

Book Reviews

HISTOIRES DE DIRE

Josiane Lapointe et Pauline Voisard.
Vidéo-femmes: Quebec, 2001.

PAR JEANNE MARANDA

Un documentaire sur vidéo de 25 minutes produit par Vidéo-femmes en l'an 2000. Josiane Lapointe et Pauline Voisard se sont associées afin de réaliser "Histoires de dire" qui aborde un aspect du SIDA: le dévoilement de cette maladie à l'entourage. Cette vidéo raconte la démarche et le questionnement des femmes atteintes du VIH. Doivent-elles révéler ce lourd secret aux personnes aimées et cotoyées, enfants, partenaires, collègues de travail? Dans ce documentaire, certaines choisiront de dévoiler, d'autres préféreront se taire. "Histoires de dire" présente des témoignages touchants, livrés en toute simplicité.

"Vidéo-femmes" en produisant ce documentaire poursuivait trois objectifs. D'abord faire prendre conscience de la difficulté qu'éprouvent les femmes atteintes du VIH à révéler cette maladie à leur entourage. Ensuite il leur fallait démystifier l'image que l'on se fait du SIDA en présentant des femmes non-marginales. Tout en poursuivant le message de prévention, il s'agissait aussi de donner l'espoir en présentant les nouvelles données médicales concernant cette maladie.

Cette vidéo a été primée au "festival Yorkton du court metrage et vidéo" en mars 2001 au Manitoba et les réalisatrices ont remporté le prix du jury à Téléfilm, une bourse de

\$2000 remise au meilleur court metrage.

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THE SPINSTER AND THE PROPHET: FLORENCE DEEKS, H.G.WELLS, AND THE MYSTERY OF THE PURLOINED PAST

A. B. McKillop.
Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter and Ross, 2000.

BY CLARA THOMAS

A mystery story without a murder but with enough page-turning suspense to satisfy the most jaded whodunit fan. An exercise in enraging confirmation of the deepest, darkest of feminists' prejudices against male power structures. A *tour de force* by a well-respected Carleton Professor of History. *The Spinster And The Prophet* is all of these, offering also the bonus of a cracking good read!

As McKillop tells us in his Preface, he was enticed into examining this once-sensational case by a footnote mentioning "the Deeks *versus* Wells

papers" during his research on the historian, Frank Underhill. These papers turned out to be in the holdings of the Toronto Public Library, while a huge archive of Wells papers was deposited at the University of Illinois. Scenting buried treasure, McKillop embarked on his challenging quest—the untangling of the mysterious events linking these two most unlikely individuals, a world-famous author and a shy Canadian spinster.

Wells' two-volume *The Outline Of History* was published by MacMillan in 1920. Immediately it became a best-seller, renowned throughout the English-speaking world, published in separate editions by both the American and the Canadian branches of the firm. It had been written, so its author said, between the end of WWI in November of 1918, and the beginning of its first serial publication in November of 1919, a sweeping survey of some 250,000 words, and a well-nigh impossible feat even for the fast and prolific author that Wells had often proved himself to be.

For her part, Florence Deeks had worked throughout the years of WWI to write a history of the world with special emphasis on women, and their prime importance to the course of history. She called the resulting lengthy manuscript *The Web*; timidly, using the pseudonym Adul Weaver, she submitted it to the Methodist publishing house and J.M. Dent and sons. When both of these companies politely turned it down and returned it to her, she screwed up her courage once again and submitted it to Macmillan. When she bought at Eaton's Wells's best-seller

Outline and read it, her own manuscript had been returned to her with a recommendation for radical revising, but not before Macmillan had held it for more than six months. Therein lay the cornerstone of her case against Wells. Totally convinced of his use of her own work in his published *Outline*, she adopted the vindication of her convictions as her lifetime mission and throughout the decades of a long life, she did not relinquish her purpose.

Intriguingly, McKillop layers the biographies of Deeks and Wells to take us on parallel paths through the lives and works of two people whose lives could hardly be more disparate. Wells, a poor boy who made good, was intensely proud of his achievements and his over-vaulting of his designated "class." He was by far the most famous novelist of the first decades of the twentieth century and was faithfully assisted and cosseted by his wife, Catherine, whom he insisted on calling Jane. He was a constant womanizer of the most blatant kind, but "the lonely and vulnerable young woman worshipped him."

Florence Deeks was one of the three daughters of a family who were Loyalist in origin and intensely proud of it, born in Morrisburg, Ontario, in 1864 but resident in Toronto from the nineties. Her brother, George, made a fortune working in the railway industry, having developed a new technique for laying tracks in difficult country. He built himself a mansion on Admiral Road, and was the chief support of his widowed mother and sisters who lived in a house he had bought on Farnham Avenue. Florence was clever and as dogged in her working habits as she later proved to be in her prosecution of Wells. She passed her Senior Matriculation in Morrisburg when she was thirty years old, having spent most of her twenties, she said later, in travelling in Europe and America and in the study of art and literature. In Toronto, she enrolled at Victoria College, but did not complete her

degree, beginning to teach at the Presbyterian Ladies College in the late nineties. Her interests were artistic and literary and through the very active Women's Art Association, she became vitally interested in the burgeoning Women's Movement, just then beginning to build its momentum in Toronto under the enthusiastic leadership of Flora Denison.

When Florence Deeks finished her reading of Wells's *Outline*, she was so enraged by her conviction of his plagiarism of her work that she marched his book back to Eaton's. On sober second thought she bought another copy and set out to compare carefully his work with her own. Adding insult to injury, she found that he had completely removed all her stress on women. Otherwise she found many parallel and identical passages and, most damning of all, even the same mistakes. No one could ever accuse Deeks of hasty actions. It was 1922 before she finished a careful comparison of Wells' work and her own and 1925 before she showed a revised manuscript, now called *The Highway Of History*, to John Saul of Macmillan. The ensuing legal tangles continued for the rest of Florence Deeks' life and finally took her to England, a privy council appeal, and a personal appeal to George V. Because of the clever layering of the text, McKillop makes all these legal tangles as well as the actual courtroom appearances engrossing but, to a feminist, enraging reading.

Predictably, she was condescended to, treated as a hysterical woman and, finally, as an infernal nuisance. But her claims were also taken seriously by a number of men whom she enlisted to give their opinions on her manuscript, and it was Norman Tilley, who had a reputation as Ontario's finest litigator, who acted on her behalf when the case first came to trial.

Throughout, it is obvious that McKillop, having painstakingly researched the whole case, firmly believes in the validity of Deeks' accusations. Unproven though it is and

will remain, her manuscript travelled across the Atlantic to Wells at a time when he could and did use it for the work that above all ensured his fame and wealth. A Canadian Macmillan functionary must have been the agent, and suspicion rests strongly on Frank Wise, founding president of Macmillan of Canada, whose later conviction for forgery and imprisonment were quite divorced from the Deeks case. McKillop's even-handed treatment of all the tortuous byways of the case is a *tour de force*, as is his sketching of the context in which each of its principals lived. Biographers had long since unmasked the unscrupulous Wells, though always stressing his personal, not professional sleaziness; no one had memorialized Florence Deeks as McKillop has done, bringing her back among us in all her stubborn early feminism, naïveté, and rectitude.

DIARY OF A EUROPEAN TOUR, 1900: MARGARET ADDISON'S SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY AND EDUCATION

Margaret Addison and Jean O'Grady, Eds.
Montreal: McGill-Queens
University Press, 1999.

**BY DENISE ADELE
HEAPS**

For many University of Toronto students over the past several decades, the name Margaret Addison (1868-1940) likely connoted, if anything at all, an eponymous Victoria College residence for women. Constructed