

**WELLS'S SCIENTIFIC (NOT)ROMANCE:
AN ADDENDUM TO 'TRACING WELLS'S NEW WOMAN'**

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In an earlier essay, 'Tracing Wells's New Woman through *The Wheels of Chance* and *The War of the Worlds*', I consider Jessie Milton (*Wheels*) and Miss Elphinstone (*Worlds*) as two of Wells's earliest New Women and speculate on the fate of these two women at the end of their respective novels. Wells returns Jessie to her socially constrictive box and Miss Elphinstone simply fades out of the reader's view. However, while recently examining the manuscript file for *The War of the Worlds* at the Wells archives in Illinois, I encountered a passage regarding another possible ending for Miss Elphinstone printed in the *Pearson's* serialisation that is absent from the Heinemann (London) book. To be clear, this passage is in no way a new discovery; David Y. Hughes worked extensively with this manuscript while preparing the critical edition of *The War of the Worlds* (co-edited with Harry M. Geduld in 1993).¹ For this addendum, however, the section I refer to gives additional support to the original argument that Miss Elphinstone is surely a stronger representative of Wells's first New Woman and also suggests that Wells may be more romantically inclined in his early scientific romances than initially thought.

The above claims hinge on a passage located in Book I, Chapter XVIII, 'London Under the Martians' in the *Pearson's* serialisation, which immediately follows 'The Thunder Child' chapter.² In the latter chapter, the narrator's brother and the two Elphinstone women are aboard 'the little

¹ Here, I would like to acknowledge Hughes's excellent and thorough examination of this particular manuscript fragment, a summary of which is found in the introduction to the critical edition of *The War of the Worlds*. I do not wish to negate any of Hughes's field-opening research, only to learn from it, build on it, and consider the text through a different lens.

² H. G. Wells, 'The War of the Worlds', *Pearson's Magazine* 4 (1897), 453-454. This passage is also found in the *Cosmopolitan* serialisation (published at the same time as the *Pearson's*). This chapter becomes Book II, Chapter I, 'Underfoot' in the London edition.

vessel' as the Martian aeroplanes 'rained down darkness upon the land'.³ The former chapter begins essentially the same way in both texts; however, in the deleted passage that follows, the manuscript offers insight into why Wells chose to curb Miss Elphinstone's fate to what we see in the London edition. Wells's narrator explains how 'new romance writers' might interpret the effect Miss Elphinstone had on the narrator's brother: 'what a fine figure they could have made of my sister-in-law – Miss Elphinstone that was, *with her courage and resolution*.'⁴ He extrapolates further, admitting that 'it would have been more picturesque if I could have told of the two standing side by side on the steamer, hand in hand, she with shining eyes and parted lips, watching that wonderful fight. I could imagine her enthusiasm rising, *for she is not the type to be cowed by danger*.'⁵ With this deleted episode, two aspects from my previous article require reconsideration. In the first place, this concerns the main argument that Miss Elphinstone is a stronger representation of the Wellsian New Woman than Jessie Milton.

Clearly, the narrator and, by default, Wells, has much respect for Miss Elphinstone, as evidenced by the words he uses to describe her character: 'courage' and 'resolution' are not words to be taken lightly (for a man or a woman). Additionally, the narrator admires Miss Elphinstone so much that he envisions that she ends up as his sister-in-law and as a woman not to be trifled with. As evidenced by the narrator's speculations (and by her own actions at saving not only herself and her sister-in-law, but also the narrator's brother from the would-be horse thieves), Miss Elphinstone is indeed not a heroine to be 'cowed by danger'. With these ruminations, there is a definite air of high adventure and spirit in Miss Elphinstone, along with a whisper of where this relationship might go. Although it might be tempting to argue that Jessie, on her bicycle, also has a sense of high adventure, it is wise to remember that Hoopdriver saves her, not the other way round, as with Miss Elphinstone and the narrator's brother. Conversely, we do see Wells's narrator try to bolster Jessie's actions and agency throughout the pages of *Wheels*, but we do not see outright admiration for her, as we do with Miss Elphinstone. And we certainly do not see any hint of romantic feelings, at least on Jessie's part, between her and Hoopdriver.⁶

³ H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* [1898], ed. David Y. Hughes and Harry M. Geduld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 137.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

⁶ Hoopdriver's last attempt at romance ends in an awkward moment as he 'lift[s] it [her hand] to his lips' and Jessie tries to 'snatch' it away. Even after all of his heroic

The second aspect this deleted passage addresses is the absence of Miss Elphinstone in scholarly discussions concerning Wells's first attempts at representing the New Woman. In the previous article, I noted that trend continues in Hughes and Geduld's summary of the manuscript wherein Miss Elphinstone deserves no mention by name. For instance, Hughes and Geduld write: 'Meanwhile, his brother rescues two ladies he never saw before, takes them away by sea, and wins their reciprocal aid in doing it despite danger and hardship.'⁷ With these words, Miss Elphinstone's entire agency is cancelled and the narrator's brother becomes the hero. If we consider this passage, along with the London edition, Miss Elphinstone's actions undeniably demand recognition as an attempt by Wells to make a stronger New Woman as he (questionably) progresses from Jessie Milton (1896) to Ann Veronica (1909).⁸ Hughes and Geduld also observe that 'being told at second hand it [the narrator's brother's story] comes across as a specimen case.'⁹ Set against the 'heroic by any measure' actions of the narrator's brother, Miss Elphinstone's actions suggest that this section of *The War of the Worlds* might be interpreted as more than an aside. This fully developed storyline speaks to the *human* will to survive, offering yet another angle from which to consider this vastly versatile text.

In the end, the reader is still left with unresolved questions concerning Miss Elphinstone's fate. The last we read, she is forward on the steamer, soothing her sister-in-law (an action that still speaks to her character and quality). Surely, we have a much more hopeful ending for her than for Jessie Milton. It is important to remember, however, that the ambiguous endings are not about either woman, but more about Wells himself as he explores the embodiment of a New Woman. This deleted passage serves to solidify Miss Elphinstone's candidacy for Wells's truer New Woman and also shows a side of Wells that leads one to ponder if his 'romances' were indeed only meant to be 'scientific'.

deeds, Jessie does not understand what Hoopdriver dreams of in terms of their relationship; she states '[e]ven now, I do not understand'. (H. G. Wells, *The Wheels of Chance: A Bicycling Idyll* (London: Macmillan, 1896), 316.)

⁷ Hughes and Geduld, 14.

⁸ I continue to stand by my original observation that Ann Veronica should have been an even stronger representation of Wells's New Woman, but Wells disappoints.

⁹ Hughes and Geduld, 17.