

Shadow Lovers

The Last Affairs of H. G. Wells

Angrea Lynn



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H. G. Wells

ANDREA LYNN

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The dead deserve the truth, the living deserve our respect.

—Voltaire

*To the Helyns/Helens in my life:
Helyn Williams Kramer, my life mother, and
the late Helen Farlow, my mentor*



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Preface

I have a humanitarian nature & the remains of a Christian upbringing & my affections blow about in a disheveled manner & get entangled about people. . . . Thank you for lending me a clear eye about it. A cool eye. Whenever (I hope never) you are heated & worried my eye is at your feet. And I am, Yours to command. Your HG.

—H. G. Wells to Christabel McLaren,
May 12, 1932

On the brink of a messy breakup with one lover and what he hoped would be a smooth and orderly transition to the next, H. G. Wells did in May of 1932 what he often did in such circumstances. He turned to a woman, to *yet another woman*—in this case, to Christabel McLaren. HG turned to Christabel many times over the last twenty years of his life—both on paper and in person. He admired her “marvellous steadfastness” and delighted in her unbridled irreverence—even when it was at his expense. For example, Christabel once called HG’s beloved French Riviera a “haunt of parasites,” and those who frequented it, “plaster façades.” On this occasion, however, it was Christabel’s intelligence and uncommon common sense that HG was interested in tapping. He had long believed that her insights were keen, her advice wise and good. Two years earlier, for example, when he asked for her impressions of his latest heart’s desire, she reported that the “Russian Lady,” the Baroness Moura Budberg, was an adventuress, “which means that

when life promises to be tedious she edits it.” Such people, Christabel cautioned, “contrive to get most of the things they covet.”¹ “Your estimate of my Russian . . . is very sound,” he replied.² It was, indeed, a bull’s-eye summary of the baroness.

Despite her frequent jabs, Christabel was a lovely person—indeed, “the loveliest person in the world,” HG proclaimed.³ And despite the heavy demands on her—two households, a husband, and five children, among other things—she was stability incarnate, an emotional anchor with a nurturing soul. Christabel was always there, through fair weather and foul, to offer HG an eye, an ear, or a shoulder to cry on. She was the compass by which he navigated the troubled waters of his love life, especially through the 1930s. “You would be surprised to know how astronomical you are to me,” HG wrote to Christabel. “I sail my course by you more than you think. You are a star, (even to the twinkle) & sometimes I feel how far you are away & still get my comfort from the starlight.”⁴ Because of these things—and many others—HG felt great affection for Christabel. If it wasn’t love, he once confessed, then it was “something very very like love.”⁵ Another time he conceded: “In some unreasonable & entirely holy spiritual way, I love you.”⁶

Christabel seemed to understand HG’s affection and to appreciate her position in his busy orbit. She undoubtedly knew that her self-chosen status as Woman-Entirely-Off-Limits-Sexually to HG guaranteed his staunch devotion to her over the years. In her memoir, Christabel claimed: “Once HG and I had settled that I never intended to sleep with him, [his] company was a delight.”⁷ He, too, may have come to realize that eliminating the burr of sex from their relationship was not entirely unrewarding, for he later observed in pages that would be suppressed from publication: “I have learnt this much of life that a good thing expected is better than a thing realised.”⁸ That short simple sentence may better explain H. G. Wells than anything else he ever wrote about himself—and he wrote a great deal.

Thus, for any number of reasons, HG was able to admit his frustrations, faults, and failings to Christabel. “I don’t do it to anyone else,” he once told her. “The purity of my relationship to you in view of its ex-

treme intimacy is a scandal. I trust you to keep my shameful secret.”⁹ And Christabel was able to keep HG’s shameful secrets and hear him through his many romantic crises. It wasn’t a burden on her. Christabel, the future Lady Aberconway, was as fond of HG as he was of her.¹⁰ *She prized his friendship, flawed as it was. In her memoir, Christabel wrote that she rejoiced in HG’s “use of words, in his anecdotes about people and places, and in his letters.” She even credited him for teaching her many things: how to make tea, for example, and how to overcome her fear of death. In addition, his company added considerably to her own well-being. Christabel once told HG that she derived “a lot of re-conditioning” from simply being with him. They met over a meal at her home in the Mayfair district of London, or for a long weekend *en famille* at Bodnant, her getaway estate in Wales. HG invited her to lunch, tea, dinner, or soirées. Once, when she was without her cook, Christabel invited HG to a restaurant, “where I will do my best to give you the new sensation of feeling like a gigolo, being taken out to dine. Afterwards we will go to any play or film you like, or we will produce our own entertainment by talking.”¹¹*

At the moment, Christabel was hearing HG through his plans for a separation with Odette Keun—his lover of eight years.¹² As he told Christabel in the letter excerpted above, he was going to Grasse, in the South of France, to “wind up” his situation with Odette. Cutting his losses there would be painful business. “I’m going to do some wrong & make some disagreeable memories for myself,” he told Christabel. He and Odette had been having a spate of first-class quarrels, although HG had long recognized a streak of insincerity in their relationship. “Is there any love relationship without something forced & kept up in it?” he asked Christabel. “And that is why they come unstuck at last.” As it happened, HG didn’t cut his losses. Odette promised to behave and that appeased HG, at least temporarily. “My weakness,” he later wrote to Christabel, “is to be kind & charming to people (until my temper gives way). The consequence is that Odette is sticking to me most desperate.”¹³

As important as she was, Christabel wasn’t HG’s only emotional pit stop. He had dozens of women friends to whom he wrote hundreds of letters, although few of the letters approached the candor of those he

wrote Christabel. Still, legions of women gravitated around HG. Like Christabel, they came to meals and to parties, and they reciprocated. HG, thus, saw a great many women between the mid-1930s and the last year of his life, not too surprising for a man who described himself, self-deprecatingly, to be sure, as a Don Juan of the Intelligentsia.

HG also aired his romantic frustrations in his books—the fiction as well as the nonfiction. Always ahead of his times, he did nearly seventy years ago what is becoming increasingly fashionable today: He wrote two autobiographies. However, HG published only one of his self-studies—the first one, which traced the “emotional development” of his brain. In that work, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866)*, HG described his origins in lower-middle-class England, his struggles to find his calling and to make a living, his frustrations with his wives, and his attempts to create a “planned world.” When Christabel received her copy of the *Experiment*, she told HG: “At last I may begin to read all about your early life and what has been going on inside that *first-class* mind of yours ever since. How will it affect my feelings for you, I wonder? Anyhow, God bless you (in spite of your feelings towards him).”

While the *Experiment* must have seemed complete enough to most readers—it was 718 pages—HG immediately began writing a second autobiography. He worked for nearly a decade on the next book, configured as a postscript to the first, then with great self-control sat on it for the rest of his life.¹⁴ There was a good reason for that: The book explored, in HG’s own words, his many “sexual events and personal intimacies.” In other words, HG topped off his life story—its roots deeply planted in the Victorian age—with an exposé of his major sexual romantic adventures. In his dust-jacket endorsement, Carlos Baker described the work as “the history of HG’s sexual exploits” and a “*Confessio Amantis*.”¹⁵ HG called it his intimate diary and the story of his amatory life. Don Juan had a thick diary, a long story, a rich trove, indeed, from which to cull.

Yet, despite his embarrassment of riches, HG claimed that his sexual life was nothing special. The only difference was that he probably had

more *opportunity* than most men: “I have done what I pleased, so that every bit of sexual impulse in me has expressed itself,” he announced.¹⁶ As an aside, HG noted that he was never able to determine whether his interest in sex was average, above or below it, since there was “no meter” for that sort of thing. Still, it takes an acrobatic leap of logic to reconcile having a ho-hum libido with being a veritable (and Victorian) Casanova. As he must have known, and as should become clear in the following pages, there may have been many things about H. G. Wells that could be called “normal,” but his sexual drive wasn’t among them. With apologies to the more conservative Wells scholars, the evidence certainly suggests that the author of *The Time Machine* was something of a Sex Machine.

Be that as it may, HG instructed his heirs to release his piquant post-script at their earliest convenience *after* his death and *after* the women in it were either dead or beyond worrying about their reputations. HG got his wish—at least most of it. The heirs published the second autobiography in 1984—thirty-eight years after HG died—but before they did, they excised large chunks of the story and the names of two of HG’s alleged last lovers, as well as a good deal of narrative about them. They also surgically removed other bits and pieces about other lovers. HG had been extremely candid, though not X-rated in his love memoir. The heirs, however, played it cautiously, their actions prompted by courtesy and concern over litigation. It is noteworthy that they released the book a year after Rebecca West died. HG had devoted an entire chapter to their passionate but rocky ten-year affair.¹⁷

In addition to the rejections, discards, and excisions from HG’s manuscripts, the heirs also held back a huge cache of letters “of a personal nature” that HG had received over the decades from the many women in his life, including those from Christabel and also from his legion of lovers. Finally, in 1994, the family put the *Withheld Wells*, so to speak, up for sale. The University of Illinois Library, already the site of the world’s premier H. G. Wells Collection, snapped up these items, the mother lode of long-suppressed personal material about H. G. Wells. This acquisition contained documents of all stripes, in addition to the

suppressed manuscript pages and the massive collection of very personal correspondence—a “Closet Correspondence,” if you will.¹⁸

Among other things, *Shadow Lovers* restores the missing pieces of HG’s love memoir—aptly titled by his eldest son and chief editor, Gip (George Philip Wells), *HG Wells in Love: Postscript to an Experiment in Autobiography*, hereafter called the *Postscript*. *Shadow Lovers* also opens the hundreds of previously suppressed love and friendship letters to and from H. G. Wells. Drawing on these documents, this book attempts to tell the story HG intended to tell about the busy and complex—sometimes wonderful, often harrowing—life of his affections, a life that had a life of its own. The focus is on HG’s last three love affairs as they are revealed through their correspondence—and now, from the grave. The lovers include our highly improbable Lothario—HG, aged sixty-eight when the story begins; the Russian baroness, Moura Budberg; a French countess, the American-born Constance Coolidge; and a French marquise, Martha Gellhorn, also an American.¹⁹

Other friends, lovers, and family members from the Closet Correspondence enter the story and speak for themselves, including Rebecca West and Margaret Sanger. Many other people play a part through other caches of recently released papers, some never before published. In this category are several lovers—previous, contemporary, or future—of our women in question, including the American writers Harry Crosby and Ernest Hemingway. The result of all of this eavesdropping, spying, and literary sleuthing is a portrait, hauled somewhat reluctantly out of the mists of time and, yes, the shadows of history, of three relationships and four lovers, needy and restless spirits all. In the background are glimpses of the era and the milieu in which these remarkable people lived—from the horrors of the Russian Revolution to the breezy glittering playgrounds of the rich and famous on the French Riviera. While I use the word portrait to describe this study, sketch may be more accurate, since these stories are incomplete. Many of the documents that would illuminate the shadows are still lost or sealed, most notably Martha Gellhorn’s papers at Boston University, which include HG’s letters to her. Rebecca West’s letters from HG were said to have

been destroyed many years ago. Intelligence files that would throw light into the dark corners of Moura Budberg's life are also unavailable, as are her personal papers—victims, some claim, of a house fire.

I have described these four people as needy and restless spirits; but, of course, they were a great deal more. I often think of them as rebel reinventors. Each of them at an early age and in a particularly repressive era broke out of some kind of bondage—gender, family, or social. Refusing to accept what they regarded as limited lives, each invented and reinvented himself and herself according to his or her personal needs and desires. They were risk-takers all; they used and abused the system to become their imagined selves. All carved out successful careers—the women, notably, in a man's world: journalism, horse racing, publishing, and espionage. While the women were carving places for themselves, HG was working hard for women's equality, including sexual liberation. He subscribed to the idea that women's liberation improved human life—it certainly improved his—and his lovers evidently subscribed to that idea as well. They also saw themselves as HG's equals. For these reasons, as well as others, I submit that in these relationships there were no victims.

To be sure, these four people were unusually lucky in their natural resources: their intelligence, imagination, and gumption, and all except HG were lucky in their looks and birth. All were keenly aware of—and skillful with—their considerable sexual and personal charms and their intellectual powers. They wished to do what they were eminently capable of doing, and that perhaps is one mark of genius, or at least one hallmark of their success. Sometimes their choices were peculiar, their behaviors inexplicable. Very often their actions were self-centered—even those of HG, the tireless promoter of Utopia on earth. These were original, ambitious, and irreverent people who were also human and richly flawed. HG, for example, carried a huge chip on his shoulder despite his extraordinary personal success. He went into battle over minor, indeed, meaningless offences; he was beset with jealousy, he held grudges, and he was petulant, willful, and irresponsible. All four were irresponsible at times, sometimes wildly so, and sometimes with the

heart of someone who loved them. That the women were femmes fatales and that HG was a self-proclaimed Don Juan suggests that all of them had rather oversized needs and desires. Did they ever! Each was born with a huge appetite for life, for life not only at its fullest, but also at its most intense.

Few people lived more intensely than H. G. Wells. His vitality, energy, and drive were legendary. Indeed, HG was said to “radiate” energy: intellectual, emotional, physical, and sexual.²⁰ In its obituary for HG, the *New York Times* wrote that the short, stocky writer with the tiny hands and feet and an unfortunate squeaky voice had “superhuman energy.” Superhuman or simply well above average, his energy served him well. Over his nearly eighty years, HG produced several film scripts, more than a hundred books, and hundreds of articles, newspaper columns, and talks. “Mr. Wells was a superman in many respects,” the obit writer for the *New York Times* claimed, unaware, undoubtedly, of HG’s busy romantic life! But all that was ages ago. What about today, 135 years after HG’s birth in a ramshackle china shop to what we would today call a dysfunctional and financially challenged family? Why should we care about H. G. Wells in the new millennium? Why, moreover, should we give a fig (leaf) about his love life?

* * *

At the very least, HG still holds a place in our reference books. In the CD ROM that came with my computer is a succinct little entry about Bromley, England’s, first son.²¹ The English novelist and social theorist Herbert George Wells, it begins, was born on September 21, 1866, and died August 13, 1946. One of the world’s most important literary figures between 1895 and 1920, he, “with Jules Verne, was the inventor of science fiction;

in the tradition of Dickens, he was a master of the comic novel; in his prime he was also a self-appointed prophet and popular advisor to the public on virtually every acute problem that confronted the modern

world. By the time he was 30 years of age he had already embarked on his famous series of scientific romances, notably *The Invisible Man*, *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*. His *Outline of History* is perhaps the best one-volume history of humankind ever compiled by a single author.

The entry ends with a sobering thought: “Although he was originally a firm believer in the ability of science to create a more perfect world, Wells later felt that the human race was likely to destroy itself through its own barbarism.”

HG’s impact also continues to be felt at the box office. Several of his stories or adaptations of them—*The Invisible Man*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, and *Independence Day*, a modernization of his *War of the Worlds*—captivated audiences at the end of the twentieth century.²² A new version of *The Time Machine* with HG’s great-grandson as producer is soon coming to American theaters. In publishing, more than three dozen H. G. Wells titles are still in print; several biographies and works of criticism are released every year. Hardly a week goes by without a mention of HG’s name in the mainstream media. A quick Internet search also turns up many elaborate Web sites for H. G. Wells, most of them devoted to his science fiction.

Beyond his continuing presence in today’s world, what can we say about HG’s contributions? For one thing, he not only anticipated at the beginning of the twentieth century the enormous influence science would later have but also recruited single-handedly thousands of people into science for at least twenty years—from 1910 to 1930. He had, among other things, an uncanny way of seeing where this wobbly world of ours was going—the shape, color, and size of things to come. Trained in biology at the elbow of Thomas Huxley, HG was able, as biographer David Smith put it, “not only to describe his own world, but also to offer a glimpse into worlds that might be.”²³ Thus, beyond his sci-fi imaginings, H. G. Wells predicted the two world wars and the various tools of war: tanks, airplanes, and rockets. He also had a sixth sense for geopolitical change. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in a book titled *Anticipations*, HG predicted the rise of China and the

demise of Russia. “The chances seem altogether against the existence of a great Slavonic power in the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century,” he wrote in 1902.²⁴ Thirty-four years later, HG foresaw the possibility of total world destruction. In *The Anatomy of Frustration*, he drew up a blueprint for an alternative to self-annihilation: a world revolution that would produce a world community. “Either we *take hold of our destiny* or, failing that, we are driven towards our fate.”²⁵

This wasn’t the first time he had confronted the idea of human extinction. In 1914, HG published *The World Set Free: A Story of Mankind*, a novel that still is considered a remarkable forecast of nuclear warfare and subsequent world reconstruction. After nuclear bombs wreak widespread destruction and catastrophe, the nations of the world joined together to end war—all war. His book became the rationale for producing a weapon so terrible that it would prevent Armageddon.²⁶ There are people who still remember HG’s dire early warning. At the entrance to In Flanders Fields, a new museum in Ypres, Belgium—and the site of great human loss during World War I—is an immense tablet carved with the words: “Nothing could have been more obvious to the people of the early twentieth century than the rapidity with which war was becoming impossible. And as certainly they did not see it. They did not see it until the atomic bombs burst in their fumbling hands.”²⁷

In his last years, HG worked at full throttle to craft and promote his last-gasp effort to save the world from itself. That document later became the basis for the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted on December 10, 1948. HG also fought for the rights of women, primarily through his fiction; indeed, he was a major force in the “opening out of modern feminism.”²⁸ Through several books, including *Ann Veronica* (1909), he not only widened society’s view of love but also sanctioned women’s sexual and romantic desires and displays.²⁹ His fiction also promoted new optimism for the lower middle class, from whence he emerged.

Before H. G. Wells dared to dream great things for humankind, he dared dream them for himself—this despite his mother’s plans for him in the drapery trade. “Almost as unquestioning as her belief in Our Fa-

ther and Our Saviour, was her belief in drapers," HG wrote.³⁰ But "Little Bertie" refused to accept his destiny. As his family watched in shock and horror, the teenager took a great flying leap over the drapery counter and landed a few years later in the world of publishing, where he rapidly became a huge success in a new genre. The draper's apprentice, the son of a maid and a gardener, would climb rapidly to the highest rungs of the social and political ladder.

Considered one of the brilliant minds of his age, HG became ubiquitous. His face, words, and ideas appeared in the world's newspapers. His voice squeaked out over radio waves all across the globe, and his short figure strutted across miles of newsreel. Audiences in the remotest corners of the globe crowded into lecture halls to hear the diminutive diviner. There was hardly a world leader who didn't make time for him. The author of *The Time Machine* became a modern man—perhaps the first modern man. He became an early and ardent proponent of women's liberation, human rights, and world peace, three causes that continue to top the free world's agenda. As suggested earlier, he was also an angry man, once described as the first Angry Young Man in English literature. Yet, through his books, articles, lectures, and films, he stirred a society's consciousness, sometimes even led it to places it had never dreamed of. For all this, this little man with a great gift to foresee was surprisingly modest. He once told a friend that prophecy was simply a matter of having a little common sense, a little scientific background, a little imagination, "and being a step or two in front of the obvious."³¹

Despite his role as sage during some of the worst decades of the last century, the prophet became a forgotten man—the Invisible Man he created on paper in 1909 and on celluloid in 1933. He became a victim, in a sense, of his own success as many of his predictions came to pass. In the United States, the fiftieth anniversary of HG's death came and went without notice. This book teases the complex and sometimes confounding HG out of the shadows. It is the least we can do for a man who in his time was considered the greatest intellectual force of the English-speaking world.³²



A few words about this book, beginning with its organization. Chapter 1 sets the stage: the winter of 1934–1935 in the villas and hotels of the French Riviera, when and where HG’s romantic life took yet another sudden and delightful turn. The chapter also explores his chief obsessions (work, love, and sex), and reviews several interpretations of them. Chapter 2 reviews HG’s origins and early years and focuses on his parents, his awakening sexuality and conceptions of romantic love, his early romances, and the major romances that led to the last affairs. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are devoted to Moura, Constance, and Martha respectively. Woven into each of these chapters, which function as mini-biographies, are the stories of their concurrent affairs with HG as they are revealed through their correspondence. The affairs are explored through themes, allowing the reader to trace HG’s comments on given topics; for example, his private concerns about love, boredom, loneliness, disillusionment, and being forgotten, as well as his observations about the larger world—FDR, for example, America, Russia, and God. Newly released documents allow me to offer revisionist interpretations not only of HG but also of Moura and Martha, while the material on Constance is almost entirely new. Chapter 6, the Epilogue, brings the main characters back to the stage for a final bow and assessment. The chapter titles are taken from HG’s novels.

This book is titled *Shadow Lovers* for many reasons, from the personal to the historical. At the personal level, the romantic liaisons discussed here were conducted in secret or hidden in the open. HG was married to Jane Wells when he began his affair with Moura Budberg, and he was intimately involved with Moura when he began his affairs with Constance Coolidge and Martha Gellhorn. As noted, their affairs continued to be shrouded in secrecy in the five decades following HG’s death. Moreover, HG’s affairs with Constance and Martha have been unknown except to a few members of the Wells family, and many gaps remained in HG’s relationship with Moura. This book also explores other major romances these people had before, after, or during the primary affairs of this study. This second tier of lovers includes Rebecca West,

Margaret Sanger, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Harry Crosby, Bruce Lockhart, and Ernest Hemingway.³³ Considering this matrix of past and future romances allows us to see how the specters of other love affairs shadowed the affairs of HG, Moura, Constance, and Martha—as perhaps love and affairs always do. In a sense, the title of this book could have been *Shadow Lovers: The Last Affairs of HG Wells . . . and Their Affairs . . . and Their Affairs!* We are dealing here with a great many cases of what might be called the Repetitive Love Syndrome!

There is another human shadow: Christabel. She is a thread that runs through the chapters, just as her friendship with HG stretched across the years. While never a dark presence, Christabel has been until now a little-known factor in HG's emotional life. She is also a foil to HG's women, and a Greek chorus; for more than anyone else, Christabel knew the secrets of HG's heart. It was a place he did not open fully to his last three lovers, or perhaps to any other woman.

Another aspect of this study involves some dark realms indeed: those of international espionage. Chapter 3 explores many of the allegations about Moura. Was she a secret agent, as rumor had it? Did she use HG to influence—or obtain information from—Western opinion makers, movers, and shakers? Chapter 5, devoted to Martha, examines the possibility that she used her relationship with HG to help advance her career. Also, using never-published letters from Ernest Hemingway, we explore Martha's troubled relationship with Papa, which began soon after she met HG. Hemingway emerges as a kinder and gentler man: a revisionist image indeed.

To be sure, each lover lived with personal shadows in the form of compulsions and obsessions: for sex, for romance, for a former lover, for travel, for taking physical risks, for horses and betting, and career. Each manifested a complex of paradoxes: the need to be in company and to be alone; the need to be of use to someone and to be a free spirit; the need to play the field and to be monogamous; the need to be free and to advance a career. One of HG's inescapable shadows was his birth in lower-middle-class England. As we shall see, it was a berth he alternately embraced and rejected.

Which brings us to the main shadow in this study so full of secrets and shadows and shades of gray. This is the shadow that haunted H. G. Wells, that held sway over his imagination for most of his adult life. He called that presence his “*Lover-Shadow*.” HG, the scientist, HG, the “*World Brain*,” imagined that in this huge universe there existed a woman (or several) who was (were) his complete female counterpart, his intellectual-emotional-sexual equal, his soul mate, his *Lover-Shadow*. In his construction, this dream-lover was a powerful force and a most demanding mistress. One of HG’s rationales in taking so many lovers—aside from the recreation and sexual release it provided, to which he freely admitted—was to find his *Lover-Shadow*. To be sure, there are those who argue that his perseveration with his *Lover-Shadow* was bunk: an elaborate excuse to justify his phenomenal sex drive and nonstop philandering. There are those who argue that instead of chasing this phantom, HG should have accepted his obsession for sex and stopped endowing it with phony transcendent significance.³⁴ In this work, I will examine HG’s obsession for sex and the *Lover-Shadow*; for women, especially foreign women, who had social status, titles, money, and liberal views; for women who were beautiful, intelligent, charming, and liberated, and yet who would be totally devoted and submissive to him. Along the way I will consider HG’s need for social validation through the acquisition of one trophy woman after another, and his inability to achieve intimacy—even with his intimates.

To be sure, Moura, Constance, and Martha had considerable cravings of their own. Their appetites for external stimuli were huge, indeed, and seemingly insatiable. They chased new thrills: new things, new places, new relationships. Whether it was opium or high intrigue, endless travel, or a rapid succession of lovers, life was only as good as the next new challenge, the next new adventure. Someone once described Constance as a member of the “*Exotic Set*.” Moura and Martha also belonged to the club. Navigating through the minefields of the 1930s, these women fed their inordinate cravings and desires to have it all—a dynamic life, a grand career, excitement, lovers, and the soul mate of their dreams. To be sure, all four characters were demanding.

They shared ground-level thresholds for boredom and sky-high thresholds for excitement. They also grappled with the frustrations that arose from their huge personal appetites.

How familiar this all sounds. In looking at these lives, one is reminded that the late twentieth century didn't invent the Don Juan or the femme fatale. It didn't invent compulsions or obsessions, fascinating ambitious women, or powerful men. Nor did the late twentieth century invent the notions of personal reinvention or redemption through finding one's soul mate. No, creatures with powerful passions began shaking the earth some time ago—even left their footprints on history. They sought and found love, although often in all the wrong places, often for all the wrong reasons, and often excessively.

This book, then, is a laboratory of love, an anatomy of the love that took so many forms in the lives of our characters: It was, among other things, a dream-fantasy, hope, deception, delusion, a warm embrace, an icy restraint, a fond and disquieting memory. Love could also be, as HG observed in one of his shortest definitions of the phenomenon, “a clumsy search for an enduring dear companionship into which the primitive lust prowls has developed.”³⁵ Let us then begin exploring HG's searches, some of them clumsy, to be sure, some of them artful, all of them imperfect, all of them evanescent.

Note: To preserve the flavor of the quoted material, much of it letters dashed off in haste, it is printed exactly as it appeared in the original sources and, therefore, may include misspellings or errors in punctuation.



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Andrea Lynn
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1

*Secret Places of the Heart:
HG in Love and in
His Postscript*

What is that magic thing between persons, that is so bright & wonderful, so infinitely hopeful—hopeful Christabel—& sure. And it goes & it won't come back. And there is what you loved that was alive & divine—and it is nothing but a clay figure, just a suggestion of all that you thought was there.

—HG to Christabel, April 1935

The weather, of all things, brought H. G. Wells and Constance Coolidge together Christmas of 1934, in the winter of his life, the lingering summer of hers; but other forces equally beyond their control kept them true—in their own fashions—to each other over the next few years, then allowed them simply and swiftly to drift apart. Masters at the game of love—especially of winning and then letting go—both knew a potential romance when they saw it: They had seen the signs so many times before. They knew that for them, a fresh romance vanquished loneliness and boredom, that it fed the imagination, the heart, and the soul. In short, romance, with its bursts of suspense, surprise, and excitement, fed their cravings for a vivid life, a life at its most in-

tense. Romance was love when they were together, a lovely sustaining dream when they were apart. That is how it always had been. That is how it always would be. That is how it was during Christmas of 1934. The luxury hotels, bistros, bars, and restaurants of the French Riviera, gaily trimmed and packed for the long Christmas–New Year’s season, provided the backdrop for their latest adventure in love.

Nice, according to the *Daily Mail* on December 24, enjoyed one of the merriest and busiest Christmases it had known since World War I. On Christmas Eve, the streets and shops were “thronged with people buying last-moment gifts, and in the evening there was a veritable invasion of people at the places of entertainment,” the paper’s “Christmas-tide Gossip from the Holiday Resorts” column noted. Six days later, *Le Figaro* reported that the grand hall of the Riviera Place hotel at Cimiez was decorated with an immense Christmas tree that sparkled with a thousand lights, and that miniature replicas of that magnificent tree had been placed on each table. As guests dined, Guy Sarlin, Evelyn Gray, Baby, Teddy, and Paddy earned everyone’s admiration for their graceful and daring acrobatics.

As the hours of 1934 ticked away, Nice took a breather, the *Daily Mail* reported, between the Christmas and New Year’s festivities. Despite the lull in the round of galas, the city was in an animated and gay mood, and the crowds found plenty to entertain them. Verdi’s *Rigoletto* was playing at Nice’s opera house. The International Military Horse Show and the Lily of the Valley Fête would soon follow. Glittering and beautiful people, a mix of royalty, high society, and well-known literary figures, were showing up everywhere: Miss Paris had just arrived at the Negresco; the king of Sweden attended a “diner fleuri” at the Sporting Club; and “Mr. and Mrs. H. G. Wells”—in reality, HG and his latest mistress, the Russian Baroness Moura Budberg, recently of Petrograd and several major European cities—were now at the Hermitage, which overlooked the glittering Bay of Monaco.¹

With the end of the year approaching, HG, age sixty-eight, and Moura, forty-two, had planned to spend the holidays in Palermo; they were hoping that a few weeks in a warm sunny place would melt the

ice collecting on their young affair. That summer, HG had accidentally caught Moura in a stupendous and painful lie—ever after referred to as “the Moscow deception” and “the Moscow crisis.” The holiday trip, then, would be an attempt to smooth over the trouble they had been having and to rebuild trust. The couple left London’s Victoria train station on December 18 with salvation, sunshine, and Sicily on their minds; but a heavy fog and flooding at Ostia stranded them in Marseilles. With their few options dwindling, HG called on an old friend and Riviera neighbor.

As it happened, Willie, otherwise known as William Somerset Maugham, the British novelist and playwright, was in residence at his villa at Cap Ferrat for the holidays. In response to HG’s SOS, Willie invited the uncommon writer of common origins and his titled Russian mistress to spend Christmas week with him at his Villa Mauresque; he suggested that they check into the Hermitage right away, since it had just reopened, then join him and his guests at the Cap the following week. Ironically, HG had his own vacation home—Lou Pidou—in the South of France, but at the moment it was strictly off-limits. He and his previous mistress, Odette Keun, were involved in “small border warfare,” which included ridiculous legal maneuvers, over ownership of the property. Odette, a formidable woman with a wicked temper and ferocious jealousy, was currently winning control of the pretty *mas* and was not about to tolerate the incursion of a new mistress, whom she described as a “fool of an Esthonian,” on the premises. Lou Pidou, a Provençal contraction for *Le Petit Dieu*, was a wonderful piece of real estate tucked into the lavender-covered hills near Grasse, with a main house, a guest house, a farm, and a massive *rocher* with a staircase. In 1927, the same year he built Lou Pidou, HG gave Odette a lifetime usufruct for it. Her impact as mistress of the *mas* had been enormous. An exotic creature—HG once told her that she dressed like an Armenian carpet-seller—Odette employed a flamboyant decorating style; Lou Pidou, it is said, compared favorably to a dwelling that Kubla Khan might have inhabited.

By 1933, the relationship between HG and Odette had become difficult. He was now less willing to tolerate her fits of rage and her accusa-

tions of cheating, often triggered by clues she found when nosing around in his correspondence. He was also fed up with Odette's public displays of outrageous behavior and foul language. HG moved his belongings out of Lou Pidou in May 1933, and the place fell into limbo and general decline for several years until he began the process of buying Odette out in 1936. "Your attachment to the place is purely sentimental. I want it vitally as a refuge from the winter climate here," he told her on April 21, 1936. Odette was too smart, too paranoid, not to realize that HG undoubtedly had another agenda—that he was entertaining notions of entertaining his Russian mistress there—and Odette was not going to let that happen. Proposals and counterproposals devolved into a battle royal, but Odette held her ground, literally and figuratively, and eventually, and with great reluctance, HG gave up the fight and abandoned the former love nest. In better times, HG had hired local masons to carve an inscription above the fireplace—"Two Lovers Built This House"—and around the windows, some free verse he had written about vines, olives, and undying love. "All that seemed as good as marriage-lines to Odette," HG asserted.² In his 1964 autobiography, Charlie Chaplin reported that the inscription suffered many mutilations over the years. Following the lovers' "first-class" arguments, the masons would be called in to remove the stony saying; after the lovers made up, the masons were called back to restore it. As the story goes, the verse had been taken off and put on so many times that the masons eventually stopped responding to the summons. Today, a plaque with the words "This house was built by two lovers, HG Wells, 1926," is attached to the wall next to Lou Pidou's front door.

Although this was neither the first time nor the last that HG would "ask himself" to Willie's, the request was hardly an imposition; Maugham thoroughly enjoyed HG's company. In addition, he was hosting a group of glitterati and must have been delighted with the serendipitous appearance of his old friend because it afforded him the opportunity to make "Mr. & Mrs. H. G. Wells" the social centerpiece for his holiday table. The *Daily Mail* later ran a small item reporting that Maugham had H. G. Wells and Miss G. B. Stern staying with him at his

lovely villa at Cap Ferrat. Gladys Bronwyn Stern was a popular novelist and close friend of Maugham's; for reasons unknown, she went by the name of Peter, but HG called her "Tynx." The *Daily Mail* did not mention Moura Budberg, who, although then a somewhat unknown quantity on the Riviera social scene, would not be overlooked for long in European society items. Indeed, forty years later, in her glowing but seriously flawed *Times* obituary, the baroness would be described among other things as having been "an invaluable guest."

Handsome, intelligent, charming, charismatic, and, above all, mysterious, Moura was rapidly becoming a darling of London's literary and émigré circles. An aristocrat who managed to survive the Russian Revolution, she claimed two former husbands, two children, two previous high-profile affairs—the first with British secret agent Bruce Lockhart in 1918, the second with Russian icon and writer Maxim Gorky from 1919 to the mid-1930s—and at least three periods of imprisonment in Russian jails. Moura left Russia in 1921, temporarily rejoined her young children in Estonia, then flitted from one European city to another until she emigrated to England in the early 1930s, from whence she continued her habit of flitting. She and HG became open lovers in 1933, and they traveled around Europe together or met in various cities, but this was their first sighting on the Côte d'Azur and at Maugham's. Over the years other noteworthy guests to the luxurious Mauresque, with its beckoning swimming pool overlooking the Mediterranean, its impressive art collection, and its legendary cook, Annette, included Michael Arlen, Max Beerbohm, Winston Churchill, Noel Coward, Moss Hart, the Aga and Begum Khan, Rudyard Kipling, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and, often, G. B. Stern. Maugham bought the villa for himself and his new lover/chauffeur, Gerald Haxton, in 1929, after he and his wife, Syrie, had divorced; he paid £7,000 for his piece of the Cap. Maugham's neighbors included Bao Dai, the former emperor of Indo-China, Charlie Chaplin, and Jean Cocteau.

Meanwhile, up the coast in Nice at the New Year, throngs were enjoying the "gala reveillon" at the Palais de la Jetée, the newspapers claimed, and the annual steeplechase meeting on the Var racecourse

had just opened. On February 1, the *Daily Mail* ran an item in its society column about the turf personalities being seen in Monte Carlo. Well-known figures in the worlds of hunting and racing had been spotted at the International Sporting Club's gala dinner. Mrs. Coolidge, the American horse owner, was the guest of Mr. H. G. Wells. The famous novelist's party also included Mr. Somerset Maugham, who had recently been promoted to Officer in the Legion of Honour, and Mr. G. Haxton.

Constance Coolidge, a sensational centerpiece for anyone's table, was installed for the holidays in a suite of rooms in Nice's fashionable Negresco Hotel. As HG would learn, the forty-two-year-old American heiress and former French countess was neither just a pretty face nor a garden-variety socialite. Like Moura, she was a foreigner, well endowed with physical beauty, intelligence, charm, courage, wit, and pedigree—an irresistible combination as far as HG was concerned, and a type he had been drawn to over and over again through the years. Unlike Moura, who just scraped by with the meager earnings from her sporadic translating and editing jobs and the generosity of HG and her refugee friends, mostly expatriate Russians living in London, Constance was flourishing. Set up since childhood on a generous trust fund that was doled out to her by her cousin, Charlie Adams, she was a long-term expat living in Paris who twenty-five years earlier had said, "If I can't be French, thank God I'm American." Constance wore couturier designs, dined at the finest restaurants, lived in the best arrondissements, and employed four household servants, including a chauffeur who shuttled her around in her fabulously expensive touring car, a Hispano-Suiza.³ She also was a respected businesswoman—a winning horse owner and trainer well known at Auteuil, Longchamp, and other tracks around Paris. She once had been described as a "fervente des courses, qu'elle suit assidûment." Earlier in 1934, her horse, Jean-Victor, won the Prix du Président du République at Auteuil. "I try to earn enough for my daily needs," Constance once disingenuously told her friend Caresse Crosby.

Like her horses, Constance was a thoroughbred, sprung from generations of upstanding Boston Brahmins—people such as grandfather

Caspar Crowninshield, commander of the 2nd Massachusetts Cavalry during the Civil War; aunt Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, a great patron of music; the aforementioned Cousin Charlie, who recently had served as secretary of the navy, and Ben and Freddie Bradlee, her contemporary younger cousins.⁴ But at some point very early in her long life, Constance Crowninshield Coolidge, born in 1892, the same year as Rebecca West, Djuna Barnes, and Pearl Buck, threw off the bit of her Brahmin background to chase a free and independent life.⁵ Along the way, she met a great many movers and shakers, political and intellectual, but she was particularly drawn to writers. Two years before she met HG on the Riviera, she had dined several times with the novelist Robert Herrick, whose intellect she greatly admired.⁶ As she told her diary: "He has a very interesting mind. I so seldom see people who have, & I am drawn & afraid! It's like knowing how to swim in a bath tub, & then being suddenly thrown into the sea. My knowledge is the bath tub variety—strictly personal. I have never had much occasion to be intelligent outside!!"⁷

With her considerable charms about her—despite what she told her diary—the youthful, freckled, and upbeat Constance was in town and unattached when Maugham's high-spirited lover invited her to Christmas lunch at the Mauresque. She was, like the baroness, tall, dark, and smiling, but other qualities made her the exact opposite, "explicit where Moura was implicit, slender and fit where Moura was slack," HG wrote in his posthumously published *Postscript*.⁸ As HG soon would discover, Constance Crowninshield Coolidge could have written her own *confessio amantis*. In her 1932 diary, she noted that "Lots of people have asked me to marry them, but I suppose that is so with everyone. I can remember 20 quite clearly, but there may have been others. And yet I have never had much confidence in myself or been ever really conceited or in fact thought much about myself at all."⁹ By the time she met HG, she had had several dozen lovers, those twenty marriage proposals, and three husbands on as many continents—Ray Atherton, an American diplomat (they were married, after a fashion, from 1910 to 1924); Pierre Chapelle de Jumilhac, a French count (married from 1924 to 1929); and Eliot

Rogers, a California newspaper man (married and divorced in 1930). But then, Constance had got a head start on marriage when she exchanged vows with Atherton soon after her eighteenth birthday. After leaving Ray and China, the scene of his latest posting, she made a new life for herself in Paris, which is where, in 1923, she met the man who became, arguably, the great love of her life—poet-publisher and fellow Boston Brahmin Harry Crosby. Despite her romantic history—the dizzying number of beaux she collected and her reputation for being Europe’s leading *femme fatale*—Constance Coolidge was not simply—or even always—a sexual adventuress. On November 27, 1938, at the age of forty-six, she confessed to her diary: “I’m not so fond of making love anymore. It never did mean very much to me, and yet I have had so many lovers—almost 40, in fact, I think it is 40.” Thus, with great looks and a captivating personality, culture, intelligence, a demonstrated taste for risk and adventure, a reputation for being one of high society’s loveliest, most fascinating, and funniest women, Constance was also a trophy guest at Maugham’s table that Christmas of 1934. Accompanying her was her faithful dog. At the moment Simon was her preferred male companion. And so it was that HG and Constance, stars from very different constellations—and floors in society’s house—met at Maugham’s, sharing “a little pig,” as Constance reminded HG in a warm and nostalgic letter more than a decade later. “I sat next to you. It was sunny and warm then and everyone was happy.”¹⁰ From the beginning, as HG wrote in an unpublished portion of his *Postscript*, he liked Constance’s simple directness and he found her naïve and experienced and entertaining.

On January 13, a few weeks after that magical meeting, the baroness suddenly left for London to attend to a family matter, she said, and on January 16, the former comtesse, seizing the moment, perhaps, invited HG to the Negresco for dinner. It may have been that Constance wished to explore HG’s mind. An avid reader, she had devoured most of his books and, like many other people, considered him one of the greatest intellects of the age. In fact, two years before their first meeting, Constance wondered in her diary why HG had never received the Nobel Prize: “He has given more knowledge, more comprehension of

the world and science to the general public than any other writer. His 'Outline of History' and now the 'Science of Life' are great and monumental achievements and should be rewarded."¹¹

Like the Christmas lunch at Maugham's, the second meeting of Constance Coolidge and H. G. Wells was a great success. The world-renowned writer and the world-class reader "talked of books and immortality and love and what was to be put into life and what was to be got out of it," HG wrote in the *Postscript*, "and come to a point when I should have left the Negresco for my rooms at the Hermitage, I stood up to go and it seemed to be the most natural thing in the world to take her in my arms and kiss her and for her to kiss me back—and after that I did not go for an hour or so. Thereafter for a week we were together for as much as we could be. We just liked being together."¹² HG's 1935 date book corroborates that thought:

- Jan. 16 Dinner Constance Coolidge*
- Jan. 17 Lunch Negresco*
- Jan. 19 and 20 Mas des Roses*
- Jan. 21 Dine CC*
- Jan. 22 Lunch CC*
- Jan. 23 Dinner 8 Negresco*
- Jan. 26 St. Paul de Vence and dinner*
- Jan. 28 CC's car 12:30, lunch Maugham's*
- Jan. 30 7.45 Dine CC*

The attraction could not have been missed by anyone who saw the couple—whether they were cruising along the *corniches* in her magnificent car or dining on bouillabaisse in Nice's old town. Indeed, their affection for each other was so apparent that the Riviera "had a marriage with Constance arranged for me within a week," HG wrote in a suppressed portion of his *Postscript*, adding, "I have always had a delusion that I am an Invisible Man, but the fact is that nowadays I am easily made into news and gossip."¹³ "Whatever I do is put in the papers," Constance complained to her diary.¹⁴

Moura returned to Nice and HG on February 2, and five days later HG shamelessly threw a dinner party at the Sporting Club in Monte Carlo for three of his lovers, Moura, Constance, and “Little e”—Elizabeth von Arnim Russell, a writer who had a *mas* in nearby Mougins. However, on the fourteenth, Moura shuttled off again, this time to Estonia, she said. Once again on their own, HG and Constance hopped into her car and rode in high style to Macon, where they spent the weekend, then drove on to Paris. Three days later, HG flew home to London. Before he left, he told Constance: “I’m in love with you, and who wouldn’t be?”¹⁵ Two months later, when Moura accused him of being in love with Constance, HG replied, “Everybody is in love with Constance.”¹⁶

* * *

But then, finding himself in love was hardly a novel experience for H. G. Wells. It happened with considerable frequency, perhaps fifty times, perhaps more, and in varying degrees of centigrade over his nearly eighty years, and that isn’t counting the minor *passades*—his term for the short romantic episodes or “events.” Finding himself in lust was, similarly, a fairly common experience. It has been said that the mature HG averaged three or four new conquests a year.¹⁷ Whatever the number—four or forty—it is no stretch to say that HG had a roving eye and unquenchable lust. Not to sell him short, he also was a romantic at heart, who “fell in love easily, and with great passion,” and as a result, enjoyed a hectic love life.¹⁸ Hectic, indeed! Between January 1935 and January 1936, Herbert George Wells, pushing seventy, round, balding, and diabetic, fell head over heels in love—not once, but twice. According to his own account, he managed within those twelve months to juggle at least three affairs on two continents, and, again, that doesn’t count those casual *passade* meetings. By anyone’s standards, HG was a phenomenon.

From time to time, friends, neighbors, and countrymen commented on HG’s robust appetite for amour—both falling into it and making it.

Chief among them was Willie Maugham, who, as we know, saw a great deal of HG and his women from his roost at the Mauresque. Maugham once wrote that his neighbor had “strong sexual instincts and he said to me more than once that the need to satisfy these instincts had nothing to do with love. It was a purely physiological matter.”¹⁹ This characterization agrees with something HG later wrote in his *Postscript*:

To make love periodically, with some grace and pride and freshness, seems to be, for most of us, a necessary condition to efficient working. It admits of no prosaic satisfactions. It is a mental . . . aesthetic quite as much as a physical need. I resent the necessity at times as much as I resent the perpetual recurrence of meal-times and sleep.²⁰

Willie Maugham offered many keen observations about his friend over the years. Some of the best of them landed in his book *Mr. Maugham Himself*. In a chapter called “Some Novelists I Have Known,” Maugham claimed that although he closely observed the writers he reported on—Arnold Bennett, Henry James, Elizabeth Russell, and H. G. Wells—he was not intimate with any of them. The fault for that, he conceded, was in his own character. “I am either too self-centred, or too diffident, or too reserved, or too shy to be on confidential terms with anyone I know at all well. I prefer to guess at the secrets of their hearts.”²¹ Maugham also said he was more inclined to be amused by people than to respect them.

For whatever reason, Maugham found in HG much that amused—and fascinated—him. “If humour, as some say, is incompatible with love, then HG was never in love, for he was keenly alive to what was rather absurd in the objects of his unstable affections and sometimes seemed almost to look upon them as creatures of farce.”²² When he delved deeper into HG’s psyche, Maugham came up with something that in all likelihood would have stunned HG at least at first: Maugham claimed, and with good reason, that HG was “incapable of the idealization of the desired person which most of us experience when we fall in love.”²³ As we shall see, HG felt he was ably equipped to idealize his

lovers; the trouble came when those lovers fell short of his expectations. On that point, Maugham observed,

If [HG's] companion was not intelligent, he soon grew bored with her, and if she was, her intelligence sooner or later palled on him. He did not like his cake unsweetened and if it was sweet it cloyed. He loved his liberty and when he found that a woman wished to restrict it he became exasperated and somewhat ruthlessly broke off the connection. Sometimes this was not so easily done and he had to put up with scenes and recriminations that even he found difficult to treat with levity.²⁴

Another old friend, Charlie Chaplin, believed that HG's urge to mate was driven by boredom. In his autobiography, Chaplin explained that this insight came straight from the horse's mouth. "There comes a moment in the day," HG once told Chaplin, "when you have written your pages in the morning, attended to your correspondence in the afternoon, and have nothing further to do. Then comes that hour when you are bored; that's the time for sex."²⁵ Chaplin also noted that HG, who churned out 1,000 words a day, was one of the most productive writers he had ever met. Chaplin, a promiscuous and productive man himself, did not directly link abundant sex with productively—in himself or in his friend. Along the same lines, in his highly controversial biography of his father, Anthony West wrote about HG's "awkward hour"—the time between five and seven in the evening when he craved—and apparently often got—obliging young women to serve his pleasure, usually *chez lui*. "Platoons" of them, someone else once quipped of the obliging women.

One of the many women who served HG's pleasure, Odette Keun, also observed him—keenly, vociferously, and often in print. Despite her vitriol for having been removed from her lover's bed and heart, Odette had a knack for analyzing HG that rang true to a good many people. She argued, based on a decade of close study, that what motivated the highly energetic, tightly wound Wells, in the boudoir or in general, was a powerful need for renewal. "A novel emotional experience could change his state of mind, release cooped-up energies, give him fresh-

ness and vigour, a surge of intellectual curiosity and power, and the hope that at least, after a lot of traveling, he had reached an enchanting oasis.”²⁶ When the oasis dried up, as it always did, HG would embark on another expedition: “There was always an abundance of women who were very eager indeed to participate in his voyage.”²⁷

In 1930, Odette wrote to Marjorie Craig Wells, HG’s daughter-in-law, saying that she and Amber Reeves, one of HG’s most passionate young lovers from earlier in the century, had been corresponding with each other because they were both helping HG on a book project. “Great sympathy expressed on both sides, & fervent hopes of meeting soon,” Odette reported of the exchange.²⁸ She went on to say that she also had just spent an afternoon with her predecessor in love, Rebecca West. The three women—two former, one current lover of HG—were entertaining the delicious notion of collaborating “in a detailed, copious, voracious biography of our Great Experience. Poor little thing, [Pidookaki] might at last feel shy.”²⁹ Elsewhere, Odette wisely pointed out that for HG “the game was the thing.”

HG had found himself in the game with Miss Reeves twenty-two years earlier, in 1908. At that time, he was genuinely, hopelessly head over heels in love and lust with the brilliant and adventurous student under his tutelage. Beatrice Webb, a once-close Fabian Society friend, later observed that what HG was seeking in *that* particular extramarital romance—although it probably was true of all of his romances—was nothing short of a double life. Nobody’s fool, Webb claimed that HG craved stability and respectability: home and hearth, children and wife; a life that gave him an outlet for what she called his “Goethe-like libertine” impulse.³⁰

Amber was only one of several caprices HG had with young Fabians, more often than not the daughters of prominent socialists in the Fabian Society, of which he was a charter member. In the *Postscript*, HG conceded that the Fabian meetings had suddenly become “bright and animated gatherings of the young,” and that a number of young women “assumed attitudes of discipleship towards” him. Indeed, it was inevitable, he wrote, that some of these friendships would take on a

warmer tinge.³¹ HG would give Beatrice Webb a great deal of ammunition over the next few years, and she would become one of his most vocal critics.

It is surprising that there were so few complaints from the many objects of HG's affection. Women accepted him, indeed, even embraced him, on his own fast-and-loose free-love terms. Trysts without ties. Passion for the simple pleasure of it, even in the early days of the new century. Even Jane Wells, wife number two, came around to accepting HG's serial dalliances. Although their marriage seemed to function fairly normally in its early years, HG began seeking sexual gratification elsewhere—and well before they celebrated their tenth anniversary—just as he had in the earliest days of his first marriage to his first cousin Isabel Wells. Jane, herself the “other woman” in HG's first marriage, seemed to accept her husband's affairs as a quid pro quo for a stable household and a good life for herself and their children. Even after it became obvious that she and HG were not emotionally or sexually suited to each other, they stayed together and they maintained a strong partnership throughout their thirty-two-year marriage. Indeed, Jane's central role in HG's life—her hold over him—was powerful, even extremely irritating to some of her husband's lovers. Rebecca West, for one, detested HG's unwavering concern for his wife. To Rebecca, Jane was a conniver who hid behind her respectability, who secretly enjoyed Rebecca's trials, and who always held a better hand because HG made no major decisions without seeking her counsel.³²

Still, for the legions of women who did succumb to his charms, HG remained a good and gracious friend. As one of his biographers wrote:

Whether the affair was a “passade,” to use [HG's] word for brief encounters, or lasted a decade, the woman in question knew that he was her friend, her supporter, that she was his equal, and that she could rely on him for support, for aid if necessary, and for companionship once the relationship was over. Wells practised what he preached—sexual equality within the biological differences mandated by our genes.³³

There were two notable exceptions to the rule that HG and his lovers remained close friends: Miss West and Miss Keun; but, like Odette, Rebecca left contradictory opinions about HG. At one point, she thought him insane, possessed, like Tolstoy, of an “anti-sex complex” that made him punish the female who evoked his lust.³⁴ She also wrote that the women who left HG “all felt enduring affection for him and were his domestic friends in his old age,” even though the end of her relationship with HG was anything but affectionate.³⁵ The same was true of the split up between Odette and HG. The grim details follow in the next chapter.

* * *

Despite the importance—perhaps even centrality—of love, lovemaking, and sex in HG’s life, most modern Wells biographers have danced around or skipped over his sexual-romantic life. Perhaps they shared a simple distaste for writing about the subject. Perhaps they were dubious about its relevance or in denial over the disturbing details. David Smith framed this question:

Wells was perhaps the best known socialist in the world for much of the twentieth century, an advocate of equality of education for all according to their talents, and a gifted author who provided his readers glimpses and vistas into a world set free—free of the dominance of upper-class rules, free of hidebound and narrow education, and above all, free from irrational nationalism with its pride in killing, in slaughter, bullying tactics, and oppression. How could a man with this reputation go through life bedding women other than his wife, sireing children out of wedlock, living in “sin,” and still justify the reputation?³⁶

Still, some biographers *have* tried to explain HG’s sexual drive, promiscuity, and serial love affairs, among them Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie. In the beginning, the MacKenzies, who adopted most of Odette Keun’s views, gave HG the benefit of the doubt: They argued

that for him, sex was a powerful pain-reliever for despair. In their scenario, HG tended to overwork. He became depressed as a result, and ultimately broke down in rage or in tears. The release of emotion that this process produced, these biographers contended, “passed into lovemaking,” which was followed by a sound sleep. HG would arise the next morning and resume writing with “fresh enthusiasm.”³⁷ The MacKenzies also argued that in marriage, HG was torn between having strong sexual instincts and being rid of them; in fact, he spent much of his adult life trying to escape the “corruption of the physical appetite he so rapaciously indulged.”³⁸ HG believed that he could find salvation in moral and domestic order, but his domestic claustrophobia caused him to look outside marriage for a woman who could satisfy his emotional needs. Once found, however, the ideal always developed feet of clay.

The revelations in the *Postscript* shocked—even scandalized—the MacKenzies; HG would never again enjoy the benefit of the doubt from them. In their revised edition of *Life*, they let HG have it with far worse names than his self-deprecating self-moniker, Don Juan of the Intelligentsia. Now he was the memorable “philandering sybarite,” known for his “unremitting sexual peccadilloes” and his “innate irresponsibility.” The “streak of puritan self-righteousness in his nature”—inherited from his mother—combined with a conviction that the survival of the species depended on him, may have been what allowed him to shed the “less cosmic responsibilities” in his life.³⁹

One of the standard ways HG shrugged off those minor responsibilities was to claim that it was the woman who initiated the affair. For example, in the *Postscript*, HG wrote, with a splash of humor to be sure, about Amber Reeves: “She fell in love with me with great vigour and determination, and stirred me to a storm of responsive passion.” She also demanded that he give her a child. Even Amber’s mother bore some responsibility for the affair. She “encouraged the development of a very intimate friendship between us.”⁴⁰ Other examples:

Elizabeth von Arnim: “She had already called upon us at Sandgate when she had been passing through Folkestone and had liked me; she heard

talk of my scandalous life, and it seemed to her that I was eminently fitted to correct a certain deficiency in her own.”⁴¹

Rebecca West: Following a sudden mutual kiss, she “flamed up into open and declared passion. She demanded to be my lover and made an accusation of my kiss.”⁴²

Frau Hedy Verena Gatternigg: “She passed rather suddenly and skillfully from an intelligent appreciation of my educational views to passionate declarations. . . . I hate to snub an exile in distress, and she was an extremely appetizing young woman. . . . She wanted me; she plied me with love-letters and professed an unendurable passion. . . . ‘This must end,’ said I, ‘this must end’—allowing myself to be dragged upstairs.”⁴³

Odette Keun: “She had instructed the hotel people to send me up to her room, and I found myself in a dimly lit apartment with a dark slender young woman in a flimsy wrap and an aroma of jasmine. She flung herself upon me with protests of adoration. I was all she had to live for. She wanted to give her whole life to me. She wanted nothing but to be of service to me. ‘If you feel like *that*,’ said I.”⁴⁴

Constance Coolidge: “A day after [Moura left Nice], I had a note from an American widow who owned race-horses and whom I had met at lunch at Maugham’s. . . . she asked me in a schoolgirl handwriting to come to dinner with her at the Negresco.”⁴⁵

According to the MacKenzies, this pattern was typical of the personal irresponsibility that permeated all aspects of HG’s life. All this, all these unattractive qualities, stemmed from HG’s upbringing, the MacKenzies and other biographers have argued. Every member of the Wells household was frustrated and dissatisfied with life and with each other, and this “general state of domestic paranoia left enduring marks on Wells in the form of a pettish willfulness, the lack of any stable

frame for his attitudes and conduct, and a carelessness for his effect on his wives, his mistresses, his publishers, political associates and friends," the MacKenzies concluded.⁴⁶ They also argued that HG probably knew that he had squandered his energies on the pursuit of women. Most of his writings, based as they were on a thinly disguised version of himself, suggest that uncontrolled sexual passion can distract a man, even ruin him.

Meanwhile, one of Maugham's biographers maintained that HG was a victim of "the paradox of the polygamist." His search for passion in a series of infidelities "led him to devalue and discard the women he possessed."⁴⁷ According to the biographer, HG once confided to Maugham that "women often mistake possessiveness for passion, and when they are left, it is not so much that their heart is broken as that their claim to property is repudiated."⁴⁸

Many recent studies also lock onto HG's childhood as the source of his lifelong preoccupation with women, sex, and love. One writer, for example, argued that HG's womanizing was driven by gender confusion, the result of a miserable relationship with his overcontrolling mother and absentee father. Another writer, a feminist critic, theorized that HG's loveless childhood had rendered him incapable of intimacy. Noting that an imposter theme runs throughout HG's writings, this writer also argued that HG's sense of his own fraudulence—a product of his guilt for having risen so far above his parents—drove him compulsively to prove himself over and over again, and then to reject the evidence of his adequacy.⁴⁹ Sharing Beatrice Webb's position, another writer, Patricia Stubbs, argued that HG's self-described domestic claustrophobia drove him to lead a double life: one moment at home with his family, the next, across town, the country, or the continent with his mistress. In his personal life, he exploited his women, wives and mistresses alike. "It is very important to see HG's proselytizing in the cause of freer sexual relations for women in the light of these adventures."⁵⁰

British writer Robin Lockhart was never much charmed by H. G. Wells; that is abundantly clear. The son of Bruce Lockhart, Moura Budberg's great love following the Russian Revolution, Robin claimed that

“Although Wells appealed to women, there was hardly a man who had a good word to say for him; he was thoroughly conceited, bombastic on political matters of which he knew nothing. Nor was there an English writer who had a good word to say for him either as a human being or as a writer except for one or two famous books written in the last century. There was one exception: Arnold Bennett respected him. I met [Wells] once and took an instant dislike to him.”⁵¹

Maugham thought differently, as previously mentioned; indeed, he found much to like in his fellow writer, and the feelings were mutual. In January 1935, HG told Christabel that he was growing fonder of Willie. “He’s a very human creature really.” In Maugham’s opinion, HG was self-centered, like most creative types, but he was devoid of conceit, and he had no illusions about himself as an author. Furthermore, HG was sharp-witted and had a lively sense of humor and, according to Maugham, could laugh at himself. Also to his credit, HG’s humor was without malice. In addition to all those sterling qualities, HG was a splendid houseguest! In a long, humorous piece on houseguests, Maugham ranked HG right up at the top—far, far ahead of the guests who burned holes in the sheets, brought three weeks’ worth of laundry with them to have washed at his expense, and took all they could get but gave nothing in return.

There are also the guests who are happy just to be with you, who seek to please, who have resources of their own, who amuse you, whose conversation is delightful, whose interests are varied, who exhilarate and excite you, who in short give you far more than you can ever hope to give them and whose visits are only too brief. Such a guest was HG. He had a social sense.⁵²

The one thing about HG that surprised Maugham was his sex appeal, since, to Maugham, HG was not particularly attractive. In fact, Maugham described his friend as fat and homely. So what did this fat and homely, short and stocky man with the peculiarly high-pitched voice have in the way of sex appeal? Not having a clue, Maugham once asked

Moura what had attracted her to HG. Instead of saying that it was his acute mind and his sense of fun, she said in vintage Mouresque that his body “smelt of honey.”⁵³ Lance Sieveking, a programming director at the BBC who became a good friend of HG’s, once said that it was quite easy to understand why women were attracted to him, why they loved him: His *mind* smelled of honey. One begins to think that HG *did have* an appealing natural fragrance. Rebecca West once wrote that HG’s body smelled like walnuts. For historian and H. G. Wells biographer Michael Foot, it was neither honey nor walnuts that attracted the women. Foot suggested that HG’s major draw was his “happy, guileless, infectious gift of high spirits” and his “radiant hopefulness.” While his physical attraction wasn’t obvious, “women fell in love with him easily, and even those who didn’t could find themselves captivated.”⁵⁴

Many other people have offered their ideas about what made HG so appealing; they suggested everything from his *joie de vivre* to his honesty. J. B. Priestley, a writer known for his shrewd characterizations, belonged to the second school. He once said that HG was one of the most honest and frankest human beings who ever existed. Lady Cynthia Asquith, meanwhile, testified that she was drawn to HG’s baby blues. All of his intelligence, she said, was in his eyes, which sparkled with mischief and interest, making him look like an exuberant and greedy schoolboy, for whom no day could be “long enough for all he wanted to cram into it.”⁵⁵ Otherwise, HG did not have a particularly noticeable face, and his voice, she said, was like “a pencil on slate.” Sieveking also said that, despite HG’s short and stout physique, his sloping shoulders, large head with sparse hair, a straggling mustache and that famously squeaky voice, HG had beautiful eyes and mouth, and when he smiled, he radiated “vitality and a warmth of human kindness that immediately infected everyone.”⁵⁶

Rebecca West once recalled that HG’s rays of happiness “came and went several times a day. He’d frisk about like an animal, indeed, he had the moves of an animal—a very nice animal.” She also conceded that it was hard to say why HG “with no personal advantage but a bright eye made everyone else in the room seem a dull dog. His company was like

seeing Nureyev dance or Tito Gobbi sing.”⁵⁷ She also effused—and Foot later repeated—that HG had “the most bubbling creative mind that the sun and moon have shone upon since the days of Leonardo da Vinci.” Still, he simply wasn’t adapted to having love affairs or being married, “although he made, God knows, enough tries.”⁵⁸

Regardless of what interpretation—or set of interpretations—one chooses to explain HG’s animal magnetism and romantic-sexual behavior, the bottom line, as biographer David Smith points out, is that to know the complex Mr. Wells, “one must also at least attempt to know his life in the world of fiction and his life in love.”⁵⁹

* * *

Ostensibly, that was HG’s intention in writing the *Postscript*: He wanted to understand—and to share, of course—his formidable life in love. The best way to do that was to analyze the pants off of it, so to speak. Ever the biologist, HG tended to use the verb “dissect” to describe his impulse to inspect and introspect his life. He even kept the laboratory metaphor running throughout his personal writings and often referred to himself as his own rabbit and his own toad. In his first autobiography, the *Experiment in Autobiography*, HG first dissected his brain to convey “some idea of the quality and defects of the grey matter of that organized mass of phosphorized fat and connective tissue.”⁶⁰ He then did the same to his persona, which he described rather unsatisfactorily as the vanity that dominated his brain’s imaginations.

The main theme of the *Experiment*, then, was his mental system—the expansion of the interests and activities of his brain. The second theme was his sexual system.⁶¹ “I suspect,” HG wrote, “the sexual system should be at least the second theme, when it is not the first, in every autobiography, honestly and fully told.”⁶² HG claimed, perhaps disingenuously, that his brain, like his libido, was nothing special. “If there were brain-shows, as there are cat and dog shows, I doubt if it would get even a third class prize. Upon quite a number of points it would be marked below the average.”⁶³ Critics called him on his claim

of having a room-temperature brain, saying that he was insincere, guilty of a reverse arrogance. They were, HG noted, inclined to overrate his “quality.” Still, it is doubtful that a mediocre brain could have dreamed up as complex a concept as the Lover-Shadow, or have used it to better effect, than did HG. And yet, he argued that this abstract factor was present in every normal brain. In the Preface to this book, I defined Lover-Shadow simply as HG’s “complete female counterpart, his intellectual-emotional-sexual equal.” HG defined and redefined the concept dozens of times. The Lover-Shadow was a “subtle complex of expectation and hope,” sexual in origin and then later, social. It was almost as essential to our lives as our self consciousness. “It is *other* consciousness.” He also wrote that when people make love, they are trying to make another human being concentrate for them as an impersonation or a symbol of the Lover-Shadow in their minds. When we are in love, “we have found in someone the presentation or the promise of some, at least, of the main qualities of our Lover-Shadow.”⁶⁴

In the closing pages of his *Anatomy of Frustration*, where he deposited dozens of pages originally written for the *Postscript*, but then retrofitted them, HG aired his protagonist’s statement about the Lover-Shadow—for all intents and purposes his own. He wanted

a Personal, Intimate, Subservient, Devoted, Private Divinity, a genius like the genius of Socrates, a confidant who will not know what I want to conceal but will know whatever I want to have known. And somehow this has got to be embodied in an attractive, variable, interesting woman who will respond to my desire. I have never wanted a pet of a woman or an exhibitionist Venus to worship. I am no sort of impresario lover. I have wanted a strong, quietly animated goddess-slave. Or a strong, quietly animated slave-goddess. Mother-mate not mistress. With some mistress thrown in. Preposterous—yes. But this is how I am made. This is what I find I want when I go down into myself.

I want love that will glow through my being from the smallest thrill of sense to the utmost mental exaltation. And I want it *with* my lover and

my lovers and through my love. I do not want to pass into an abstract sublimation and leave smell and sight and touch behind. I do not want to float up into the sky; I want the two of us to grow up to the sky with our bare toes still pressing firmly and happily into sunlit soil.⁶⁵

In HG's paradigm, the *persona* and the Lover-Shadow were the main elements of the human psyche—the hero and heroine of our private dramas. Other complex systems move across the stage and act out their small roles, he said, but they are essentially “subordinate.”

HG intellectualized the Lover-Shadow ad nauseam; he also spent a great deal of time and effort over his long life trying to “concentrate” or “embody” his Lover-Shadow in a string of women. While claiming to have a normal brain, he admitted that it behaved differently where the Lover-Shadow was concerned. In a section of the *Postscript* aptly titled “Psychological and Parental,” HG argued that there was no separation of psychological and physical in *his* personal make-up; all the love affairs in his life, therefore, were attempts to embody and concentrate the Lover-Shadow. Not every brain was as likely as his to concentrate the Lover-Shadow, and not everyone linked the Lover-Shadow “as closely to a sexual relationship as I have done. Since I am very much a body as well as a mind, all these love affairs have sought a physical expression.”⁶⁶

In the *Postscript*, HG described this complex original notion in original and often complex ways. Thus, the Lover-Shadow could be “a very grave and lively complex of desire,” “elusive dream-stuff,” or “a lovely, wise and generous person wholly devoted to me. Her embraces were to be my sure fastness, my ultimate reassurance, the culmination of my realization of myself.”⁶⁷ Perhaps his Lover-Shadow could be viewed as his better half, the authentic half that made him whole. Perhaps it was a bogus construction, as suggested in the Preface, a complex concept HG created to deflect attention away from his rapacious sexual appetite.

Not surprisingly, HG's obsession with the Lover-Shadow has been understood in a great many ways. Feminist critic Nancy Steffen-Fluhr conceded that HG was grasping for “an important psychological in-

sight,” but that it was “just beyond his field of vision.” She also suggested that HG was linking his desire for intimacy with another person and his more inchoate desire for intimacy with the estranged parts of his own personality.⁶⁸ In his treatment of the subject, David Smith tried to imagine the experience of finding one’s Lover-Shadow:

Together, the soul-mates would have transcended the biological imperative, the drag of time and custom, and even the pursuit of power for power’s sake, to live in complete harmony. Wells did not find such a person (one is tempted to add, “of course”). . . . In any case Wells sought through much of his life for such relationships, came much closer than most to finding them, and wrote of them in his fiction about the real and the ideal in the world of human love and passion.⁶⁹

Others have understood the Lover-Shadow as HG’s ideal woman, or simply his sexual-emotional fantasy. Whether it was the more complex definition or the less can be endlessly debated. What is not debatable, though, is HG’s statement in the *Postscript*, made after all of the women, all of the love affairs: “The fundamental love of my life is the Lover-Shadow, and always I have been catching a glimpse of her and losing her in these adventures.”⁷⁰

In the *Experiment*, HG seemed to dissect every conceivable aspect of his human experience, including the full story of his two marriages, with all their hopes and expectations, twists and turns, ups and downs. In the *Postscript*, HG promised to update the various activities of his Lover-Shadow. He promised to carve up the remaining love relationships, slide them under the microscope, and write up the lab reports. “I want [my children] to know all about me,” he explained in the *Postscript*. As his note made clear, the *Postscript*, which was to be published after his death, expressed “not the main strand of my life but the sexual, domestic and intimate life sustaining it.”⁷¹ As he put it in some pages that were later suppressed from the *Postscript*, left out of publication in folders marked “rejected” and “deleted,” HG wrote: “Let me, to make sure that no one misses my point, repeat that this *Postscript* is not

full autobiography; it is autobiography strictly below the belt.”⁷² HG’s plan was to package the *Experiment* and the *Postscript* together, along with his preface to *The Book of Catherine Wells*, the volume of his late wife’s writings that he published in 1928. He was offering a literary one-stop-shopping trip into his life, his being, at least from 1866 to 1934, so all the “main masses” of his experiences would “fall into proportion.” As we know, HG’s heirs did not package the *Postscript* according to HG’s orders.⁷³

In the opening pages of his *Experiment in Autobiography*, H. G. Wells wrote that he put everything else aside and began the book because his thoughts and work were “encumbered by claims and vexations” from which he could not see any hope of escaping. At the end of the book, he reminded the reader that he had begun the autobiography to reassure himself during a period of fatigue, restlessness, and vexation, and that he believed he had achieved his goal.

I wrote myself out of that mood of discontent and forgot myself and a mosquito swarm of bothers in writing about my sustaining ideas. My ruffled *persona* has been restored and the statement of the idea of the modern world-state has reduced my personal and passing irritations and distractions to their proper insignificance. So long as one lives as an individual, vanities, lassitudes, lapses, and inconsistencies will hover about and creep back into the picture, but I find nevertheless that this faith and service of constructive world revolution does hold together my mind and will in a prevailing unity, that it makes life continually worth living, transcends and minimizes all momentary and incidental frustrations and takes the sting out of the thought of death.⁷⁴

Fifty years later, HG’s son Gip would claim that his father did in fact achieve re-integration after writing the *Experiment*, “partly by proclaiming the service of a future world-state as the central purpose of his life and partly by falling (or throwing himself) head over heels in love with Moura Budberg, and persuading himself that she would make him a brilliant wife and give him the support he so badly needed.”⁷⁵ But

Moura foiled HG's hope for a happy life ever after; she had no interest in marrying him, and the chance discovery he made about her in July 1934—the previously mentioned Moscow deception/Moscow crisis—destroyed all hope he had for realizing his Lover-Shadow in the form of Moura Budberg. Gip claimed that his father's "shock of disillusion" was followed by a deep and nearly suicidal depression. "Slowly he worked himself out of it. The self-analysis involved in the writing of the *Postscript*," Gip argued so wisely, "which he then undertook, played a major part in his recovery."⁷⁶

Thus, although HG's stated purposes in writing the *Postscript* was to ensure that his children would know all about him, and also to make certain that he would have a safeguard against being misrepresented posthumously, "which I have had considerable reason to fear," it was also a therapeutic exercise, just as the *Experiment* had been. His "suicidal mood," he wrote, began in July 1934, after he caught Moura, the woman he yearned to marry, in a series of strange lies about her connections with Russia. She couldn't accompany him to Russia that summer, she protested, because it would be extremely dangerous, if not fatal, for her to do so.

Ever since coming out of Russia in 1921, Moura had insisted that she was a *persona non grata* there, and that if she ever dared return, she would risk great bodily harm, if not prison and death. Russia was a "barred country to her" due to her various but unspecified troubles with the authorities. A host of complex and contradictory stories circulated, and continue to circulate, about Moura's activities in Russia, including the claim that she was a spy for Russia. Although Moura used her checkered past as a compelling reason to refuse to accompany HG to Russia the summer of 1934 to meet Gorky and Stalin, she had in fact just been there. As HG explained in the *Postscript*, when he was in Moscow, he learned by chance that Moura had preceded him there by a week—stayed at Gorky's, in fact, but then had "skedaddled" back to Estonia. HG's Russian guide and interpreter were the inadvertent bearers of these ill tidings.⁷⁷ He also learned that Moura had been to Moscow three times within the past year, whereas she had led him to believe that she

had not been back for more than ten years. This news came by way of Gorky, soon after the first bombshell. HG was stunned not only by Moura's deceit but also by her indifference to his well-being. "She could have been with me in private; she could have been beside me to discuss my impressions; she could have made love in Russia once more," he wrote in the *Postscript*.⁷⁸ Worse than that was the jealousy, the fear that Moura was rekindling her affair with Gorky, her former lover and employer. Even if the relationship was Platonic, as Moura protested it was, her relations with Gorky, HG wrote, "were of a nature so intimate and sentimental that she could not be with us together, in the same place. . . . Someone had to be sacrificed."⁷⁹ When HG confronted Moura about his discovery, she denied having been in Russia, then later admitted it but dismissed the event as an innocent, hastily arranged trip to see her homeland—and her old, ailing patron—one last time. Moura stuck to her story "stoutly," HG wrote, adding that nothing she said lessened his distrust of her after the Moscow deception. They would have, he wrote, "the canker of this trouble" between them.

On August 3, 1934, at Kallijärv, Moura's lake home in Estonia, not far from today's Tallinn, HG wrote to Christabel about his crisis. He said he had discovered something in Moscow that meant either that Moura had been "humbugging" him in a quite intolerable way or that Gorky was a liar. "It is queer how in a phase of jealousy one can believe anyone rather than the person one loves. Jealousy dear Christabel is the most malignant of fevers. In jealousy there is no rest, no peace, no human dignity. After sixty, one should be immune." In her previously suppressed letter of the same day, Christabel replied: "There's something all wrong in that picture—[Moura's] not like that. Is it not possible you have misinterpreted the situation? And, [if] there has been something, couldn't you forgive it?" Apparently he couldn't entirely, for in the *Postscript* HG wrote: "In an evening my splendid Moura was smashed to atoms." There is no doubt that the Moscow incident seriously wounded HG.

There it lies between us. Everything about Moscow rests unexplained.
Did she go thrice or once? I do not know. I begin to feel it does not mat-

ter. But the Moura who was never really there has vanished now for ever and nothing in earth or heaven can bring her back. We were lovers as the word goes, and intimate associates. We could still laugh and talk about a thousand things. But we were consciously apart from each other. We were sitting back to look at each other.⁸⁰

The discovery and its aftermath changed the relationship between HG and Moura. It also motivated HG's liaison with Constance Coolidge five months later on the French Riviera, and with another young American woman, Martha Gellhorn, a few months after that in Washington. In typical style, HG blamed Moura for *his* unfaithfulness: "She had made it possible for me to be unfaithful to her," he wrote in the *Postscript*, and "to slip back to promiscuity."

HG put a great deal of energy into his *Postscript*, which had the potential of exorcising his jealous demons and sense of betrayal. He fussed over his personal love history, writing and rewriting it intermittently over a period of eight years—and in his tiny, often illegible handwriting, to what must have been the horror of his secretary and daughter-in-law, Marjorie Wells, who typed his manuscripts.⁸¹ Gip and Marjorie Wells, Gip's wife and longtime personal secretary to HG, edited and titled the manuscript and published it fifty years after HG began it. The dust jacket touted the book as an "extraordinary publishing event," not only for its combustible subject matter—"the romantic and sexual affairs of a world-famous writer"—but also for its "self-revelation and astounding candor."

Soon after HG's *Confessio Amantis* was released, reviewers and biographers began cranking out a river of reviews. Their reactions to HG's candor and behavior were all over the map: He was both reviled and praised for his most recent work. Some described the *Postscript* as a deft bit of gossip that used psychological catchphrases but was devoid of self-insight or understanding; others saw it as the standard by which such works, in the future, should be judged.⁸² The historian Michael Foot believed that the *Experiment* and the *Postscript* taken together "constitute the bravest autobiography of the century." The *Experiment* alone

was “one of the greatest literary autobiographies ever written.”⁸³ With it, HG led the way to the fullest, freest discussion of sexual questions.

As previously mentioned, by the time the *Postscript* was published, a good deal of its revelation and candor had been chucked. Gip cut out portions of narrative that he thought might cause trouble if published, and he removed the names of his father’s last lovers, Constance and Martha, replacing them with asterisks and pronouns. He also cut out long portions of narrative about them, although only Martha was still alive when the book was released. Thus, in the section where HG left explicit publishing instructions, Gip edited the published version to read that the memoir should go to press “when ***** and Moura and Dusa are either dead or consenting—for Odette does not matter a rap; Rebecca, bless her, is fully able to take care of herself; ***** won’t mind, and nobody else has any justification for complaint.”⁸⁴ In the original manuscript pages, HG actually wrote: “A few years after my death, when Constance Coolidge and Moura and Dusa are either dead or consenting—for Odette does not matter a rap, Rebecca, bless her, is fully able to take care of herself, the Hemingways won’t mind, and nobody else has any justification for complaint.” In another version he wrote: “When Elizabeth von Arnim, the dowager Countess Russell, is dead and Constance Coolidge and Moura and Dusa and Martha Gellhorn are either dead or consenting.”⁸⁵

As mentioned, HG too had jettisoned large pieces of narrative from the *Postscript*. These he bundled into a separate folder for omission. He later cannibalized a large part of that omitted text, most of it having to do with his conception of the Lover-Shadow, and put it into *The Anatomy of Frustration*. The leftovers were never used anywhere because either they referred to women in his *Postscript*—Constance Martha Gellhorn, and Moura—and thus didn’t suit *The Anatomy*, or they referred to the *Postscript* or to the *Experiment*, and similarly didn’t fit into *The Anatomy*’s conceit: a discursive modern synthesis of current life, based on Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*.⁸⁶ HG’s *Anatomy*, supposedly the work of one William Burroughs Steele, “an observant watcher of the world,” has been described as HG’s interview with him-