

THE GISSING NEWSLETTER

“More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”
– George Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*.

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Odd Women and Male Vision :
Men's Views of Women in *The Odd Women*

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What a simple thing marriage had always seemed to him, and how far from simple he had found it! Why, it led him to musings which overset the order of the world, and flung all ideas of religion and morality into wildest confusion.

George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, 1893.¹

Mr. Widdowson's disillusionment with married life and the bleak predicament in which this leaves him can be seen as framing the central concerns of George Gissing's *The Odd Women*. Throughout the novel, Gissing focuses on what might be called the "death" of Victorian domestic ideology. Described by one contemporary critic as "intensely modern"² *The Odd Women* surveys the Ruskinian ideal of womanhood from a position that is quite consciously retrospective. Gissing views it as belonging to a world that is quickly fading into the past, and probes the consequences of its disappearance. His choice of a highly topical issue makes *The Odd Women* a very revealing novel about late nineteenth century ideology. But what makes it even more interesting is his treatment of that issue not only as one concerning the nature of female objects, but also of male subjects.

This statement of the concerns of *The Odd Women* may initially appear surprising, for the title itself refers explicitly to a world where men are absent – that is, to the world of unmarried women. Early in the novel Rhoda Nunn, Gissing's militant feminist protagonist, explains that "there are over half a million more women than men in this wonderful country of ours," going on to say:

So many odd women – no making a pair with them. The pessimists call them

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useless, lost, futile lives. I, naturally – being one of them myself – take another view. I look upon them as a great reserve. When one woman vanishes in matrimony, the reserve offers a substitute for the world's work.
(37)

Most commentators on Gissing have seen this as introducing the novel's basic theme – the lives of single women and their struggles to gain independence and self-respect. Certainly, this has an initial plausibility. Rhoda and her friend Mary Barfoot, both central characters in the novel, run a school which helps young women to achieve independence by training them in a career. It is their aim to transform these women from "useless, lost, futile lives" to "a great reserve" striving to create a better world. Rhoda exemplifies in many ways what became known in the 1890's as the "New Woman" – she is brave, outspoken, contemptuous of traditional roles assigned to women and determined to maintain her independence. We might expect, therefore, that Gissing provides us with a view of the lives of single women and the concerns of nineteenth century feminism.

If the novel is read in this way, however, it is very disappointing. The Barfoot-Nunn establishment is presented almost entirely from the outside, so that it is impossible to gain much sense of its internal organisation. Nor does Gissing provide any coordinates which might help us to enter the mental world of nineteenth century feminism. He refers a number of times to Ruskin as a point of orientation for discussions of womanhood, but never alludes to even the most

prominent contemporary feminist thinkers. The feminist principles espoused by Rhoda and Mary remain oddly unsituated in contrast to the views of conservative characters such as Mr. Widdowson. This is surprising given that Gissing was generally concerned to create a sense of situational specificity. He was among the first English novelists to give his fictional creations a

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specific geographical and temporal location. If his central concern were with single women, one would expect him to make their world more concrete.

More important than this, however, is the fact that Gissing's focus is rarely on women alone, but almost always on their relationship to men. Although numerous "odd women" appear in the novel, they remain peripheral unless they come within the orbit of one of the male characters. The narrative line of the novel is entirely built around the development of two contrasting male-female relationships – the "traditional" relationship and marriage of Monica Madden and Mr. Widdowson and the more "modern" relationship of Rhoda Nunn and Everard Barfoot. The truly odd women – the genteel old maids, Alice and Virginia Madden; an uneducated shop girl, Miss Eade, who ends up working as a prostitute on a railway station; and the young women of Mary Barfoot's establishment, Mildred Vesper and Winifred Haven – flit in and out of the plot merely as comments on the central drama.

The absence of any development of the theme of the lives of single women is generally explained in terms of the limitations and faults of Gissing as a writer. According to some commentators, he was bound to the form of the mid-Victorian novel in which narrative development was conventionally structured around romance. According to others, his introduction of male characters is evidence of male egotism and hostility to feminism – he simply could not believe that women could live without men.³ Both these interpretations tend to see the men in the novel, and particularly Everard Barfoot, as spurious inclusions with no real relationship to the main theme.

It will be argued here that a far more appropriate interpretation of *The Odd Women*, and one that reads it more in terms of the framework that Gissing himself sets up, is simply that its chief interest is not with the lives of single women but rather with ideals of womanhood. Too often is the fact that Gissing is not a "major novelist" allowed to guide interpretation of his work.

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In the numerous discussions of Gissing's views of women, it is almost always assumed that these views are naively represented in the text. What is often ignored is the fact that very often he is, himself, engaging in "second-order" reflections – reflections not about women directly, but rather about ideals of womanhood. Once this is realised, it becomes clear that his male characters are far from being accidental or superfluous, for they provide the means by which ideals of womanhood can be externalised as a problem. The ideology with which Gissing was concerned was male-centred – it presupposed man as subject. It is only by focusing on masculine consciousness, therefore, that it could be properly examined.

The Odd Women must be seen in the context of a dislocation of established ideals of womanhood. This dislocation was seen by contemporaries not as an isolated problem concerning sexual identity alone, but as one affecting the entire social order. For mid-Victorian ideologues such as John Ruskin and Coventry Patmore, women signified Truth for man. They represented stability of meaning and universal values in a world tormented by social upheavals. Marriage and the family, with women at their centre, were to be an island of tranquility and calm in the midst of chaos and uncertainty. The crucial element of this ideology was the belief that the immutability of woman's place was guaranteed because it was derived from Nature. In a

world where anything else might be questioned, the naturalness of sexual roles could not be denied. Man being presupposed as subject, woman became the passive sign of a timeless absolute outside the ceaseless flux of history, reassuring him of the continued centredness of his existence. It was this absolute that writers such as Ruskin and Patmore sought to apprehend in codifying the nature of true womanhood.

Paradoxically, however, the very codification of woman's natural place opened it to a possible *denaturalisation*, for in the process it was made an explicit object of consciousness. It was no longer simply presupposed as given, but was something to be theorised, discussed,

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represented in art and literature. In the proliferation of discourse about women, ideals of womanhood increasingly betrayed themselves as cultural products whose naturalness became open to doubt. By 1879, Maria Grey was able to write boldly that "the social question that goes to the very roots of our social life – the relationship between the sexes ... must now be tried as freely as others in the ruthless crucible of doubt and analysis."⁴ For Grey, such an analysis revealed the unnaturalness of marriage. Women in marriage were subordinated to men – their position was one of "the weak and dependent, of the slave, the pauper and the parasite."⁵ They were subjected to artificial restraints and restrictions which forced them into a predetermined role rather than allowing them to freely express themselves. Women became unnatural objects that "can only be grown under glass."

The rejection of the Ruskinian ideal of womanhood did not necessarily entail the more fundamental rejection of the paradigm on which it was based. Ideal womanhood, itself, need not be dismissed for it could simply be displaced into the future. In fact, such a displacement was an essential strategy of feminists such as Grey. They were able to argue that their proposals would not revolutionise society, threatening to throw it into chaos, but, on the contrary, would put it on a more solid foundation. The strength of this argument relied upon taking the central metaphor of the Ruskinian ideal of womanhood – the identification of women with Nature – and pressing it to its conclusion. If women were natural, then surely they should be allowed to realise their naturalness unhindered and unrestrained. In journals of the late nineteenth century such as *The Nineteenth Century* and *The Fortnightly Review*, there were numerous articles concerned with narrating the story of this progressive realization. A whole industry arose in constructing evolutionary typologies of marriage and the social role accorded to women. There was a burst of interest in women of other cultures – Islamic women, Indian women, Turkish women, and

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Burmese women.

The most important question for contemporaries, however, was the nature of "modern" woman. How much of the present ideal of womanhood was natural and would remain, and how much would change? For Maria Grey writing in the late 1870's there was relatively little that would be altered. Man, she argued, is naturally the source of authority and leadership, while woman is naturally gentle and submissive – the helper and comforter.⁶ This would not be threatened by the removal of artificial restraints on womanhood. By the 1890's, however, there were much more extreme views. Mona Caird, in an article on "The Morality of Marriage," rejected almost entirely the present ideal of womanhood, arguing that "It is a hideous ideal that we have set up for woman, and the world is wretched and diseased because they have followed it too faithfully."⁷ Caird argued that there was nothing whatsoever that was natural about this ideal and went so far as to attack the very appeal to nature as spurious: "Nature intends nothing. *Man* intends. *Man* desires – 'Nature' learns to obey."⁸ It is significant, however, that her ultimate appeal rested, like those of her conservative opponents, on a call for natural

womanhood. In contrast to “the crumpled and petty ideal of the womanly character,” she envisaged the modern woman as one whose “purity came into being with the love of nature ... She is fostered by that passionate love of liberty, of health, sunlight, freshness, which is becoming one of the regenerative and moving forces of the century.”⁹

Gissing had no political interest in feminism. It is nevertheless understandable that he should be interested in ideals of womanhood. Throughout his work, he was strongly concerned at the consequences of the decay of established ideals once it was revealed that they had no absolute basis in nature or religion. During the 1890’s, this problem was most clearly focused in the “woman question.” It is not surprising, therefore, that Gissing should make this

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a central concern of his novels. It should be remembered, however, that he is not so much interested in the practical concerns of feminism as in the way in which changing ideals of womanhood fitted into a general framework of thought about stability and change and the centredness of man in relation to nature.

The Odd Women is imbued with a very strong sense of historicity. Gissing was one of a number of late nineteenth century novelists and writers who were beginning to objectify “Victorianism” as a coherent and identifiable set of attitudes and values. Although the term itself had not come into general use, there was already a sense in which the mid-Victorian era was another world. The novel opens with a vignette of the domestic life of the Madden family which is very consciously presented as past (we are even told that the date is 1872). Dr. Madden is portrayed by Gissing as almost a caricature of a mid-Victorian gentleman. His world is saturated with sentimentality and religiosity: “From the contact of coarse actualities his nature shrank.” (2) This world is male-centred – it is Dr. Madden’s world. From the very opening of the novel, Gissing focuses on male perceptions and ideals of women, making this the central problem of the novel. Dr. Madden’s six daughters surround him as pretty objects that screen him from conflict and anxiety, and provide him with a sense of order and stability. Reflecting on their future, he thinks indulgently of “what a delightful old age his would be, when some were married and had children of their own, and others tended him – they whom he had tended.” (4)

There are already signs, however, that this pleasing image conceals a not so pleasing reality. All we hear of Mrs. Madden is that “having given birth to six daughters, [she] had fulfilled her function in this wonderful world.” (1) The brutality implicit in dismissing her as having “fulfilled her function” disrupts the unity and order of the “wonderful world,” revealing it as a mere surface appearance. It is made clear that Mrs. Madden’s death was the result of

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physical and emotional exhaustion: “She had known but little repose, and secret anxieties told upon her countenance long before the final collapse of health.” (2) Yet Dr. Madden retains only a sentimental memory of “a sweet, calm, unpretending woman; admirable in the domesticities.” (1) He must constantly suppress any thought that women could be affected by conflict or trouble. He makes no provision for the possibility that his daughters may one day come into contact with the world outside the home. “The thought ... of his girls having to work for money was so utterly repulsive to him that he could never seriously dwell upon it. A vague piety supported his courage. Providence would not deal harshly with him and his dear ones.” (3)

With the movement of time into the present, we are thoroughly disillusioned as to the naturalness of Dr. Madden’s world. With his death, it becomes obvious that its timelessness and calm is an illusion that he both creates and maintains. Without him, his daughters are thrown forcibly into the very hardship and suffering from which he tried to believe they were immune.

By the time the story is resumed, two of the sisters have died. A third, Isabel, soon follows, drowning herself in a bath after entering a charitable institution as a result of overwork. The two oldest sisters, Alice and Virginia, are pitifully ill-adapted to life outside the safety and security of the family home. They illustrate starkly the artificiality of the ideal that has been imposed upon them. Alice's corpulence is the result of a sedentary life. Virginia too is unhealthy. Both are childish despite their age, and are unable to help themselves. They can only retreat into their cramped and suffocating lodgings, where they subsist on mashed potato and milk. Virginia secretly takes refuge in gin and popular novels, while Alice consoles herself with religion.

Alice and Virginia survive as constant reminders of the unnaturalness of Dr. Madden's ideal of womanhood and link the novel to the story of its opening prelude. Their faded gentility

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represents the death of the ideal following upon the death of its creator. It is against this background that the narrative picks up on the developing relationship of the youngest Madden sister, Monica, with her aging suitor Mr. Widdowson, and the contrasting relationship of Rhoda Nunn and Everard Barfoot. The entire action of the novel is, in a sense, an after-event. It follows upon the irreversible disappearance of a past world of order and stability symbolised by the death of Dr. Madden.

Monica represents the hope that the past may be regained. Like her sisters, she is forced to confront the external world of hardship and unpleasantness. She works in appalling conditions as a shop girl for "Messrs. Scotcher & Co." where her companions are vulgar, uneducated and crassly materialistic. However, unlike her sisters, there is a possibility that she may marry and so regain her place within a domestic scene of order and stability. Throughout his treatment of Monica, Gissing plays upon the theme of her naturalness. She is first described as a perfectly ordinary girl: "She ... had no aptitude for anything but being a pretty, cheerful, engaging girl, much dependent on the love and gentleness of those about her." (11) These are exactly the qualities that are regarded as "natural" in a girl of her social class. Because she is natural, there is little question that she must follow the "natural" course. Her sisters live in hopeful expectation of this eventuality: "She must marry; of course she must marry! Her sisters gladdened in the thought." (12) When, finally, Monica agrees to marry Mr. Widdowson, it is "at nature's bidding" that she decides to do so.

And yet her relationship with Widdowson is in almost every respect profoundly unnatural. Both she and he force themselves to act out roles in a desperate attempt to recapture an ideal in which they have lost their faith. The wedding, itself, is totally lacking in spontaneity. "All the formalities are complied with" but that is all. "Depression was manifest on every countenance, not excepting Widdowson's; the man had such a stern, gloomy look ... For an hour

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before going to the church, Monica cried and seemed unutterably doleful; she had not slept for two nights; her face was ghastly." (121) The ceremony is less a celebration of the ideal of a natural relationship between man and woman, than an implicit recognition of its death.

Monica feels no real attraction to Widdowson, but forces herself to believe she does, explaining rather lamely to her friend Mildred Vesper that "he has made me love him." (112) Throughout her early relationship with Widdowson, she constantly defers her responsibility to him, trying to create for herself a faith in him as an absolute source of authority. In doing so, she must constantly suppress signs that contradict this faith – Widdowson's age, his awkwardness of manner, his lack of knowledge of the proper dress for a gentleman.

Widdowson is, in fact, an anonymous suburban dweller who has spent half his life as a clerk. He contrasts strongly with Dr. Madden, yet in many ways he is a similar type simply

transferred to another time. Both are unexceptional men who are concerned only to achieve a sense of safety and security. The difference between them is that Dr. Madden feels that security much less under threat. He is a gentleman with a family and a country residence. His religious faith is unquestioning and he believes that he is well “established” in a respectable profession (forgetting the awkward fact that he is “doctor only by courtesy”). Widdowson, by contrast, is deeply aware of his rootlessness. He is insecure in his religious faith. He is haunted by memories of his life as a clerk where he was an inferior subordinated to a vast impersonal institution. The inheritance of his brother’s wealth allows him to become a “man of means,” but he is awkward in the role of a gentleman. Without a social “circle” or any other coordinates by which to orient himself, he is convinced that the external world is uniformly hostile and menacing and so turns inwards in a desperate attempt to create a microcosm of order in his suburban villa.

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The difference between Dr. Madden and Widdowson translates, in their views of women, to the difference between a good-natured patriarch and an obsessive tyrant. Both hold an ideal of women as passive signifiers of order and stability. However, whereas Dr. Madden surveys his daughters with a benign tolerance, secure in his belief in their purity and innocence, Widdowson cannot view Monica without suspicion. He is constantly troubled by signs of her worldliness – her memories of her life as a shop girl at Walworth Road, her knowledge of London transit, and her association with the disturbing ideas of Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot. These are not only signs that she is “tainted” with associations with the disordered external world, but also that she has an independent subjectivity. Widdowson assumes that his wife exists only in relation to himself: “he was unconsciously the most complete despot ... Never had it occurred to Widdowson that a wife remains an individual, with rights and obligations independent of her wifely condition. Everything he said presupposed his own supremacy.” (152) Monica’s display of independence, however, threatens to overturn his sense of centredness.

Widdowson can only restore his lost sense of order by exercising coercion. He attempts to “improve” Monica, lecturing her on her role as a wife, advising her to read Ruskin, persuading her to adopt a rigorous domestic routine and trying to limit her excursions outside the home. “Let us be everything to each other,” he says, “and forget that any one else exists.” (153) Yet force only exacerbates the problem for it reveals his ideal of Monica as an unnatural imposition and so threatens to reduce their relationship to one of open violence. Monica, herself, soon becomes aware of this. Early in their marriage, she is uneasy about Widdowson’s interest in her clothing, exclaiming nervously: “You are making a butterfly of me.” (151) Her unease gradually becomes alarm and finally horror. She finds that she is entrapped, enclosed, unable to act or even to think freely and spontaneously. She comes to feel the extreme unnaturalness of her

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position: “When he took her in his arms she had to struggle with a sense of shrinking, of disgust. The union was unnatural; she felt herself constrained by a hateful force.” (200)

Significantly, however, Monica does not question the *possibility* of an ideal marriage, but only her *particular* relationship with Widdowson. Losing faith entirely in the naturalness of his authority, she looks only for a replacement: “The independence she had been struggling to assert ever since her marriage meant only freedom to love.” (222) She is therefore highly susceptible to the amorous advances of the amiable Mr. Bevis, and is wholly unsuspecting that he, too, is weak, self-interested and incapable. Upon finding these faults, she is shattered: “She had expected something so entirely different – swift, virile passion, eagerness even to anticipate her desire of flight, a strength, a courage to which she could abandon herself.” (230)

Widdowson, too, is shattered by his disillusionment with the ideal. For him, actual proof of his wife's dishonesty confirms every suspicion he had previously held. Before, he was able to sustain some illusion that she signified perfect Truth. Afterwards, he is divested of his last hope of any certainty and his whole world is thrown into confusion.

Whatever she tells me – how can I believe it? When once a woman has lied how can she ever again be believed? I can't be sure of anything. (330)

In complete contrast to the relationship of Monica and Widdowson is that of Rhoda Nunn and Everard Barfoot, who are both thoroughly "modern" in their views. Rhoda rejects conventional ideals of womanhood as false and artificial and consciously attempts to situate herself beyond such ideals. For her, marriage is an unnatural institution which, far from being a scene of peace and tranquillity, is almost always riven with strife and unhappiness. In contrast

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to her friend, Mary Barfoot, who believes that "the vast majority of women would lead a wasted life if they did not marry," Rhoda believes that "the vast majority of women lead a vain and miserable life because they *do* marry." (59) Everard prides himself on holding no illusions about women, being fully aware of the falseness of their idealisation. As he explains to his traditionally minded friend, Micklethwaite, who is "of the Ruskin school," "I haven't anything like the respect for women, as women, that you have." (93) For Everard, women should be treated directly and openly, as one would treat other men. He does not believe in marriage, but supports instead the idea of a "free union" where man and woman treat each other as equals.

If the relationship between Monica and Widdowson represents the attempt to relive an ideal past, then that of Rhoda and Everard represents the opposite response to a denaturalisation of sexual relations – the displacement of the ideal into the future. Contemporary reviewers of *Gissing* immediately recognised the relationship as an exploration of the possibility of natural relations between the sexes among those with "modern" views. *Gissing* was addressing a problem that was widely discussed in the 1890's. This discussion generally had a certain definite pattern. Although the problem was often presented as one of the relationship between men and women, it almost always tended, in practice, to be a discussion of "modern women." This reflected the dominant assumption of a male-centred vision. *Gissing* reproduces this assumption by focusing largely on Rhoda as the object of interest. However, he also breaks with it, to some extent, in his reflections on the attitudes and motivations of Everard.

In strong contrast to Monica, Rhoda is presented as a woman who has rejected or denied the qualities that are usually regarded as naturally belonging to womanhood: "At first view the countenance seemed masculine, its expression somewhat aggressive – eyes shrewdly observant

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and lips consciously impregnable." (20) Her whole demeanour is "of the intellect" – it is conscious rather than natural. There is, however, a suggestion that there may be an underlying naturalness: "When the lips parted to show their warmth, their fullness, when the eyelids drooped in meditation, one became aware of a suggestiveness directed not solely to the intellect ... hinting a possibility of subtle feminine forces that might be released by circumstances." (21)

The tension between Rhoda's conscience and her "nature" is further developed in her discussions with her friend, Mary Barfoot, who takes a much less intransigent position in relation to established ideals of womanhood. Mary's difference from Rhoda is reflected even in her manner and dress: "her style of dress, gracefully ornate, would have led a stranger to

presume her a wedded lady of some distinction.” (50) She resists a complete rejection of what is regarded as natural, warning Rhoda that “a strained ideal is as bad, practically, as no ideal at all.” (60) She believes that, for most girls, marriage is the most natural and satisfactory course. Rhoda, by contrast, argues that “before the female sex can be raised from its low level there will have to be a widespread revolt against sexual instinct” and that “this great movement for women’s emancipation must also have its ascetics.” (61) Rhoda, as her surname Nunn implies, is such an ascetic. Her clothing and hairstyle are deliberately severe, as signs of her rejection of complicity with established conventions.

The suggestion of an underlying womanly nature that is suppressed in Rhoda sets up a framework for a certain narrative development. As an “odd woman,” her true nature remains only a potential. For it to be revealed, it must be fully realised. As in the case of Monica, this realisation must involve her coming into relationship with a man – a viewer who will discover her Truth. With the appearance of Everard, the expectation of this development is confirmed. Rhoda’s appearance begins to soften. She becomes less distant and removed and is drawn into

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ordinary drawing-room conversation. (97) There seems the possibility that the relationship of Rhoda and Everard, unlike that of Monica and Widdowson, might be natural and free from mere convention. Rhoda, once her aloofness disappears, does not act a part. She is forthright and honest in her views. Everard appears not to impose ideas of ideal womanhood upon her, but delights in her straightforwardness.

Having set up this narrative framework, however, Gissing sets about to undermine it – to show that just as in the case of Monica’s relationship with Widdowson, its naturalness is illusory. In fact, there are from the very start, disturbing indications that the relationship between Rhoda and Everard is not quite natural. Both are highly self-conscious of their position. Everard first considers courting Rhoda merely as an interesting idea and is wary of “falling in love.” He is attracted to her because he believes that she reflects a Truth that is free from social convention. She is, for him, one with whom one can discuss “daring topics” rather than hiding reality with false niceties: “No Grundyism in Rhoda Nunn; no simpering, no mincing of phrases. Why, a man might do worse than secure her for his comrade through the whole journey of life.” (130) Even here, however, it is clear that he assumes that the Truth that Rhoda represents exists only in relation to himself – in order that she may be “his comrade.” Although Everard rejects the Ruskinian ideal of womanhood, he is still very much caught within the Ruskinian paradigm. All that differs between him and Widdowson is the Truth that they seek in womanhood.

As in the case of Monica and Widdowson, it is the woman who first perceives reality, and again, this comes about through suffering the imposition of inappropriate ideals. In one of his first discussions of his ideas on womanhood with Rhoda, Everard expresses the view that, in training women for greater independence, she is, in fact, working for the good of men. “The gain of women,” he argues, “is also the gain of men,” for if women remain at their present

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“barbarous stage of development,” then men must live forever without intelligent companions. Everard’s attempt to rationalise her activities from a male-centred perspective draws a rather amused surprise from Rhoda: “‘Indeed?’ escaped Rhoda’s lips, which had curled in irony.” (102) This irony goes apparently unnoticed by Everard who continues blithely to further expound his views.

The most apparently natural interaction between Rhoda and Everard occurs during their “perfect day” when they walk together in the wild country around Seascale. Their relationship appears to be one of perfect comradeship. In leaving behind all traces of civilization, they

symbolically also leave its false conventions. As Everard says, the day seems “An ideal realized, for once in one’s life. A perfect moment.” (258) In fact, however, the perfect day is entirely staged. From the very time when Everard persuades Rhoda to allow him to meet her on her holiday, he envisages an ideal picture of the meeting, which he then tries to impose upon Rhoda. For him, it will be a day of total peace, ending in Rhoda’s agreement to a free union with him which will be just the beginning of an ideal life – a life of freedom and rich experiences as they travel together on the Orient express.

Rhoda is somewhat attracted by the ideal but remains aware of its essential artificiality. To Everard’s fantasies of a future life together of wild indifference to stable society, she exclaims: “And how dreadfully tired of each other we should be!” (260) As she points out to Everard after their relationship has dissolved, “The perfection of our day was half make-believe. You never loved me with entire sincerity.” (327) Similarly, the perfection of their relationship was never entirely real. It was constantly disrupted by minor imperfections that had to be suppressed. The arrival from Mary of a letter suggesting the possibility of a secret affair between Everard and Monica Widdowson is not an external accident that upsets an original harmony. It merely makes

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explicit disharmony that is already present, revealing a violence that is always implicit. Everard’s will to have Rhoda subordinate to himself becomes hardened and made overt: “He rejoiced that his strength of will had thus far asserted itself. The keener her suffering, the sooner her submission. Oh, but the submission should be perfect!” (279) At the same time Rhoda’s determination to retain her independence is equally strengthened. No compromise is possible.

The conclusions to be drawn from *The Odd Women* would have been very radical for Gissing’s day. In rejecting both an attempt to recover a past ideal of womanhood and also the displacement of the ideal into the future, he questioned not only particular versions of woman’s natural place, but also the very possibility of naturalness itself. In *The Odd Women*, Gissing allows us to see that the very problem of woman’s nature is one that assumes the orientation of a male-centred consciousness and the creation by men of ideals of womanhood. It is an interesting paradox that this was only possible given Gissing’s position as a novelist who was not politically involved in feminism. Although feminist writers sought to reject the Ruskinian ideal of womanhood as sanctioning the subjection of women, for strategic purposes they remained necessarily bound within the broader Ruskinian paradigm. This is illustrated in a contemporary review of *The Odd Women* by Clementina Black, a novelist and journalist who wrote on labour and feminist problems. Black criticises Gissing for refusing to allow the successful union of Rhoda and Everard. “We feel,” she says, “that between two persons so clear-sighted, so outspoken, and so fully aware of the pitfalls of married life, the natural end would be a real marriage – that is to say, an equal union, in which each would respect the freedom and individuality of the other, and in which each would find the completest development.”¹⁰ It is only by upholding such an ideal that Black is able to argue for a change in sexual relationships that would not be perceived as resulting in social chaos. For a politically

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committed feminist, the rhetoric of nature could not be dispensed with.

The above interpretation of *The Odd Women* must force us to reconsider, at least to some extent, the acuteness of Gissing’s perceptions as a writer concerned with the social issues of his day. It is true that he did not write for the cause of the woman’s movement. However, this very fact allowed him to see ideals of womanhood in a way that feminists, at least in their public presentation, were not able to. *The Odd Women* should not be seen as a poor attempt to write about the women’s movement, but read closely for its insights into the essential nature of

Victorian domestic ideology.

1. George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, London: Virago, 1980, p. 239. Page references will henceforth be given in the text from this edition.
2. Unsigned review, *Athenæum*, 27 May 1893, p. 667.
3. See, for example, Lloyd Fernando's discussion of *The Odd Women* in "New Women" in *the Late Victorian Novel*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977.
4. Maria Grey, "Men and Women," *Fortnightly Review*, November 1879, p. 672.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 677.
6. Maria Grey, "Men and Women," *Fortnightly Review*, June 1881, p. 787.
7. Mona Caird, "The Morality of Marriage," *Fortnightly Review*, March 1890, p. 314.
8. Mona Caird, "A Defence of the so-called 'Wild Women,'" *Fortnightly Review*, May 1892, p. 820.
9. Mona Caird, "The Morality of Marriage," p. 330.
10. Clementina Black, *Illustrated London News*, 5 August 1893, CIII, p. 155. Reprinted in

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Algernon Gissing Down Under

C. M. Wyatt, Canberra, Australia,
and Pierre Coustillas.

This is the last instalment of the bibliography which we began to publish in October 1988. Four instalments were devoted to George's works, we now offer what we found concerning his brother's novels and short stories.

Before supplying some information about Algernon Gissing's life and works by way of introduction, it may be appropriate to note that when we began to look for items of interest in the Australian and New Zealand Press, it was essentially reprints of George's works – novels in instalments and short stories – as well as further critical response to his books that we hoped to discover. So the items we reprint or quote from here are to a large extent accidental discoveries. It is all the more significant therefore that we exhumed a larger number of short stories by Algernon than by George. Perhaps, as the confusion made by some Launceston newspapers at the time of George's death indicates, not all journalists made a clear distinction between the two brothers, and even when they fully realised that the two writers published novels that had little enough in common, as H. H. Champion did, they did not invariably know that the two men were brothers. At all events the fact remains that Australian and New Zealand editors, as opposed to publishers, accepted Algernon's short stories more readily than they did George's. To the best of our knowledge no one has ever attempted to compile a bibliography of Algernon's short stories, but he seems to have tried his hand at this genre only comparatively late in his career, and of the thirty books he published only two are collections of short stories, *The Master of Pinsmead* (John Long, 1906) and *Love in the Byways: Some Last-Night Stories* (F.V. White & Co., 1910).

The following are the eleven short stories we found:

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- "An Idea of the Rector," *Adelaide Observer*, 7 May 1898, p. 35. Collected in *The Master of Pinsmead*, pp. 64-76.
- "Bridget's Dream," *Tasmanian Mail*, 24 December 1898, p. 5, and 31 December 1898, p. 5. Uncollected.
- "The Minister's Bureau," *Canterbury Times*, 3 May 1899, pp. 52-53. Collected in *The Master of Pinsmead*, pp. 182-99.
- "The House o' the Dead," *Canterbury Times*, 20 December 1899, p. 44. Collected in *The Master of Pinsmead*, pp. 90-106.
- "The Parson's Text," *Canterbury Times*, 29 August 1900, pp. 62-63. Collected in *The Master of Pinsmead*, pp. 280-96.
- "The Man from the North," *Canterbury Times*, 31 October 1900, pp. 61-62. Collected in *The Master of Pinsmead*, pp. 49-63.
- "Aa'd Nick," *Canterbury Times*, 18 September 1901, pp. 71-72. Collected in *Love in the Byways*, pp. 239-62.
- "One of the Flock," *New Zealand Mail*, 10 December 1902, pp. 9-10. Uncollected.
- "Chimes at Midnight," *Canterbury Times*, 28 September 1904, pp. 69-71. Collected in *The Master of Pinsmead*, pp. 233-50.

- "The Girl at the Ferry," *New Zealand Mail*, 9 November 1904, pp. 9-10. Collected in *The Master of Pinsmead*, pp. 135-51.
- "Cobbing's Conscience," *Otago Witness*, 1 January 1913, pp. 81-82. Uncollected.

Besides these tales of rural life, *The Wealth of Mallerstang: An Upland Tale* (Chatto and Windus, 1901), Algernon's twelfth novel, was serialized in the *Melbourne Age* from 6 July 1901 onwards. Two chapters appeared every Saturday for thirteen weeks. Of all his books this was one of the most successful. It is very likely to have been serialized in some English newspapers as well, and it is one of the few from his pen that ran into a second edition.¹ The

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first edition, attractively produced in pictorial blue cloth with gilt titling in the autumn of 1901, was followed in 1918 by an unrecorded reprint in plain blue cloth with yellow titling. There must have been a demand for this novel, for it is the only one by the author that was reprinted after the outbreak of the First World War.

Although some information about Algernon Gissing has become available in recent years, notably in the form of letters to friends, publishers and editors, he is still essentially known through his brother's correspondence. Only after George's death do his correspondents seem to have realized that his letters might be worth preserving.

Born in Wakefield on 25 November 1860, he attended the same local schools as George and William, and was sent to Lindow Grove School in early 1871 after Thomas Waller Gissing's death. Although his academic achievements were undistinguished, he it was, not George and William, who was given the best chance of making his way in life through the exercise of a solid occupation. For some years he was articled to William Henry Stewart, the Wakefield solicitor, and, after passing various examinations, he settled in Barstow Square as a solicitor. When he realised that the population of Wakefield needed no additional legal adviser, he applied for several other employments which he thought might suit him, notably a deputy town clerkship in Liverpool. For a time in 1885 he did find a situation in which he could turn his legal training to account. George's letters for that year show that his brother was for a brief period a solicitor's head clerk in Richmond, Yorkshire, but he already thought of emulating George who, by then, with two novels published and *Mrs. Grundy's Enemies* and *Isabel Clarendon* accepted for publication, was in a fair way to become a professional writer. Algernon received much advice from him and began to write stories in the early 1880's when he still hoped that clients might be forthcoming. His love affair with Catherine Baseley, a niece of

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Samuel and Lucy Bruce, who were friends of the Gissings, was also a source of frustration, as no marriage could reasonably be contemplated until he had a decent income. Eventually, after several years of fitful attempts at finding some stable employment, reason was cast to the winds by the two lovers, much to the chagrin of the Bruces, and Algernon and Catherine married in September 1887, settling immediately at Broadway, Worcestershire.

An account of their married life, which lasted for nearly fifty years (Catherine only survived her husband by a few months) would partly coincide with Algernon's vain efforts to make a living by his pen until the outbreak of the Great War. Five children were born to the couple – Enid (1888), Roland (1895), Alwin (1897), Katharine (1900) and Margaret (1901) – and no serious progress was made in Algernon's strenuous quest for literary fame. In comparison with him George was a wealthy man, and Algernon's repeated appeals for loans (which were very rarely refunded) testify to his knowledge that his brother was in much easier

circumstances. Algernon and his wife were often on the move from the time they settled at Smallbrook Cottage in 1887 to the time they died at Bloxham, near Banbury, respectively in their seventy-seventh and seventy-eighth year. For the year 1904 alone we find Algernon writing from Low Birker, near Boot, Cumberland in February; from Castlerigg Cottage, Keswick, in March; from Saintbury, Broadway, in April; from Willersey, near Broadway in May and June, and again from Keswick in August.

The publishing history of his books is an index to his difficulties. Unlike George he did not have to pay for the publication of his first novel, *Joy Cometh in the Morning* (1888, 2 vols.), but the £16 or so he made from it did not prelude substantial royalties. It may be wondered whether any book of his brought him in more than a hundred pounds; none did that appeared under the imprint of Hurst and Blackett at all events. The two men remained his publishers from *Joy Cometh in the Morning* to *The Sport of Stars* (1896, 2 vols.). The nine titles concerned were

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published in either two or three volumes, and not a single one was thought to be enough of a success in multi-volume form to be reissued in one volume selling at six shillings. George's anxiety about his brother at this stage is on record, as is his prediction when Algernon managed to sell *The Scholar of Bygate* (1897, 3 vols.) to Hutchinson that this novel would enjoy the distinction of a second (cheaper) edition. But, whatever the reasons may have been, Hutchinson was to publish no other novel by Algernon Gissing. The gap between 1897 and 1900, in which year *A Secret of the North Sea* was published, may point to a crisis, but as the above list of short stories testifies, Algernon experimented at the time with short fiction – to the stories already mentioned should be added a few more of the twenty which were collected in *The Master of Pinsmead*, notably "Lettice," which first achieved publication in the *English Illustrated Magazine* in April 1897. Then for a few years (1900-1907) Algernon turned to Chatto and Windus, who became his principal publishers with *A Secret of the North Sea* (1900), *The Wealth of Mallerstang* (1901), *Knitters in the Sun* and *An Angel's Portion* (1903), *Baliol Garth* (1905) and *The Dreams of Simon Usher* (1907). Those years were very trying ones for Algernon and his family. There were now four, then five children to raise; George's posthumous affairs were time-consuming, and Chatto and Windus kept demanding copy for which they had paid in advance. Algernon must have been overworking himself; he was anxious to sign new memoranda of agreement which might enable him to pay his debts and to live a little more comfortably. In the same period he wrote the only novel that appeared under the imprint of Methuen & Co. *The Keys of the House*, (1902), a title which justifiably incurred George's displeasure; it was included in Methuen's Colonial Library. He also contributed *Arrows of Fortune* to the six shilling series published by the Bristol publisher J. W. Arrowsmith (1904), a weak story which was reviewed devastatingly by young Virginia Stephen, afterwards Woolf, as well as two booklets on *Broadway* and *Ludlow and Stokesay* to

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Dent's Temple Topographies. In the year when George's best posthumous collection of short stories, *The House of Cobwebs*, was brought out by Constable with an introductory survey by Thomas Seccombe, Algernon, perhaps not altogether innocently, convinced John Long to issue a similar collection of tales from his pen, *The Master of Pinsmead* (1906). They were twenty in number and the majority of them still have to be traced to their original publication in magazines. The experiment with John Long ceased after *Second Selves* (1908), but another firm, F. V. White & Co. must have found it possible to make some profit on Algernon's stories, since they published no fewer than seven volumes by him from *The Unlit Lamp* (1909) to *A Dinner of Herbs* (1913), a title Algernon had already thought of using in the days of his apprenticeship. As

noted above, his collection of tales – twelve in number – entitled *Love in the Byways* belongs to this last batch of volumes which ultimately saw the sorely tried writer opt out of fiction. He had to give up the struggle and made a very poor business of the sale of the manuscripts of his brother's novels to Frank Redway, the bookseller and publisher. When he sought to obtain more substantial sums by selling the manuscripts of *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile* at Sotheby's, he met with such a disaster that he was not tempted to try his luck again with that firm for whatever manuscripts he still owned. His need for money remained as acute as ever. In March and April 1913 he attempted to sell one more novel to a publisher he had apparently never tried, Grant Richards, but even though, after refusing with many compliments, Richards ultimately relented, the story was not published under his imprint. What this last novel's title was is unknown, but the possibility cannot be ruled out that it was *A Dinner of Herbs*, which appeared in F. V. White's list in the autumn. The "New Rural Rides" which Algernon was then writing were only provisionally declined by Richards. Would their author, if circumstances admitted, offer him the whole of the "Rides" when the manuscript was completed?

Circumstances allowed no such thing. The Great War broke out and when the "New Rural Rides" appeared it was only in serial form. One last book was to be published with

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Algernon Gissing's name on the title page, *The Footpath Way in Gloucestershire* (Dent, 1924) – last, or last but one only if one feels that the collection of his brother's letters he co-edited with his sister Ellen was in some way his work. Whatever the view one takes of the matter, this sole editorial attempt of his proved a memorable failure. He had done his best to prevent the publication of George's collected works in J. B. Pinker's lifetime; he now ended his literary career with the publication of a volume which scholars, for want of a better collection, were to regard as indispensable until this very year 1990, one hundred and thirty years after the birth of Algernon Gissing in mid-Victorian Wakefield.

May the following annotated bibliography of the critical response to his work in the antipodes be followed some day by a similar bibliography devoted to the reaction of English critics to his many volumes of fiction.

Anon., "in Bookland (By the Secretary, Sydney School of Arts)," *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 9 August 1890, p. 9. A notice of *A Village Hampden*, "which describes in the course of the story country life and scenery in Gloucestershire. For light reading the book can be recommended." The reviewer wrote that Algernon Gissing should not be confused with "'George' of that ilk."

Anon., "Literary Notes," *Tasmanian Mail* (Hobart), 1 July 1893, p. 6. "Mr. Algernon Gissing, author of *A Moorland Idyl*, *A Village Hampden*, and other works, comes before the public again with a new three-volume novel, called *Between Two Opinions*."

Anon., "Literature: New Novels," *The Australasian* (Melbourne), 6 November 1897, p. 1025. "*The Scholar of Bygate*, by Algernon Gissing (London, Hutchinson and Co.; Melbourne, George Robertson and Co.), is an excellent story, chiefly of rural life in the north of England, the scene being laid in the vicinity of Newcastle-on-Tyne. The characters are

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distinct and well drawn, old Crozier in particular being one of the most strongly marked personages in recent fiction. In his strange mixture of obstinacy, vindictiveness, rudeness at times verging on brutality, and love of conviviality he is a striking specimen of the

North countryman. Besides this remarkable portrait the others are by comparison almost colourless, but there is much merit in several of them, especially that of the weak and shallow minded Adelina Brett. Here and there the book reminds us of the writer's more famous brother, but the termination of the story is less unconventional, though, perhaps, for that reason more pleasing to the majority of readers than the endings of most of the novels by the author of *The Whirlpool*. The descriptions of scenery are truthful and poetical, the romantic aspects of the lonely hills and farmhouses being skillfully contrasted with the prosaic town life. *The Scholar of Bygate* is an unusually interesting and powerful novel." Considering that *The Whirlpool* had been reviewed in the same newspaper on 17 July of the same year, one may reasonably suppose that the reviewer made a distinction between the work of Algernon and that of George Gissing.

Anon., "*The Scholar of Bygate*," *Adelaide Observer*, 11 December 1897, p. 33. Another review of *The Scholar of Bygate*. "The characters in this remarkable story of life among the people of the borderland between England and Scotland are drawn in an admirably lifelike manner, while the plot is striking and original. The book opens with Lina Brett seeking a home with her uncle, Old Crozier, the sheep-farmer, after the bankruptcy and death of her father. Brett at the time of his demise owed the man of sheep a large sum of money. Crozier firmly believed that Brett's death was a hoax, and that he was in hiding to escape the consequences of a fraudulent insolvency. It is difficult to tell which is the most interesting personality in the story – the ferocious and strictly honourable old man Crozier, or his high-principled, strong-minded son Sibbald, the scholar of Bygate. The word

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pictures of borderland scenery are full of colour, and the many exciting situations are depicted with a graphic realism which carries the reader along with breathless interest."

Anon., "Current Literature," *Adelaide Advertiser*, 22 January 1898, p. 8. Yet another review of *The Scholar of Bygate*. The reviewer warns his readers that Algernon Gissing ought not to be confounded with his more famous brother and concentrates on the character of Old Crozier, the major character in "a work done with conscientious care ... His vindictive obstinacy and domineering rudeness are to some extent set off by a love of conviviality, which invests him with an interest that would otherwise be lacking. The descriptions of the lonely hills and farmhouses that form the setting of much of the story bear the impress of careful study, and are remarkably truthful and poetic. But on the whole Mr. Algernon Gissing, like the author of *The Whirlpool*, views life through glasses perhaps a little too much the reverse of rose-tinted. That is a fault, but a fault common to many novelists of the day."

Anon., "The Christmas 'Chronicle'," *Adelaide Advertiser*, 16 December 1898, p. 5. A passing mention of "Bridget's Christmas Eve" which will sustain its author's reputation, "deservedly gained" by *A Village Hampden*, *A Moorland Idyl*, and "above all, that beautiful work," *The Scholar of Bygate*.

Anon., "New Novels," *The Australasian* (Melbourne), 28 April 1900, pp. 945-46. A review of *A Secret of the North Sea*, which we reprint unabridged. "Mr. Algernon Gissing is a striking and original writer, and there is in his books a strain of romance that is wanting in those of his more famous brother. *A Secret of the North Sea* is full of strong scenes and situations and the stormy passions of the North. It is based on a family feud between David Crumstone and the Beadnells. Matthew Beadnell and his sister Janet formed a plot

to make Crumstone marry Janet Beattie, whom he had wronged. Crumstone was in love

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with Janet Beadnell, but the other Janet was substituted. Crumstone thereupon vowed revenge, and made it the sole object of his life to ruin Beadnell. It takes him twenty years to do this, but he succeeds, and obtains possession of Beadnell's farm. By this time Beadnell's daughter, Lylliard, has grown up, and in order to revenge herself upon Crumstone for ruining her father she marries him, his own wife being dead. In neither case does the vengeance turn out as satisfactory to the avenger as was anticipated. It is a strange, wild story, though relief is afforded to the fierce and vindictive passions of Crumstone and Lylliard by the tender relations between Perry Beadnell, Matthew's son, and the "Kittiwake," Crumstone's daughter by Janet Beattie. The descriptions of the seashore and the country are fresh and vigorous, and form a very appropriate background to the tale."

Anon., "Four New Novels: *The Keys of the House*," *The Age* (Melbourne), 2 August 1902, p. 4. The reviewer seems to have doubts about the real identity, not only of the novelist "who signs himself Algernon Gissing," but also about that of "the more popular writer known as Mr. George Gissing." The ability of the former "to weave a story possessing the characteristics of those of his namesake appears to be at present somewhat immature. He is not disinclined to intermingle occult phenomena with the occurrences he describes, and there is a certain amount of novelty, if not of originality, in those portions of the work in which the author depicts the relations of an only son towards his mother, who has deserted her husband on a frivolous pretext, and towards his father, to whom the aberrant wife returns after an alienation of eleven years."

Anon., "New Novels," *The Australasian* (Melbourne), 16 August 1902, p. 407. A short review of *The Keys of the House* worth reprinting in full as it gives interesting details about the plot and the characters. "Mr. Algernon Gissing's new story, *The Keys of the House*

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("Methuen's Colonial Library"), is not one of his most striking books, though it contains some good scenes and characters. Mr. Brant, a clergyman in a northern parish in England, had, after a few years of married life, been deserted by his wife. She had no special cause of complaint against him, but they had drifted apart, and she determined to separate from him, and live her own life in the larger world of the city. He had no ill-feeling for her, and when, after an absence of 10 or 12 years, she returned he received her into his home and treated her well, though his old love for her was dead or dormant. By this time their boy, Yordas, was 16 years old, and Mrs. Brant's affections were henceforth set on him, the main object of her life being to make his life a success from her own worldly point of view. The two best-drawn characters are Baillie Gourlock, the daughter of a shepherd, and Gideon Thew, a wheelwright, both of them belonging to those rustic types in the delineation of which Mr. Gissing excels."

Anon., "Literature, Other Publications," *The Advertiser* (Adelaide) 7 Feb. 1903, p. 9. Another review of *The Keys of the House*, which is said to deal with "a problem in psychology. It has been called the new version of *The Doll's House*, but with the one exception, that in each case the wife leaves her home and husband, there is no similarity between the works. In the one case Nora leaves her husband, partly because she realises that he is not the man

she had in her ignorance believed him to be, but primarily because she has for the first time in her life awakened to the responsibility of life, and realised that she is not fitted to educate and train her children until she herself has been prepared for the duties of a wife and mother. In Mr. Gissing's story Eleanor Brant leaves her husband (Parson Brant) and child because she is a mercenary and selfish woman, and loves the world of fashion with its glitter and pomp. After years of absence she returns to her home, broken in fortune,

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and mistaking chagrin for repentance, endeavors at first to find in spiritual exaltation anodyne for her disappointments. The tragedy of the story begins when she tries to win the son she had abandoned in his infancy to her own life and world. She succeeds for a time, but the earlier training the boy has received from his father – a man of the noblest aspirations – does its work in the end, and he is reclaimed for higher things.”

Anon., “Obituary: Mr. Algernon Gissing,” *The Examiner* (Launceston), 30 December 1903, p. 5. As noted in the second instalment of our bibliography devoted to George, this newspaper confused the two brothers and reprinted the *Who's Who* entry on Algernon. The mistake was corrected on 31 December 1903, p. 5.

Anon., “Obituary: Mr. Algernon Gissing,” *Weekly Courier* (Launceston), 2 January 1904, p. 26. The *Courier* repeated the mistake of the *Examiner*, but apparently forgot to correct it a week later.

Anon., “The Master of Pinsmead”, *Brisbane Courier*, 23 June 1906, p. 13. A notice reprinted from *The Queen*, according to which the title story is not the best in the volume. “In any case, none of them are very successful or striking examples of what short stories should be. They are too fidgety, and the style is inclined to be exaggerated. It is lavish of sentiment, and afflicted with a profusion of adjectives and stereotyped expressions that are of the essence of banality.”

Anon., “Books and Authors,” *Tasmanian Mail* (Hobart), 14 July 1906, p. 5. Same notice of *The Master of Pinsmead* as in the *Brisbane Courier*.

Anon., “*The Herdsman*,” *The Book Lover* (Melbourne), 6 October 1910, p. 114. Announcement that *The Herdsman*, the English edition of which was available from F. V. White & Co., has been included in the Colonial Library of George Bell & Sons. It is erroneously stated that Algernon Gissing is no relation of the late George Gissing.

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1. Neither the British Library Catalogue nor the *English Catalogue* lists all new editions. It can at least be safely asserted that the following titles were reprinted: *The Scholar of Bygate* (Hutchinson, 1897, 3 vols.; 1897, 1 vol.), *An Angel's Portion* (Chatto and Windus, 1903; reprinted at some unspecified date), *The Dreams of Simon Usher* (Chatto and Windus, six-shilling; and half-crown editions, 1907; Chatto and Windus, popular edition, 1911).
2. In its obituary of Algernon Gissing *The Times* (“Mr. A. Gissing, Johnsonian and Novelist,” 9 February 1937, p. 16) mentioned *The Wealth of Mallerstang*, “the scene of which is laid in the wild Mallerstang valley, in Westmorland,” as one of his three best known books, the others being *A Village Hampden* (3 vols., 1890) and *A Secret of the North Sea* (1900). Of

the last named book's reputation a good idea may be formed from the sixteen reviews in the English press quoted on the verso of the half-title page of the first edition of *The Wealth of Mallerstang*. The reviews in question appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Athenæum*, *Literature*, the *Bookman*, the *World*, the *Standard*, the *Scotsman*, the *Spectator*, the *Glasgow Herald*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily News*, the *Literary World*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Saturday Review*, the *Morning Post*, the *Newcastle Leader*.

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Ballade of Books Unbought

Christopher Morley.

[This poem is reprinted from a press-cutting dated 1921, the origin of which is unknown.]

Some of the books that I would prize
I'll buy (within ten years or so) –
J. Conrad's "Under Western Eyes,"
A good Montaigne (by Florio)
Old tomes like Holinshed or Stowe
Would gloriously ballast me,
And, when financial conduits flow,
Gissing's "By the Ionian Sea."

John Morley's book "On Compromise,"
A decent set of E. A. Poe;
Bacon, perhaps, to make me wise;
And Sanborn's Life of Hank Thoreau.
Most of the works of Neil Munro,
That history by Wells (H. G.)
And (nicest title that I know)
Gissing's "By the Ionian Sea."

I'm sure my mind will fertilize
When I have bought some more Defoe;
And every time they advertise
That Merrick set my passions grow.
And "Far Away and Long Ago"
And "Goosequill Papers" (L. I. G.) *
Will stand upon this shelf, below
Gissing's "By the Ionian Sea."

Envoy:

Booksellers! I soliloquize
No merely idle rhapsody –
Some day you'll see a man who buys –
Gissing's "By the Ionian Sea."

* Louise Imogen Guiney.

A Japanese Review of Victorian Heroines

In our October number of last year we reported that Mrs. Ryôko Ota's translation of *The Whirlpool* belonged to a series of six English novels notable for their unconventional heroines, the other titles being *Esther Waters*, *Jude the Obscure*, *Ann Veronica*, *The Man of Property* and *Hilda Lessways*, and we announced that the series would be supplemented by two volumes that would help Japanese readers to put the novels in perspective. These two volumes have now appeared and some account of them can be given, with the valued help of the two general editors, Professors Fumio Hojoh and Shizuki Kawamoto. They are splendidly produced and it is to be hoped that the purchasers of the six novels will be unable to resist the attraction of the two additional volumes. For one thing they are moderately priced – 4800 and 3000 yen – but, more importantly, they have been conceived as companions to the volumes of fiction.

The Long Way to Come: The Life of English Women 1830-1910, edited by Fumio Hojoh, Clair Hughes and Shizuko Kawamoto, is a profusely illustrated quarto intended for those Japanese readers who are interested in English history and culture, but need to visualize more clearly what it was like to live in England in the Victorian and Edwardian age. The editors' aim in preparing the series was to show the various aspects of the emergence of the New Woman, and this volume, with its aptly chosen illustrations and its wealth of telling quotations, should help even the most exacting readers. The book is divided into three chapters entitled respectively "The Angel in the House" (pp. 5-52), "Woman Outside her Sphere" (pp. 53-92) and "The New Woman" (pp. 93-135), each chapter consisting of (1) reproductions of paintings of women and scenes of female life (2) extracts from books and magazines about the problems inherent in women's lives, and (3) *Punch* cartoons and other black and white illustrations of miscellaneous origin. Clair Hughes, who is an art historian currently teaching at Tsuda College,

chose the paintings and supplied the comment on them, while Mrs. Hojoh and Mrs. Kawamoto selected the quotations from books and periodicals, and the rest of the pictorial material. The useful chronology covering the years 1837-1918 appears on pp. 136-37, and the still more serviceable lists of sources of the 105 quotations from memoirs, treatises, articles, poems, novels and the like, as well as of the 85 colour illustrations, black and white illustrations and photographs and prints should enable all users, whether or not they can read Japanese, to find their way through all this attractive material which is only partly familiar.

The quotations which constitute the foundation of the non-pictorial elements of the book are as varied as one could hope. The epigraph to chapter I – an extract from Mrs. Ellis's famous volume on *The Daughters of England*: "A woman's highest duty is so often to suffer and be still" – is followed by quotations from feminists and anti-feminists, the latter a large majority. If the novelists of the early and mid-Victorian age – Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Thackeray, Trollope, Mrs. Craik, George Eliot, Mrs. Henry Wood and Mrs. Lynn Linton have pride of place, their points of view are counterbalanced by those of commentators who did not express their opinions through fiction, but in conduct books, magazine articles, private correspondence and poems. The authors quoted range from Mrs. John Sandford ("A really sensible woman feels her dependence") to Mrs. Lynn Linton ("The Girl of the Period," *Saturday Review*, 14 March 1868), from John Stuart Mill to John Ruskin.

It is in chapters II and III that occur the quotations from Gissing's works – three from *The Odd Women*, one from *Born in Exile* and one from the memorable letter to Bertz of 2 June 1893: "My demand for female equality simply means that I am convinced there will be no social peace until women are intellectually trained very much as men are. More than half the

misery of life is due to the ignorance and childishness of women ...” As usual in such a context

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Gissing is found in the company of George Egerton, Mona Caird, Olive Schreiner (whose *Story of an African Farm* he admired), Emmeline Pankhurst and Sarah Grand. Hardy and Meredith are present, also Oscar Wilde and Henry James but, among Gissing’s friends, neither Clara Collet nor Eliza Orme could be included. Indeed the selection of texts and illustrations must have been a drastic one. What matters is not that some good material was (inevitably) left out, but that the selection should be excellent, which it is. And it is a matter of great satisfaction that the book should be the work of two distinguished women who teach English in Japanese universities, in collaboration with Mrs. Clair Hughes, the wife of Professor George Hughes of Tokyo University.

The other volume, *The Age of Heroines*, is more difficult to assess fairly. It, too, is divided into three parts: the first consists of six essays on Victorian and Edwardian novels with special emphasis on their heroines; the second, of another six essays on such eminent Englishwomen as Mrs. Pankhurst, Marie Stopes, Ellen Terry, Barbara Bodichon, Hannah Cullwick and Hannah Mitchell; the third, of five essays discussing the heroines in modern novels published in other countries: the United States, France, Germany, Russia and Japan. In her essay on “The Newness of the New Woman” (pp. 107-29), Shizuko Kawamoto compares Rhoda Nunn with Herminia Barton, the protagonist of Grant Allen’s once best-selling novel, *The Woman Who Did* (1895), and with the heroines of George Egerton’s short stories. Fumio Hojoh’s opening essay (pp. 5-25) tries to answer a question which has puzzled and still puzzles some critics, notably Marysa Demoor – why were there no great women novelists like Jane Austen and George Eliot at the turn of the century, at a time when feminist consciousness was obviously in the ascendant? To the present writer it seems that the reasons must have been many, but if one leaves aside Mrs. Humphry Ward, whose early novels, notably *Robert Elsmere*, *Marcella* and *Sir George Tressady*, remain solid contributions to the English novel of the

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1890’s, it is striking that female novelists of the period were perhaps too prone to take advantage of the breakdown of the old system of publishing novels in three volumes. They wrote short novels – Beatrice Harraden with *Ships that Pass in the Night* and Mérie Muriel Dowie with *Gallia* offer characteristic examples – or even preferred to write short stories – “George Egerton” being the best possible illustration with her *Keynotes*, *Discords* and *Symphonies*. That these writers, like Hubert Crackanthorpe among their male counterparts, had an eye to the economics of fiction publishing is hardly to be doubted, but the answer might also be sought in other directions. Gissing, in the 1890’s, watched for the emergence of a new Charlotte Brontë or a new George Eliot, but neither his letters nor his private papers, his diary in particular, give us to understand that he made any discovery worth reporting. –

Pierre Coustillas.

Notes and News

The Gissing Centre will be formally opened in Wakefield on 5 May 1990 at 11am. Douglas Hallam, the Chairman of the Gissing Trust committee, Jacob Korg and Pierre Coustillas will speak on that occasion, and a video film on Gissing will be shown. During the Wakefield Festival the Gissing Centre will host two evening lectures. On Tuesday 12 June Kate

Taylor will speak on David Storey, the contemporary novelist and playwright, who was born in Wakefield in 1933. On Thursday 14 June Clifford Brook will speak on Gissing.

The German translation of *New Grub Street*, *Zeilengeld*, is still available in Die Andere

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Bibliothek which is now published by Eichborn Verlag, Sachserhäuser Landwehr 293, D-6000 Frankfurt 70. The clothbound edition is selling at 36DM, the limited edition (999 copies) at 98DM.

Dr. Enrico Mozzachiodi, who is the author of a dissertation on Gissing and Italy, gave a lecture on the same subject at the University of Pisa last year. To judge from the table of contents of his dissertation, he has focused his attention on Gissing and modern Italy, following Gissing's interest chronologically. Dr. Francesco Badolato, who as usual is keeping the editor posted on any Gissing news in Italy, reports that the Roman firm Dante Alighieri has agreed to publish a school edition of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. It will consist in a selection of eight sections from each season.

Jacob Korg has contributed entries on the characters in Gissing's novels to the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. These entries cover the twenty-two novels he wrote. The volume will be awaited with some curiosity and interest, as no dictionary of fictional characters currently available is satisfactory. Gissing has never been dealt with adequately in this kind of reference work. That by William Freeman (Dent, 1963) covers *The Town Traveller* and a selection of short stories from *The House of Cobwebs*!

Shirley Slotnick has sent a leaflet about a public reading of *The Odd Women* given by CSC Repertory Ltd., 136 East 13th Street, New York on 29 January. The version used on the stage was an adaptation by Lonnie Carter and the production was directed by Lenora Champagne. A glance at the cast shows that some performers played several parts. Thus Mark Hammer was successively Dr. Madden, Thomas Micklethwaite and Newdick, whilst Lili Flanders was both Alice Madden and Mrs. Cosgrove.

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Professor Yukio Otsuka, whose book on *Henry Ryecroft* is familiar to some of our readers, has sent us a copy of his *Hikaku Bungaku Geuron (Principles of Comparative Literature)*, first published by the Tokyo firm of Hakusuisha in 1977. On p. 100 of the new edition he discusses briefly Gissing's interest in Italy, quoting the passage on Goethe in the *Ryecroft Papers* (Autumn XIX), and relates *By the Ionian Sea* to his longing for Italy even before he was given Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* as a prize at Owens College.

Shigeru Koike reports the early death of Professor Akira Usuda in Kyoto last January. Professor Usuda, who seemed to be recovering from a long disease when the editor met him last May in Japan, was a co-translator of *Le Roman anglais au XIXe siècle* by Pierre Coustillas, Jean-Pierre Petit and Jean Raimond (Nan-un-do, 1986) and translator of *The Man of Property* in the series of Victorian and Edwardian novels edited by Mrs. Fumio Hojoh and Mrs. Shizuko Kawamoto. He was the author or translator of many other books. A memorial meeting was held on 1 March at the Kyoto University where he had been teaching for a number of years.

Evelyn Toynton's article, "Books: The Subversive George Gissing," which appeared in

The American Scholar (Winter 1990) is a good survey of his life and works, and it is free of the grosser type of errors which usually mar this kind of contribution to journals with a large readership. "Subversive" is an epithet which, to the best of our knowledge, had not yet been attached to Gissing's name in the title of an article. But the notion was uppermost in the minds of reviewers as early as the publication of *Workers in the Dawn*, one hundred and ten years ago, and Evelyn Toynton certainly hits the nail on the head in his (or her?) conclusion: "What Gissing gives a reader is a sense of loneliness so vast that one can never again think of the Victorian Age as the coherent, harmonious society of our collective nostalgia. That may not

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sound like a purely literary achievement, but only in literature of a fairly high order can the voice of one man resound so powerfully as to subvert our sense of an entire age."

Recent Publications

Volume

George Gissing, *I taccuini segreti di Henry Ryecroft*, translated and edited by Francesco Marroni, Rome: Lucarini. Editore, 1990. Brown cloth and pictorial jacket. 214 pages. Lire 23500.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Ewald, Mengel, "Besprechungen," *Anglia*, Band 106 (1988), Heft 3-4, pp. 545-48. Review of *The Paradox of Gissing*.

John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1988. Contains entries on Algernon and George Gissing, on at least eleven of George's works, and a number of references to him in entries on Morley Roberts, Smith, Elder & Co., the *Yellow Book*, and George Meredith among others.

William Greenslade, "Women and the Disease of Civilization: George Gissing's *The Whirlpool*," *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 32, no. 4, Summer 1989, pp. 507-23. The same number contains the bibliography for 1988.

Rachel Bowlby, *Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*, Tokyo: Arina Shobô Ltd., 1989. Japanese translation by Hiroshi Takayama.

Fumio Hojoh, Clair Hughes and Shizuko Kawamoto, *The Age of Heroines*, Tokyo: Kokusho-Kankoh-Kai, 1989. In Japanese. The essay on "The Newness of the New

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Woman" is partly on Gissing.

Renate von Bardeleben (ed.) with the assistance of Monika Hoffmann, *Wege amerikanischer Kultur* (Ways and Byways of American Culture). Essays in honour of Gustav H. Blanke. Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York and Paris: Peter Lang, 1989. Contains an essay on

Das Sabinergut, one of Bertz's novels, by Hans-Joachim Lang.

Edward Bishop, *A Virginia Woolf Chronology*, London: Macmillan Press, 1989. Contains all the expected references to Virginia Woolf's writings on Gissing and to her correspondence with Alfred Gissing.

Joanne Trautmann Banks (ed.), *Congenial Spirits: The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf*, London: Hogarth Press, 1989. This selection contains the letter to Leonard Woolf of Tuesday, 25 April 1923 in which she refers to her review of May Yates' book on Gissing.

Fulco Pratesi, "Bosco di Policoro, Amazzonia italiana," *Il Corriere della sera*, 17 January 1990, p. 3. Contains a paragraph on Gissing.

Nicholas Lavender, "Riding in the Row," *The Times*, 20 January 1990, p. 11. A letter to the editor quoting from a dialogue between Helen Norman and Maud Gresham in *Workers in the Dawn*. This is part of a series of letters to the editor which had begun on 9 January. Mr. Gerald Leach had expressed his disappointment with the standard of dress of riders in Rotten Row. Mr. Lavender observed that the correspondence which had appeared on this subject in *The Times* for 9 and 13 January reminded him of the passage he quoted from Gissing's novel. Dennis Shrubbsall, Frank Woodman and Clifford Brook are to be thanked for sending press-cuttings.

Silvano Valentini, "Badolato presenta il Diario di Gissing," *L'Esagono* (Milano), 22 January 1990, p. 22. On the same page is to be found "Taccuini segreti," a review by "f. p.," that is Fulvio Panzeri, of Francesco Marroni's translation of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.

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Anon., "Gissing Novels in Japanese," *Wakefield Plus*, 9 March 1990, p. 48. A short article on the recent Japanese translations which have been sent to the Gissing Trust, with a photograph of Douglas Hallam, Chairman of the Trust.

Dennis Shrubbsall, "W. H. Hudson's English Country Rambles: A Chronology Derived Mainly from His Published and Unpublished Correspondence," *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 33 (1990), no. 1, pp. 64-83. Contains various references to Gissing and an excellent portrait of W. H. Hudson.

John Halperin, *Novelists in their Youth*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1990. Chapter III is devoted to Gissing. The other novelists discussed are Henry James, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Edith Wharton and Somerset Maugham. The portrait of Gissing at the age of twenty-six reproduced on p. 96 is likely to be new to most readers. Reviews of the book appeared in the *Sunday Times* (Books section), 11 March 1990, p. H5, "The child is father of the mania," by Humphrey Carpenter, and in the *Financial Times*, 17 March 1990 (Weekend Ft XXV), "Fouled-up masters of the pen," by Anthony Curtis.

Gereon Motyka, *Venedig im Spiegel viktorianischer Reiseliterature: Eine Quellensammlung* (Venice as reflected in Victorian travel narratives: A Source Book), Frankfurt am Main, Bern, and New York: Peter Lang, 1990. Volume 17 in the Forum Anglicum series. Gissing appears on pp. 261-63 and 310. This is an important source on British travellers in nineteenth century Venice with a sizeable bibliography, illustrations and transcriptions

from headstones on the graves of English people who died in Venice. It is a pity Gissing's diary has been overlooked by the author.