

Hélène, the Power behind the Throne of King Pierre



Four years after the first issue of *The Gissing Newsletter* was published in January 1965, Pierre took over the position of editor from Jacob Korg. Even after its development into *The Gissing Journal* in 1991, he soldiered on as editor until 2013, when illness finally obliged him to hand over the reins to his worthy successor, Malcolm D. Allen. However, since Pierre spent his academic life in a different world from that of the Internet and computers, all of the more mundane aspects of the editing work and email exchanges were handled by Hélène. With their permission, I digitized all the back numbers of the *Newsletter* and the *Journal*, but those could not have been made available to the public online without her meticulous and indefatigable proofreading. She spent such an enormous amount of time on the work that I have felt extreme guilt about it ever since.

In October 2018, *The Gissing Journal* published a memorial issue of tributes to the late Pierre, which was a special supplement dedicated to Hélène. In his prefatory tribute, John Spiers wrote: “when he was told once that he gave too much time to his work his wife Hélène responded that ‘Gissing is his life!’” Nothing gives a better sense of that than browsing his ambitious three-volume biography on Gissing. There we sense a scholarly soul that could not help exhausting itself in a labor of love. At the

same time, we can hardly overlook the extraordinary academic and moral support provided throughout by H  l  ne. Clearly, it is far more than her computer skills that supported his groundbreaking and epoch-making work. As a graduate, like Pierre, of the Sorbonne, one can only imagine how much her lively, intelligent contributions to their discussions helped Pierre lead such a productive academic life.

It was in 1989 that Pierre was invited together with H  l  ne to Japan by Shigeru Koike, just one year his junior; they were both in their late 50s. I was not in their circle at the time, for I had not started my journey into Gissing's world yet. The picture above, taken in front of Zojo-ji, the main temple of Jodo Buddhism, and the Tokyo Tower, shows H  l  ne with Shigeru and his former student, Ryoko Ota, who would translate *The Whirlpool* and *The Odd Women* and then many of Elizabeth Bowen's novels. Ryoko has told me about her first impression of H  l  ne that behind her gentle, modest demeanor lay an unspoken belief in her ability to support her husband's life as a scholar both morally and practically. To her, H  l  ne's bearing must have appeared as modestly confident as that of Hilda Castledine in "A Victim of Circumstances," though Pierre was quite unlike Hilda's husband, a painter with little talent. I am of much the same opinion of H  l  ne. However, many years of email exchanges have convinced me that she is a fascinating combination of conservatism and progressivism. While she looks as traditional an "Angel in the House" as Mrs. Morton in *The Whirlpool*, she has several aspects of a modern urban "New Woman" operating her machine as masterfully as Rhoda Nunn in *The Odd Women*. It goes without saying, though, that H  l  ne is a very far from odd woman.

Dedicating my sincere best wishes and heartfelt prayers for H  l  ne's continued good health and long life.

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