



George Gissing: The Odd Women

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George Gissing's "The Odd Women" dramatizes key issues relating to class and gender in late-Victorian culture: the changing relationship between the sexes, the social impact of 'odd' or 'redundant' women, the cultural impact of 'the new woman,' and the opportunities for and conditions of employment in the expanding service sector of the economy. At the heart of these issues as many late Victorians saw them was a problem of the imbalance in the ratio of men to women in the population. There were more females than males, which meant that more and more women would be left unmarried; they would be 'odd' or 'redundant,' and would be forced to be independent and to find work to support themselves. In "The Odd Women," Virginia Madden and her two sisters are confronted upon the death of their father with sudden impoverishment. Without training for employment, and desperate to maintain middle-class respectability, they face a daunting struggle. In Rhoda Nunn, a strong feminist, Gissing also presents a strong character who draws attention overtly to the issues behind the novel. "The Odd Women" is one of the most important social novels of the late nineteenth century.

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