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***Wormwood: A Drama of Paris*, by Marie Corelli, edited by Kirsten MacLeod. Broadview Press, 2004. 407. ISBN 1-55111-419-4. AUD26.95 (paperback).**
***The Woman Who Did*, by Grant Allen, edited by Nicholas Ruddick. Broadview Press, 2004. 238. ISBN 1-55111-510-7. AUD24.95 (paperback).**
***The Story of a Modern Woman*, by Ella Hepworth Dixon, edited by Steve Farmer. Broadview Press, 2004. 295. ISBN 1-55111-380-5. AUD24.95 (paperback).**

These beautifully produced editions of Victorian novels are part of a series of sixty-nine, published by Broadview Press at a rate of about five a year since 1993. Broadview's description of itself on the website has an appropriate ring for the Victorian specialist: it is an independent academic publisher (Canadian) open to a broad range of political and philosophical viewpoints and "committed to providing affordable, high quality texts." The air of the Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge is both unmistakable and seductive. And who wouldn't be happy with these good looking, contextually rich, scholarly editions?

Broadview editions range from the sensational (like *Wormwood*) to the best seller (*King Solomon's Mines*) to the relatively obscure (*The Story of a Modern Woman*); they display the range of Victorian interests as well as genre conventions and social preoccupations. Ella Hepworth Dixon was the daughter of the editor of the *Athenaeum* and in her childhood met the intelligentsia of the mid nineteenth century – Geraldine Jewsbury, Bulwer Lytton, Sir Richard Burton, Huxley and Millais. After her father died when she was in her early twenties she turned to journalism as a career. Steve Farmer's excellent chronology and introduction point out the connections between Hepworth Dixon's New Woman novel and her own experience; Mary Erle's efforts to make a living working in Grub street is the hack version of what Hepworth Dixon herself achieved. But the real New Woman of the novel is Mary's friend, Alison Ives, whose beauty and social position are equalled by her outspokenness and fearless social conscience. Alison's premature death, brought on from good works, demonstrates that women who go against the grain, no

matter how gifted or fortunate, cannot expect to survive. Mary Erle, who meekly and stoically survives the social blows produced by her father's early death is a narrative in counterpoint: unless women are both conventional and fortunate they will find themselves at the sharp end of society's dynamics.

The same lesson is harshly taught to Herminia Barton in Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*. A more radical novel than Hepworth Dixon's in the sense that the central character is made to live and die by her principles while seeing those she loves reject them, Allen's novel is also more frankly preachy. Herminia does not believe in marriage and therefore refuses, twice, to marry the man she loves despite the terrible consequences which ensue. Each time she is offered a way out from being the outcast mother of an illegitimate daughter she resorts to her ironclad convictions about the Sex Problem. The cover features an enchanting photograph of "Ethel Ross" from 1913 which perfectly fits the mood and youthful fire of Herminia. But as is perhaps always the case in a novel with a barrow to push, the narrative is intensely black and white, and interleaved with Allen's longwinded passages on patriotism, the "monopolist instinct of property," and the "organised rule of selfishness." Of course most Victorian novels enact a duty to improve the reader, but everyone likes the story to make the pill invisible, and it's not really a surprise to find contemporary reaction to *The Woman Who Did* focussed on this point. H.F. from the *New York Times* declared "the motif of this new work is brash enough to give it a place on the most advanced shelf of new-woman literature, but its treatment is lifeless to the point of tedium, and its characters [. . .] are all impossible puppets" (207). Nicholas Ruddick has made a very good job of placing the novel in the context of the New Woman debate and siting it in the context of Grant Allen's life and works, and it is interesting to have Allen's novel back in print, but the interest remains resolutely scholarly.

Marie Corelli's *Wormwood* however is, as it has always been, a different story. Over the top, improbable, heavily decadent in its mannerisms and literary effects as well as in its subject, it nevertheless races along, as Gaston Beauvais, after one encounter with absinthe, is completely transformed into a monster. Kirsten McLeod's introduction gives a rich account of Corelli's own mysterious origins, the Naturalist and Decadent writers who influenced her, British attitudes to France and the history of the infamous drink itself, partly drawn from Barnaby Conrad's excellent *Absinthe: History in a Bottle* (San Franciscon: Chronicle Books, 1988) but also bringing its use right up to date with a new vogue for the Green Fairy in Britain and North America. I have always meant to read *Wormwood* and it is only with this edition that I have finally got round to it. Unlike the novels by Allen and Hepworth Dixon, it has been worth the wait. Corelli claimed it was a "true" depiction of modern life in Paris and most of the reviews hail its grim realism. Despite the necessary accoutrements of an improbably innocent heroine and a tortured noble hero, Corelli's study of addiction still has a horror and an inevitability about it. *Wormwood* is not a great novel, but it's a greatly interesting one, and knows how to

pick you up and take you to the end of the oh-so-downward road. Like the other two novels it is beautifully produced, with a cover photograph of Rue des Marmousets c.1870 – you can feel the slippery film on the cobblestones.

All these novels have a more or less set format – a biographical, textual and contextual introduction, the text, and a number of appendices which cover reception, current debates etc. They are also footnoted. The only uneven note for me was the footnoting. In *Wormwood* Kirsten McLeod footnotes every French word, usually beginning "French term for [. . .] ." I found this irritating and it made me wonder who these editions are aimed at. The Broadview website says they are intended as university texts, but the assumption seems rather more aimed at high school – does a reader of *Wormwood* require to be told that every word or phrase in italics is a "French term for [. . .]?" What other language would it be? But this is a minor point. It's a real pleasure that a wide range of Victorian novels are being published in stylish, affordable and scholarly editions, and for those of us working in the area they are an invaluable resource.

Lydia Wevers

***Crime, Gender And Consumer Culture in Nineteenth-Century England*, by Tammy C. Whitlock. The History of Retailing and Consumption. Ashgate Publishing 2005. 244. ISBN 0754652076. US$89.95.**

The image of the innocent sent out to Australia for stealing a piece of lace or a pocket handkerchief haunts most Australian imaginations except those of professional historians of transportation and the first decades of Australian settlement. Behind this historical urban myth lodged in white Australian consciousness lies the question of how such a seemingly small act could attract the severe punishment of transportation. As Tammy Whitlock explains in her deft and informative examination of retail crime and fraud in Regency, early and mid Victorian Britain, theft of valuable property (as drapery and dress goods undoubtedly were for the economy of that era) was a capital offence frequently commuted to transportation. This book serves to remind the reader of how little of the material culture experience and practices at the time of early Australian settlement is securely known even to the academic community.

Whitlock's study is not only a book for specialists in retail history, but provides unexpected unfamiliar cross-references to a wide range of subjects. The book opens up with the story of Jane Austen's aunt and her brush with the law when accused of shoplifting a card of lace. Australian Janeites frequently reiterate that Austen's aunt could well have been sent to New South Wales if the charges stuck. But they did not stick due to a variety of factors – not least the relative leniency with