



The Odd Women

George Gissing

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Five odd women—women without husbands—are the subject of this powerful novel, set in Victorian London, by a writer whose perceptions about people, particularly women, would be remarkable in any age and are extraordinary in the 1890s. The story concerns the choices that five different women have to make and what those choices imply about men's and women's status in society and relationship to each other.

Alice and Virginia Madden, suddenly left adrift by the death of their improvident father, must take grinding and humiliating "genteel" work. Terrified of sharing their fate, their younger sister Monica accepts a proposal of marriage from a man who gives her financial security but makes her life wretched.

Interwoven with their fortunes are Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn, who are dedicating their lives to training young women in skills they can use to support themselves. Their broader aim is to help free both sexes from whatever distorts or depletes their humanity—including, if necessary, marriage. Into their lives comes Mary's forceful and engaging cousin, Everard Barfoot, and as he and Rhoda become locked in an increasingly significant and passionate struggle, Rhoda finds out through the refining fire what "love" sometimes means and what it means to be true to herself.

The Odd Women Details

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From Reader Review The Odd Women for online ebook

Katie Lumsden says

Possibly my favourite Gissing so far. A brilliant, engaging novel with fascinating and feminist themes, one of the most interesting Victorian books I've read.

Jean says

This is the first piece of literature that I've read by George Gissing. In fact, I had never heard of Gissing until a book was recommended by a Victorian group. After reading The Odd Women I will definitely seek out more of his works.

The setting is turn of the 19th century England. There are more women than men during this period and those women who do not possess the qualities (social class, money, looks) to attract a husband are labeled Odd Women. Two feminist women really really feminist for the times, open a clerical school for these "lowly women" so that they may come out of the sweatshops. The hope is that maybe they will never even consider marriage. According to one of these women, "Who needs it?"

Gissing takes the reader into the lives of these women and men where things turn out very differently from the characters' initial beliefs.

Great social commentary of the times.

MichelleCH says

A definite winner in my eyes. There are some books that just make you think and this is one of them. Taking the idea of 'odd women' and turning it into a novel is just brilliant.

Odd women are those women who are left after all other eligible men and women have been paired in marriage. These women are not outcasts per se but definitely live a much different life than those who have a husband.

Some of the women in this novel embrace the distinction while others are so afraid of becoming one that they make poor choices which resonate over their lifetime. One example is that of Monica Madden, alone in the world, she must support herself as a shop-girl. This profession is harsh and with a limitless supply of desperate workers; there is little to advance any worker's condition for the better. As soon as one worker is depleted there are many others ready to fill a position.

When an opportunity to marry a man of distinction and means presents itself, Monica is so afraid of losing this singular opportunity that she makes a decision in haste. This decision later becomes a central point in the story and leads to numerous bad decisions and complications.

At the same time, there are other women in the novel who embrace their freedom and control; these are odd women who have found a purpose. The pioneers who create the tide of liberation for women.

Rhoda Nunn, a peer and friend to Monica, is a perfect example of the type of woman that laid a path for future women to benefit from. Although she presents as a judgemental character at times, Rhoda is able to stand strong in her beliefs and desires and not become, as so many others do, beholden to any one man.

I loved this novel and there is much too much to describe. I can see a book club embracing this for a wonderful discussion. So many themes to explore: love, class, economic oppression, capitalism, feminism, desire, morals, just to name a few.

Thank you again Sera for introducing me to this gem!

Sera says

I found this book to be fascinating. Gissing represents a unique voice in Victorian literature, and he did not disappoint me with the wonderful social commentary that he wrote about the roles of the sexes and their own perceptions about what their roles should be in Victorian society. Oh yeah, and then Gissing throws in a bunch of stuff regarding the multiple purposes of getting married, the effects of loneliness on the human psyche and the crazy things that people will or won't do for love. Elements of Gissing's work reminded me more of Jane Austen than his English contemporaries, such as Thomas Hardy or Oscar Wilde. Gissing's writing style is much more simplistic than these writers, but packed with great insight into the feelings of the people who lived during this time.

There is much going on with this book, and once the multiple plot lines started moving, I had difficulty putting it down until I knew how everyone had made out in the end.

Overall, I would recommend Gissing to those readers who are interested in hearing a new voice within the genre.

Wealththeow says

Fiction about a small selection of loosely related women with various personalities and talents. The writing is pointed and both easy and interesting to read, but I got impatient and spoiled myself for the ending, and then lost all interest in actually reading the full novel. I don't enjoy reading about nineteenth century people torturing themselves and others in order to live up to their high ideals (and inevitably failing to do so anyway).

Kristina A says

This novel was surprisingly good. I was expecting something more like a polemic, something in which the issues were more important than the story. But what I got instead was surprisingly readable, well-written, and even quite suspenseful. (Okay, not in a thriller kind of way, but in a Victorian marriage plot kind of way.)

Unlike an Issue novel like *Ruth* (oh, Elizabeth Gaskell, I like you, but that novel has some problems!), where

the protagonist is primarily a bland vehicle for making a point, *The Odd Women* has interesting, flawed, complex characters who sometimes make poor choices. It also has some characters that verge on being one-dimensional -- such as Mr. Widdowson -- but even he has moments in which you sympathize with him. Almost all of the characters *appear* as though they'll be one-dimensional, but then they surprise you -- particularly the two main female characters, Rhoda and Monica. Although each one is designed to demonstrate a "type" of unmarried woman -- one with an intellectual disdain for the institution and the other who sees it as her only real option for an easy life -- Gissing takes both of them in unexpected directions. In the process, he makes one of the strongest cases for female equality that I've read in a Victorian novel, openly criticizing Ruskin's idea of separate spheres and arguing for female education and intellectual development as well as personal freedom and employment opportunities. He may not have all the answers or be able to envision a strong alternative to marriage, but Gissing never -- not even in the ending, where critics often complain Victorian novels become conservative -- backs away from his conviction that without true, mutual understanding and belief in equality, love cannot exist.

MJ Nicholls says

A riveting novel exploring the nascent rumblings of female emancipation, with a cast of strong and memorable characters serving up a long and thoughtful series of ruminations on the problems of Victorian marriage and divorce laws, and the basic humbuggering that befell women who liked to think things and not sew quilts for eight hours a day. The two main narrative threads concern an emancipated woman conflicted by the attentions of a man who is attracted to emancipated women (with dreams of dominating one), and a man who marries a seeming doormat who turns out to like thinking and refuses to bend to her master's wishes. A plethora of mild-mannered cacophonies ensue in one of Gissing's finest and less despairing productions.

El says

I sort of fell out of the world for about a month, didn't I? I am back and trying to get caught up on some reviews. It's been a busy time and also summer and summer makes me feel like the saddest pile of shit you've ever met, so bear with me. It happens every year, though this year may be the worst so far.

The Odd Women is a delightful story about the Madden sisters and their friendship with Rhoda, an intelligent woman, rare for their environment and society. Rhoda, of course, opens up their eyes and their minds and that is, of course, terrifying for many people because that's not the way women are! These women are *odd*, what with their fancy-shmancy views on eating meat and deciding not to get married and living out of wedlock and shit. Odd, odd women. Sheesh.

This was my first experience with George Gissing's writing, but it won't be the last. I'm glad I started with this book, though, because it embodies many of my own views and reading about these women going through things that were uncommon for the 19th century (or at least frowned upon) made me infinitely happy. Parts of the story (or the writing) reminded me of *Fortunata and Jacinta: Two Stories of Married Women* which I also loved. It's possible Gissing had read that before writing *The Odd Women* since Galdos published his book about ten years prior. Just a thought.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who thinks late 19th-century literature was stuffy, and never focused on the rights of women, or portrayed women as just lapdogs. These characters are not lapdogs - they have feelings and beliefs and while some may make poor choices, their decisions for those choices are well-

discussed in a complete and well-rounded manner.

Richard says

What do you do, if the only socially acceptable career is marriage - and no one marries you? In late nineteenth century England, millions of women were condemned to live a life of shabby-genteel desperation because there simply weren't enough men to have for husbands and virtually no actual employment was possible. This is the horribly narrow, lonely fate endured by one woman here - but it's far better than the fates of two of her siblings: alcoholism, and marriage to a well-meaning but unendurable ogre.

It's an alien world, with its strained proprieties and cock-eyed values - yet Gissing's treatment of it is so good (honest, fresh, angry, insightful way ahead of its time, and yet scarcely ever didactic) that many, many pages seem to describe scenes, and emotions, that are wholly modern. And on top of all this we get Rhoda Nunn, a magnificently complex, brave, fraught proto-feminist, trying almost single-handedly to reinvent her entire gender.

I expected this to be a book of some historical interest. What I got was a gripping read.

A brief note on the almost indescribably horrible Penguin edition I read (pictured here): what went wrong? I have not identified the typeface, but it looks like a form of semi-bold Palatino that someone has attacked with high-grit sandpaper before proceeding to use with twice the recommended amount of ink on poor-quality paper. Plus there is a persistent UNDER-printing near the bottom of every third or fourth page. Someone was asleep at the wheel on this one.

Ali says

'there are half a million more women than men in this unhappy country of ours . . . So many odd women - no making a pair with them.'

The *Odd Women* explores the idea of all the "Odd Women" of Victorian England, those women left over after all the more marriageable people have been paired off. Some of the characters – particularly Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot embrace their status as single independent women and in them Gissing rather satirises the "New Women" of the 1890's.

As the novel opens in 1872 the Madden sisters are living in their Somerset home with their widowed father, their lives are quiet and seemingly idyllic. Although not hugely wealthy their father is comfortable and will be able to provide well for his daughters, although his projected fifteen more years of work is cut tragically short by his sudden death. His daughters are left to fend for themselves in the world.

Fifteen years later and their fortunes are very different, the two elder sisters Alice and Virginia are in London, living in grim lodgings, in between positions as a governess and companion, their lives are hard. They are afraid to use the capital they inherited from their father, and so instead continue to live on just a few shillings a week. Their younger sister Monica is a shop girl, enduring dreadfully long hours, while living above the shop with the other shop girls. Alice and Virginia are thrown together with the bluestocking reactionary Rhoda Nunn, who they knew in their girlhood, and Mary Barfoot, who run a small establishment training young women in typing and shorthand, sending them out into the world as "New Women" who will be able to support themselves as office clerks. Rhoda professes to be vehemently against marriage – despising the weak women who settle for married life, and having no compassion at all for a poor young woman who strays from the moral path of Victorian society.

Monica is all set to become one Rhoda and Mary's pupils, but Monica is less keen on the idea of supporting

herself as those around her may suppose. Monica is terribly afraid of her sisters' fate – and this fear leads her to make a hasty marriage. Practically stalked by a much older man – but one who has a bit of money and his own home – Monica thinks she is saving herself from a far worse fate than marrying a man she doesn't really love.

“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, he took for granted that it was his to direct, hers to be guided”

Edmund Widdowson's love of Monica is jealous, obsessive and suffocating, and Monica is soon regretting her hasty marriage. Her dissatisfaction is increased when she and her husband meet young Mr Bevis and his mother and sisters while on holiday. They continue their acquaintance when home in London.

When Mary Barfoot's disgraced cousin Everard arrives on the scene – he is immediately drawn to Rhoda, initially he is interested to see if he can turn her head, her apparent dislike of romance and marriage represents a challenge to Everard.

In *The Odd Women* Gissing takes as his themes: marriage, morals, and women's roles in Victorian society and the beginnings of the early feminist movement. It is an enormously readable and engaging novel, although Gissing's world is not a cosy one. Many of the characters are flawed, angry or cynical – but they are fully rounded and wholly believable. Gissing writes about poverty, disillusion, alcoholism, obsession and Victorian society in grimy foggy London streets, yet he makes it palatable and gripping. It is many years since I read any George Gissing novels – I think I read three or four way back when – and I am now wondering why I left it so long to re-visit his work.

Always Pink says

Lord, I'm thankful to thee that I live in the 21st century and not in Victorian times. Gissing is trying his best to elucidate his readers on the grave matter of the equality of the sexes. To follow his meanderings gives us today valuable insight into the more than sad state of affairs in his times. Some thoughts and ideas on marriage are well formulated and quite interesting. But the story as such feels heavily constructed for the sake of argument and Gissing's characters have a tendency to utter gibberish and faint or weep on sofas. This novel has not aged well, but was probably a well meant effort on the author's part to promote emancipation.

Kansas says

No conocía a George Gissing, contemporáneo de Henry James, Hardy o Anthony Trollope, y desde luego no tan conocido parece ser, aunque en su época fue uno de los más populares. Lo cierto es que me ha sorprendido muchísimo en el sentido de que un hombre escribiera con tanta coherencia sobre el tema de la emergente emancipación femenina en el s.XIX, El título de la novela se refiere a esas mujeres de la época que se quedan sin casarse, en tierra de nadie, en una época en que el éxito de la mujer se media por la escala social en la que conseguía casarse. Gissing nos describe a algunas de estas mujeres, subversivas para su época, ya que empiezan a cuestionarse una vida más allá del matrimonio. Me ha encantado vaya, no sólo porque temáticamente es una novela interesantísima, sino porque el ritmo engancha totalmente.

Carla Remy says

From 1893. This book is really good. Being a late Victorian realist novel, it doesn't conclude with a happy,

pat ending, but it is satisfying all the same. The odd women are the multitude of unmarried females in Victorian England, and this book concerns the effort (by trailblazing ladies) to get educated women using typewriters so they have their own employment (besides teaching, governessing or nursing). Actually honest about marriage leading to control of the spouse - but it goes both ways. Wives without their own lives and livelihood can become warped controllers just like husbands can. Also deals with alcoholism - of a woman. Very ahead of its time. Amazing to think how much changed in 50 or 60 years.

Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says

This is an astonishing book: a subversive, feminist take on marriage and women's roles in society, written by a man in the 1890s. I suspect that's not a coincidence, that a woman couldn't have gotten away with this book and its criticism of Victorian marriage and Victorian men. And to round out the praise, it is also an excellent story, with fascinating and believable characters, that had me turning the pages as quickly as any contemporary novel.

Late 19th century England had a marriage market in crisis – the country had many more women than men (presumably due to colonization), yet there was no provision for the “odd women out”; in society's eyes a woman's life was worthless if she failed to marry. The problem is considered so severe that a male character in this book urges marriage on his friend as a charitable duty, to save some poor woman from spinsterhood. This is the backdrop to a story primarily about two women, though not the two you'll see in the blurb or the first chapters. Alice and Virginia Madden are our prototypical Victorian spinsters, who after their father's death are forced to make their living as a governess and a companion respectively: work they find unfulfilling and precarious. They mope quietly in the background of this novel, too plain to hope for husbands and too timid to break out of their roles, serving as the example its other women react against.

Anyway, on to our real protagonists. First, Rhoda Nunn, now one of my favorite literary heroines. Like her friends Alice and Virginia, Rhoda is not pretty and was forced to make her living at a young age; unlike them, she is independent, bold and uncompromising, and went about learning the skills she needed to find work with dignity. When the story opens she and her friend Mary Barfoot are running a typing school for young women, enabling them to make a decent living. Rhoda and Mary are active feminists and represent different sides of the movement, Rhoda the militant who dislikes the idea of marriage, Mary the gentler side whose goal is helping others. Of course Rhoda's world is shaken when she starts to fall for Mary's cousin, the charming Everard.

Our other heroine is Monica, the youngest and prettiest of the Madden sisters. Monica is briefly a student at the typing school, and picks up some feminist ideas without quite realizing it, but at heart she is a conventional woman afraid of becoming an “old maid.” So when a wealthy older man begins to stalk her, she marries him in spite of her misgivings, and her story is one of trying to negotiate the boundaries of a Victorian marriage, in which her husband expects to rule her in all things.

As you can see from the above, while this book has the drawing-room conversations and reticence about sex you'd expect from a Victorian novel, otherwise it's unlike anything I've read from the 19th century. It engages frankly with issues of class and gender, and I loved reading about the early feminist movement. First-wave feminism is known for being exclusive, and we see the characters thinking and arguing about that: should they include poor women? What about “fallen” women? (Women of color do not come up, and the book is much less progressive when it comes to race. The n-word pops up twice – jarringly, in contexts not meant to be offensive.) Exclusivity wins out in the end, but it's important to see that it isn't without debate; at any rate I can hardly blame these women for it, given where they started and how much we owe to women like them.

But it is also simply an excellent story, well-written and very readable, with an engaging plot that grabbed my attention and didn't let go. This is not a story you've read before; there's genuine suspense regarding the outcome. The characters are realistic, three-dimensional people, all of them with strengths and flaws, and it's a great strength of Gissing's writing that different readers can come to wildly different conclusions about them. You don't have to be especially interested in feminism to enjoy this book, though if you are it's a real treat.

I do have a couple of reservations, for which it gets 4.5 stars rather than 5. One, the will-they-or-won't-they between Rhoda and Everard in the middle of the book is drawn out a bit too long. And two, there's a bit too much unnecessary female jealousy, some of it bizarrely retconned into an otherwise beautiful scene. However, I forgive all of this in light of the end; this book can't be intelligently discussed without talking about the ending, so my interpretation is included below. But I definitely wouldn't have wanted to know before reading the book, so be warned.

MAJOR SPOILERS BELOW

So, this is basically the most feminist ending ever. First off, Rhoda rejects Everard in favor of devoting herself to her work. Name me one other novel, please, whose heroine chooses herself over an acceptable man! Some critics have seen this as pride getting the better of her, and causing her to lose out on romantic love and motherhood. But every choice in life means giving up the alternative, and given Rhoda's immediate regrets when she initially agreed to the marriage, this seems to be the choice that will bring her the most happiness. And I doubt this couple would have worked out anyway; sparring might make exciting courtship but the endless power struggle would have lost its luster. And the way Everard thinks about marriage, in terms of conquest and domination, is in no way attractive; when he says he wants a strong woman, he means the submission of a worthy opponent. He doesn't care about Rhoda herself nearly as much as the excitement of the chase. I admit to getting a little caught up in the romance myself, but on reflection the misunderstanding really was fortunate for them both.

And Monica. A lot of reviewers have interpreted her death as a punishment for considering adultery, and yes, the "unfaithful" woman's death is a common trope in Victorian novels. However, this is not a moralistic novel, and Monica never actually cheats, so it's hard to see why Gissing would have felt the need to punish her. And look at the simple cause-and-effect: Monica dies giving birth to the child she conceived with her husband, not in any way related to her potential affair. Had she rejected Widdowson, she would have lived. That's right: *marriage* killed Monica, not immorality. I told you this book was subversive.

Alasse says

Forget about Edith Wharton - this the best, most ahead-of-its-time, social commentary book I have read in a long, long time, if not ever. How come it wasn't on my radar before? It speaks about women's equality in a way that makes it incredible that it was written in the freaking 1800s. If only, the fact that it was makes it even more refreshing - because these are problems that we're already aware of but we still haven't managed to resolve, seeing it all discussed like it's new and devoid of connotations... well, it makes a change from all the angry-sounding articles on my Facebook feed, that's for sure. I guess the contrast should feel depressing, but the book is the one that reads surprisingly modern, so I had to keep reminding myself that we have truly come a long way in most of these respects. Just look at quote:

"True. But a free union presupposes equality of position. No honest man would propose it, for instance, to a woman incapable of understanding all it involved, or incapable of resuming her separate life if that became desirable."

This is GOLD, people. Read it!

Edward says

Introduction

--The Odd Women

Selected Bibliography

Cphe says

A vastly underrated novel. I'd never heard of this author until he was recommended on one of the Amazon threads. I enjoyed this story which at heart offers two tales of "love" by two very different women. Monica is a young woman who marries an older man and trade one prison for another. Rhoda is principled and idealistic and revels in her independence.

This novel delves into the start of the emancipation movement and is a quite fascinating look at 19th century society. Really this novel deserves all of the accolades that readers are able to give.

My regret is that it's taken me so long to find this wonderful and thought provoking gem that delivers themes that are as applicable today as yesterday.

Issicratea says

I think I'm beginning to like Gissing. I read *New Grub Street* a few months ago and my jury remained slightly out, but *The Odd Women* won me over.

Thematically, this novel is very interesting indeed. The "odd women" of the title are those surplus to requirements in late-Victorian Britain: women of the genteel, but unmoneyed classes who do not find a husband, and find themselves socially invisible, financially straitened, and deprived of any means to fight their way out of their corner. Fear of this fate, as Gissing illustrates, can drive women into the equal and opposite fate of a desperation marriage, which condemns both them and their husbands to a form of living hell.

Two of the main characters in this novel are on a conscious mission to address this social problem by providing business training—essentially, typing and bookkeeping—to prospective "odd women," in order to give them a means of maintaining their independence. These two, the reticent Mary Barfoot and the more exuberant Rhoda Nunn, were the freshest characters in the novel for me. They take rather a while to surface, but, once they did, my interest was piqued.

One reason why *The Odd Women* worked for me a little better than *New Grub Street* is that its gloom and misery is slightly less unrelenting. In addition to the dreary, precarious lives and feeble twitches of rebellion in which Gissing seems to specialize, we have some more colorful elements here. I was especially struck by the sparky, unpredictable, sexually charged relationship that develops between Rhoda and Everard Barfoot, Mary's faintly bolder cousin. This stole the show for me and made me revise my opinion of Gissing's

subtlety and imaginative range.

I still have a few reservations about Gissing. He's not the most elegant of writers; there's a workmanlike quality to his prose, and a degree of clumpiness to his plotting at points. But he has certainly got something—perhaps as simple as an ability to home in unfailingly on what is most new and live and raw in his society. This gives his novels a disconcertingly modern air at times, rather like the sensation of seeing color photographs from the early 1900s, which jolt you into seeing the past in a different way.

Elizabeth (Alaska) says

Writing this review will be a struggle; not because I didn't like the book, but because why I liked it is not so easy to explain without saying more than I usually do about the heart of the matter.

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

Ok, so that explains the title. This speech is given by a woman who is part of the emancipation movement of the 1890s. I must have lived under a rock, but I honestly didn't know, and was more than mildly surprised, that this very strong feminist novel was published at that time. I can only imagine the reception it must have received. Not only did Gissing address the right of women to work in other than teaching or domestic service, but it addressed the desire for a wife to be intellectual partner with her husbands.

Don't let me mislead you. Yes, this was all I've said in the preceding paragraph, but there was a rather good story as well, with interesting and well-developed characters. The prose is excellent, perhaps much better than other Victorian literature. Gissing is on both the 1001 Books list and on Bloom's Western Canon list, but for his *New Grub Street*, which I hope to find room for before too much time passes.

Everyman says

In his day, in the late Victorian age, Gissing was one of the most popular novelists. But he is not well known today, his contemporaries Trollope, Hardy, and James having aged much better than Gissing has. Indeed, neither the [Oxford Anthology of English Literature - Victorian Prose and Poetry](#) nor the [Norton Anthology of English Literature](#) has an entry for his writing, and the Oxford Anthology doesn't even mention him in its "Suggestions for Further Reading." The Teaching Company course on "The English Novel" has no discussion of him.

His contemporary obscurity is a shame, because while he may not be a first rank writer, some of his novels and most of his short stories are certainly worth reading. [The Odd Women](#) is one of his better known novels, though in my view not as strong as either [New Grub Street](#) or [The Nether World](#).

The odd women of the title, I should note up front, are not called odd because they are unusual, but are odd because at the time England had considerably more women of marital age than men, so there were many women who were "odd man out," or more accurately "odd woman out." The novel follows about a decade in

the lives of five women, three of them sisters, for whom marriage is unlikely and, in several cases, unwanted (or so at least the characters argue; the reader is entitled to believe or disbelieve them). The novel is mildly didactic, with extended conversations discussing a variety of views toward marriage and feminine liberation in the late Victorian age. These views are more enjoyably offered than they would be in a more academic document, and offer some interesting thoughts on the role of marriage and women in the transition period of the later industrial age.

The weakness of the novel, in my view, is that several of the main characters are rather flat, with their characters not well developed. They aren't quite stereotypical, but they seem to represent "types" Gissing uses to put forth his views rather than actual people.

The novel's strength is the extended conversations, which are thought-provoking and often amusing. Indeed, Gissing has a subtle and wry sense of humor which he slips in almost casually rather than flaunting.

Without spoiling the ending, or endings since there are several intertwined stories, I can say that this is not the traditional English comedic novel with everybody coming out happily in the end. It isn't quite Hardy, but it is closer to him than to Austen.

This is not a great novel, but it is a good novel, easy to read and quite sufficiently enjoyable when a reader wants a bit of a break from Bleak House, and War and Peace, and other "most serious" novels.
