

*Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational  
Reproduction and the New Woman.* By Angelique Richardson.  
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Angelique Richardson's *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century* (originally published in 2003 and now available in paperback) provides a remarkable account of "the intimate relations between eugenics and some strands of early feminism," (p.xv) especially that represented by "New Woman" writers in the 1880s and 1890s. The book is centrally concerned with the work of three prominent women writers (Sarah Grand, George Egerton, and Mona Caird) but it also provides an extraordinary account of the broader late-Victorian scene – from the deliberations of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science to the Garden City Movement and the work of the National Vigilance Association in the wake of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act. The result is a fascinating account of the "biologization" of political and social life in a period when debates between "hereditarians and environmentalists" (p.31) framed the emergence not only of new forms of feminism but also of new understandings of class. Richardson rightly notes that whereas Darwin's early work (in *The Origin of Species*) emphasized "change and mutability," his later study of *The Descent of Man* "came out in support of fundamental sex difference." While Darwin's own account was open to the possibility of social change many of his followers were less flexible. The result was the development of a class-based understanding of evolutionary discourse which biologized poverty (as, for example, in H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* or Francis Galton's eugenic utopia "Kantsaywhere"), claimed to provide a "natural and kind" biological alternative to social charity, and developed a biological understanding of female citizenship based on women's "natural" (that is, biological) morality and their capacity for rational reproduction.

Richardson's three case studies provide her with an opportunity to explore the complexities of these eugenic versions of feminism and the responses to them. Sarah Grand was one of the best-known of late-Victorian novelists; her novel *The Heavenly Twins* was the best-selling novel of 1893. Grand was also, as Richardson makes clear, "a committed exponent of biological determinism and eugenic feminism" (p.95). According to Richardson, most accounts of Grand's feminism have focused on her critique of marriage, while the eugenic elements in the texts have been overlooked. Reading Grand with an eye to those elements, Richardson emphasizes her "physiological aesthetic" (p.127)

and her commitment to the belief that “sex difference was fixed and fundamental” (p.104). Richardson similarly revises critical assessments of George Egerton, whose modernist and experimental fiction has not usually been read for its eugenic content. For Richardson, Egerton’s fiction “offers an example of the ways in which literary experimentalism and the celebration of sexuality and freedom can coexist with repressive ideologies” (p.159). Richardson concludes that “Egerton was ultimately uninterested in the political participation of women in the life of the nation; her belief in the fundamental importance of biology meant that she saw any shift towards political equality as damaging to racial improvement” (p.165). Richardson’s final case study – Mona Caird – similarly revises our understanding of the work of a well-known New Woman novelist, in this case revealing the extent to which both Caird’s feminism and her fiction were driven by an adamant anti-eugenic impulse. As Richardson puts it, “Caird appropriated the scientific rhetoric of the social purists and eugenists in order to rework their arguments, exposing the biases inherent in the new discourse of biology and reclaiming the importance of environment and culture in shaping individuals” (p.182). Caird rejected biological narratives of racial progress and emphasized women’s equality: “For Caird, motherhood and the idea of race, twin strategies of the imperial plan, are instruments of oppression which act on and through the flesh” (p.212-13). As a result, Caird ends up looking quite different from either Grand or Egerton, and the category of “New Woman novelist” looks increasingly problematic.

A great strength of Richardson’s work is the way it draws so many connections between aspects of late-Victorian society that are often dealt with in quite distinct and separate historical and critical literatures. The book brings together many disparate topics – the New Journalism, the (re)discovery of poverty, philanthropy, feminism and the New Woman, modernism, imperialism, socialism, urban planning and eugenics – and helps us to see them and the relationships between them in new ways. The result is to make it very clear how powerfully what Richardson calls the “will to biologize” (p.72) shaped not only politics and philanthropy but also aesthetic discourses; eugenic fiction, Richardson notes, was an effort to rewrite the romance plot in ways that simultaneously borrowed from and resisted the tropes of both sensation novels and decadent texts. The one element that is really missing here is the question of religion, which Richardson deals with only glancingly and in passing. To give only one example, some of the most exciting work on Sarah Grand in the past few years (admittedly published since Richardson’s book first appeared) deals directly with the spiritual themes in Grand’s work, and the ways that both race and eugenics are imbricated in her variant of

feminist spirituality, a theme which Richardson leaves aside.<sup>1</sup> Richardson's critique of "the late twentieth-century drift into philosophical relativism" which (she argues) "must take some responsibility for the obscuring of eugenic fictions, whose authorial intentions have not been acknowledged in the apparently emancipatory climate that privileged the reader as producer, and took pleasure in killing the author" (p.215) also feels somewhat dated, perhaps a reflection of the extent to which the scholarly climate is shifting in recent years. That said, her conclusion, which emphasizes the on-going relevance of these issues in our own day, given the revival of eugenic thinking in evolutionary psychology and now the human genome project, seems more timely than ever. This is a book which deserves a wide audience; while it has long been required reading for scholars working in the field, its paperback reissue will now make it more accessible to students, including undergraduates, whose understanding of this critical and complex period will be much enriched by Richardson's careful and nuanced study.

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*The Fertility Doctor: John Rock and the Reproductive Revolution.* By Margaret Marsh and Wanda Ronner. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. 374 p., ill., notes, index. ISBN 978-0-8018-9001-7 \$29.95).

John Rock, a Catholic gynecologist, who believed that women were not well suited to being doctors, seems an unlikely midwife for the birth control pill, but not only did he lead the clinical trials, he promoted the pill as an acceptable method of birth control for Catholics. This came after a career spent trying to get women pregnant as a fertility specialist at the Free Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. Marsh, a historian, and Ronner, a gynecologist, have combined their expertise to provide us with a scientifically grounded examination of Rock's contributions to reproductive medicine and birth control.

Rock, the son of a saloon owner, entered medicine after a trying stint as a timekeeper for the United Fruit Company in Guatemala. After completing his B.S. and M.D. at Harvard, and doing a series of internships and residencies, he became the director of the sterility clinic at the Free

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1. See Ann Heilmann, "Visionary Desires: Theosophy, Auto-Eroticism and the Seventh-Wave Artist in Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book*," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 26, 1 (2004): 29-46 and Naomi Lloyd, "The Universal Divine Principle, the Spiritual Androgyne, and the New Age in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 37 (2009): 177-96.