

THE GISSING JOURNAL

“More than most men am I dependant on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”  
 – George Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*.

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A Neglected Resource in Gissing Scholarship:  
The Pforzheimer MS “Scrapbook”

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What were Gissing’s methods of composition? What sources did he use, what notes did he take, and how far was he concerned with factual accuracy? Scholars and critics keen to answer such questions can draw on a number of published works. There is Gissing’s *Diary*, an indispensable source for recording when novels were started and finished and providing details of books consulted in the process of composition. There is *George Gissing on Fiction*, an annotated anthology of extracts from his writings (especially letters) giving evidence of his views on literary art. There is Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*, a valuable compendium of reflections, sentiments and personal views – a primary source for *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. More recently made available is *George Gissing at Work: A Study of His Notebook “Extracts from My Reading.”* As its title implies, this is an anthology, equipped with comprehensive annotation, of passages that Gissing transcribed from books. Since most of these transcripts were made in his twenties, this volume complements the *Commonplace Book*, the product of his later years.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this wealth of published material, some serviceable manuscripts remain

unpublished. Two relatively short notebooks deserve to be mentioned: a Chicago notebook in the Beinecke Library at Yale, containing miscellaneous quotations and notes recorded in 1877; and a memorandum book in the Huntington Library, containing anecdotes and subjects for meditation. Both notebooks have been utilized by various scholars. There remains, however,

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one manuscript source which appears to have been used only by myself and Pierre Coustillas. Unlike the Beinecke and Huntington notebooks, this is a very extensive compilation of relevance to a vast range of Gissing's work. It is the author's "Scrapbook," currently held in the Pforzheimer Collection in New York.

Gissing himself did not name the Scrapbook. Technically, it consists of "Miscellaneous Manuscript Notes, 249-273," in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Shelley and His Circle Collection in the New York Public Library. It is an unbound assemblage of handwritten notes and pasted press cuttings arranged under 25 different headings. The totality represents a huge amount of material. The press cuttings alone would occupy many pages, while the manuscript notes – to judge from a typed transcript – comprise about 25,000-30,000 words.<sup>2</sup> Even in purely physical terms, the Pforzheimer Scrapbook is substantial.

In fact it is also of substantial value as a sourcebook for Gissing's fiction. But in contrast with the *Commonplace Book* and *Extracts from My Reading* its value is of a mainly documentary kind. Ostensibly at any rate, it is largely impersonal. For the most part it does not purport to be a record of Gissing's private thoughts and sentiments, his tastes, values and predilections, his moral and cultural reflections. The Scrapbook is rather a purposeful collection – of facts, phrases, outlines, booklists, news reports, anecdotes, observations – designed for strategic deployment in fiction. The entries do not seem to have been gathered primarily for Gissing's own interest or self-improvement, but rather for professional literary use. They are, nevertheless, highly revealing – of his mind as well as his methods.

For students of the genesis of Gissing's fiction the Scrapbook is an evidential goldmine. In this article it is only possible to sample its contents and to sketch out ways in which they might enrich or modify our knowledge of Gissing's working methods and our sense of his literary achievement. I shall divide my discussion into three broad categories. The first, and most capacious, is the value of the Scrapbook as a factual archive and repository of ideas. Here I shall mention how sociological areas were researched by Gissing for use in fiction, and discuss the ways in which specific entries informed his various writings. The second category identifies source material significantly modified in execution: its value resides partly in what it reveals of the author's original conception. The third category is the potential value of the Scrapbook as a

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pointer to Gissing's personality and the nature of his imaginative preoccupations. Despite the predominance of factual information, the selection of material is a telling index of Gissing's interests and creative obsessions; it deepens our sense of the defining features of his mental and emotional world.

Although these three categories are not mutually exclusive, I shall treat them in turn for convenience of analysis. Let us call them: Sources and Resources; Modified Material; and Imaginative Obsessions.

## 1. SOURCES and RESOURCES

The Scrapbook confirms that Gissing's working methods would align him with the realist tradition of fiction, or even with the naturalist movement. In his later life he tended to play this

down. He repudiated what he called “rigid ‘naturalism,’” and asserted that a “demand for objectivity in fiction is worse than meaningless, for apart from the personality of the workman no literary art can exist.”<sup>3</sup> Such statements need to be treated with caution. Certainly Gissing’s handling of his raw material was strongly marked by his own personality, but his typical preparations did not preclude the amassing of objective data. The Scrapbook, compiled in the eighties and nineties, incorporates detailed factual dossiers on a truly astonishing range of topics: the world of art and theatre, speculation and sport, landlordism, rents and working-class clubs, high society, crime, education, religion, local government, women, and the “trade of letters.” A huge section on “Occupations” lists 15 books giving information on employment. Among the women’s jobs on which Gissing took notes were match-makers, dress-designers, gardeners, mantle-finishers, theatre-programme sellers and quill toothpick makers (“paid 5d. per 1000,” he observes. “With hard work can make 3600 a day”). The men’s jobs noted include, unsurprisingly, cabdrivers and commercial travellers, but also bailiffs, barristers, auctioneers and even, bizarrely, “A worm-eater” (“Man employed in Wardour Street to make furniture look worm-eaten”). Knowing Gissing’s fiction we might expect a section on “Private Life of Working Classes. – Low Character &c,” but who would expect a huge dossier on “The Army” or a painstaking municipal analysis of “Bradford”?

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Some sections are plainly quarries of information that might be used anywhere in the fiction. One such is a collection of notes on women’s costume, with precise descriptions (and sometimes drawings) of skirts, jackets, hats and bustles, belts, bodices, handkerchiefs and hairstyles. Characteristically of Gissing, these accounts evince a sharp eye for the class-indicators of costume. Another apparently all-purpose dossier is entitled “Faces etc. Hints of Character.” It includes not only descriptions of physiognomies, and photographs of public figures, but give-away details of phrasing and body language. Even more striking is an extensive collection called “Localities & Notes on Nature.” This consists of numerous paragraphs of minutely observed descriptions of nature – and occasionally of urban scenes – for particular days all through the year. Effects of light are carefully noted; so too are variations in climate and vegetation. The systematic nature of these entries suggests that Gissing was compiling a file, reliably classified by season and region, of descriptive background passages.

One fascinating dossier is called simply “Names.” First come the Christian names, male and female, then 500 or so surnames, apparently accumulated at random. As with many Victorian novelists, Gissing’s choice of characters’ names was often socially or psychologically suggestive; scanning this list, one recalls, for instance, the aptness of Toplady, Ogram and Dymchurch for characters in *Our Friend the Charlatan*. Plainly one purpose of this dossier was to prevent Gissing duplicating names already used: many names have been crossed through (Reardon, Biffen and Milvain, say), though a few in fact used have not been deleted (Allchin, Everard, Hubert).<sup>4</sup> One wonders what characters Gissing might have fabricated to fit the more curious names on the list. In what circumstances might we have encountered, for example, Snickers, Birdseye, Hostage, Warbling, Truncheon, Meager, Zeal, Tankard, Sewage, Drift, Thicke or Tart? Perhaps they were rejected because too blatant. One surname listed – Pontifex – might have created difficulties for Samuel Butler, who had already used it in *The Way of All Flesh*, a novel completed in 1884 but not published till 1903.

Despite Gissing’s later doubts about realism, his narratives are characteristically constructed on carefully assembled sociological frameworks; the Scrapbook stockpiles the factual materials – lists, summaries, pictures, statistics – from which such frameworks were built. However, the Scrapbook also contains ideas, speculations and narrative outlines, and if we

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add these to the factual material we can often find very specific correspondences between the notes and the published work. Many of Gissing's short stories, for example, appear to have been germinated from jottings in the Scrapbook. Some were stimulated by press reports. "Lord Dunfield," which ends with a loutish aristocrat vaulting over the pews at a wedding – "an exhibition [...] facetiously noticed in the society journals next week"<sup>5</sup> – was based on an actual report by "Belle" in *The World* on 15 February 1892 (though the story was not written till 1895). "The Firebrand,"<sup>6</sup> also written in 1895, appears to have been influenced by an article in *The Spectator* (describing the character of a professional agitator) on 2 August 1890. Many other stories were developed from concepts first recorded in the Scrapbook. They include: "Spellbound," "An Old Maid's Triumph," "His Brother's Keeper," "Fleet-Footed Hester" and "A Calamity at Tooting."<sup>7</sup>

A number of Gissing's novels, too, are indebted to this source for narrative incidents and details of characterisation. Passages on soup kitchens and political meetings were utilised in *The Nether World*, as also was a note on "'Mad Jack' who sings psalms. His dream in which he is told that the slums are Hell, & the people in them were once wicked rich in a former life" (compare *The Nether World*, Chap. 37). Several incidents in *Born in Exile* come from the Scrapbook: Jowey's "fearsome recitation" ("The silly buckits on the deck") and his derivation of "jewellery" from "Jews"; the old printer who shows Peak the examination papers; and the aristocratic ladies in the carriage in Hyde Park. A couple of autobiographical entries were also subsequently attributed to Peak – the feeling of envy when crushing an insect and the sense of exultation, when reading Burns, that a ploughman should have glorified a servant girl ("It satisfies my instinct of revolt. Must put this into a character").<sup>8</sup>

One of the largest dossiers in the Scrapbook is a miscellaneous collection called "Ideas." An elliptical note in this section reads: "The youth who comes down to breakfast, saying: 'There's a man being hanged in London at this moment.'" Readers of *New Grub Street* will recognise here the apt and ominous opening of the novel (though Jasper Milvain is hardly a "youth"). Another note relating to *New Grub Street* (occurring in a section called "Trade of Letters") confirms the factual authenticity of its close-ups of the literary world. Near the beginning of the novel Jasper delights Alfred Yule by pointing out conflicting reviews of the same book – Miss Hawk's *On the Boards* – in a periodical edited by Yule's rival; later he

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discovers a mocking letter from the author in a London evening paper.<sup>9</sup> The original of this incident was similar in all details: a letter "To the editor of the *Standard*" from Harriett Jay about her novel *Through the Stage Door*, which had first been attacked and then praised by *The Spectator*. Even the fictional surname (Hawk) is related to the original (Jay).

So many entries in Gissing's Scrapbook were used or adapted in his novels, that it would take more space than is available here to discuss their significance thoroughly. (In the case of only one novel, *The Town Traveller*, have the parallels already been recorded and analysed: see Pierre Coustillas' introduction to the Harvester edition.) Scrapbook entries were also, it seems, the source of some of his non-fictional writing. A dossier entitled "Subjects for Essays" embodies notes used in *Henry Ryecroft* – for instance, "My gratitude to the various unknown people who have from time to time cheered me with music," or "Experiences of poverty. London lodgings."<sup>10</sup> Some "Subjects for Essays" not developed in print are nevertheless valuable for revealing Gissing's mind. His originality and skepticism, for example, come out in this crushing entry on "Satire": "It never corrected anybody, nor was meant to [...] Satirists write for own gratification."

## 2. MODIFIED MATERIAL

As mentioned earlier, the Scrapbook accommodates not only factual information but hints, ideas and rudimentary sketches for situations and stories. It therefore gives an insight into Gissing's first thoughts and, where modified, his afterthoughts. One point that emerges is that his original conception was often considerably more melodramatic than the version eventually published. In the huge dossier on "Ideas" occurs the note "A girl who kills herself by study for examinations." The sentence has been crossed through by Gissing to indicate that the notion has been used, but in fact the only counterpart in his fiction – Jessica Morgan in *In the Year of Jubilee* – does not die but has a breakdown. Likewise in the paragraph (also crossed through) which apparently prompted "An Old Maid's Triumph," the governess "has saved just enough to buy an annuity of 8/- a week." In the published story this becomes twenty shillings – less overtly pitiful and more appropriate for the pathos of shabby gentility.<sup>11</sup>

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A similar pattern is discernible in what is perhaps the most significant example of material adapted from the Scrapbook – the notes for the unfinished "A Man of Letters." Gissing began this novel in 1890 and recorded in his diary on 7 May: "Made a new beginning, putting my first scene in Brit. Museum reading-room." He worked on the book (which contained a character called Marian) throughout May and June 1890 but abandoned it almost halfway through on 29 June. In a recent article on Gissing's discarded novels Marilyn B. Saveson conjectures, "The novel certainly sounds like a first stab at what became *New Grub Street* at the end of 1890."<sup>12</sup> The Scrapbook appears to put this fact beyond doubt. The first note for the new project reads: "'A Man of Letters.' Story of clever fellow who begins with dire poverty & aspiration, & ends with successful writing of trash." Adumbrated here is the Jasper Milvain theme, though "dire poverty" is the kind of exaggeration that typifies Gissing's first thoughts. The next note seems to sketch out the Reardons' marriage. It begins: "A Man of Letters. Young fellow doing good but humble lit. work marries ambitious woman. She urges him to do ignoble work for sake of vulgar popularity & money." So far one could recognise *New Grub Street* as we have it. But the note continues: "Is acquainted with secret details of some scandal case that has been before public, & gets him to write a *roman à clef* on this. It succeeds, & is the man's ruin." Manifestly this diverges from the plot of *New Grub Street* – though it also reveals imaginative patterns that are common elsewhere in Gissing.

One other note is suggestive in this context: "In 'A Man of Letters' deal with the tendency of artistic people to become bourgeois [...] The disappearance of Bohemia &c." No doubt interpretations of this will vary. It seems to me to identify a theme that is certainly detectable in *New Grub Street* but more prominent in *Will Warburton*.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. IMAGINATIVE OBSESSIONS

The Scrapbook consists largely of facts and ideas recorded for possible use in fiction: some were indeed used, others were adapted, but many bear a more diffuse relation to Gissing's published work. Frequently what we have is not source material that fed directly into the fiction but social observations and plot possibilities that exemplify its typical concerns. The Scrapbook

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is not deliberately expressive: Gissing did not use it to record quotations or articulate his thoughts on literature and art. Nevertheless, indirectly, it is highly revealing: in tone, idiom and angle of vision, it springs from the same imagination as created his sombre and distinctive fiction. It lays open the Gissing world.

What are the features of this personal landscape? It is first, a world of poverty and hardship, of cruelty, suffering, injustice and pain. A characteristic sketch for a story reads: "A needlegirl loses her sight gradually, and in the end goes to the workhouse"; another describes a man imprisoned for 16 years and then found innocent. Suicide is a grimly recurrent topic. Men tend to kill themselves, Gissing notes, with cyanide of potassium, which is used in many trades; women favour vermin-killer. In a similar mood he records a news story: "Girl tried to poison herself with carbolic acid. She only injured her throat terribly, & lived for 15 months." In this world there is little generosity and much danger. "Work-girl who carries mock baby," reads one note, "to prevent being accosted in the street."

Above the level of squalor and poverty loom social forces and institutions that are far from reassuring. Religion, in Gissing's world, is largely hollow. Churches, he notes, in the City of London are all but deserted. On the other hand, he is repelled by revival movements. Sardonicly, he witnesses the great Salvation Army procession on Christmas Day 1886 – bands marching, girls with tambourines, Booth standing up in a carriage. "The only healthy faces were those of a few girls evidently making sport of the outing. No pretty faces. The men poor cripples, epileptic and cretinous [...] The pathos of it all." Elsewhere we learn that orthodox morality is based on repression and ignorance: "the stupidest and most insignificant people are the firmest props of society." As for Society with a capital "S," a huge number of entries document its inanity. Some are wryly factual, like a note on women's waists: "Ambition to get as small as 20 in. A 25 in. waist is fair average when unpinched." Others are more openly contemptuous or angry: "Insist on the appalling vulgarity of certain sections of 'Society' [...] What always offends me most, in 'Society,' is the impertinent freedom of empty-headed noodles to girls. Their [...] condescending flattery etc." Vulgarity, coarseness, cheapness and meanness are oppressive fixtures in the Gissing world. Examples from many areas abound. A notable one is advertising, invariably seen as vile and intrusive: ripe specimens are witheringly summarized.

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The world perceived through the Scrapbook, then, is largely a dark and negative one, replete with disturbing details. The rare chinks of light come from wistful passages that give proof of Gissing's escapist impulse – the impulse that throbs through *Henry Ryecroft* and parts of *By the Ionian Sea*. It emerges in an account of a visit to Oxford of June 12, 1888. Gissing's eye travels over the visible signs of a life of sheltered antiquity – the cloisters, the monastic feeling in the colleges, the crumbling stone fronts, the ivied walls. "Is the future England growing up here? he asks. No, no; but in poor London lodgings." Then he adds, "Ah, but the sense of rest! To forget modernism, & read Greek!"<sup>14</sup>

Despite the inveterate recurrence of this impulse, Gissing did not forget the modern world but returned to it obsessively in his fiction, imaginatively fired by what he deplored. As he wrote to Thomas Hardy in 1887 about what he called "this myriad-voiced London": "Every year I hate it more & more, longing for the pure sky, yet every year I see in it more opportunity for picturing."<sup>15</sup> The Scrapbook reflects this creative paradox. Despite the unloveliness of what it documents, it communicates no sense of depressive indifference, of a world turned "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable."<sup>16</sup> On the contrary one is struck by the zest and precision, the sheer encyclopedic range, of Gissing's observations. Consider, for example, his linguistic curiosity, which gives rise to ubiquitous entries in the Scrapbook on matters of idiom, usage and tone. One whole dossier is devoted to "Slang (Journalistic & Advertising English – London Vulgarisms & Superstitions)." It contains almost 100 instances of substandard English from the London region, presumably scribbled down by Gissing in a mood of mingled fascination and disgust. Many are Cockney pronunciations (a nice one is "The Prince of Wiles"), others are popular lower-class phrases ("Oh, hark at you," "I feel all of a 'eap," "Now, sling yer hook!", "To get the hump"), a few are examples of local slang ("A 'slop-cabbage' = a sluttish girl").

This list was compiled for professional reasons – a good many entries found their way into the fiction – but it also reflects a lifelong interest, and it clearly contradicts the still lingering assumption that Gissing’s senses were dulled by gloom. Like many other manuscripts in the Scrapbook, the file bears witness to the author’s acuteness. What it reveals is a community recorded by an accurate ear and a retentive mind – “myriad-voiced London,” indeed.

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Even so, it would be idle to deny that the Gissing world as glimpsed through the Scrapbook is short on some of the positive values that illuminate the fiction. Gissing felt strongly about natural beauty, artistic achievement, romantic passion, and, when younger, philanthropic reform. All these ideals are explored or affirmed at various times in his stories and novels, but none has left much more than a trace in the practical pages of the Scrapbook. Take for instance the tenor of the comments on women. As is well known, in Gissing’s fiction the treatment of women is decidedly mixed. Three strands in particular can be picked out: idealisation; bitter detraction; and analysis of female emancipation.<sup>17</sup> From the Scrapbook the first is almost wholly absent, though sympathy for women surfaces sporadically (for example, one note in “Ideas” reads, “The very common sacrifice of women’s happiness to the selfish males of a family”). The third strand is handsomely documented: in a dossier called “Woman” occurs a section on “The Movement” which lists books, magazines and societies concerned with female education and employment, as well as containing more specific notes on colleges for women. Many of these notes appear to have been garnered in 1889 for a book called “The Head Mistress.” In 1890 Gissing abandoned this novel, but noted “materials for that will lie over.”<sup>18</sup> I have argued elsewhere that these materials were used in later novels, including *The Odd Women*.<sup>19</sup> Certainly any student of Gissing and women would find this dossier indispensable.

This leaves the second category mentioned above – bitter detraction, or wondering disparagement, of female follies and vices. In the Scrapbook this category strongly predominates. Women are condemned for a number of qualities, from mental confusion to a “barbarous” love of jewellery. As in the fiction, such hostile comments are often laced with class revulsion. In a particularly revealing note Gissing suggests that a character might write: “With intelligent & educated women I am not so well acquainted as I might be, but on the female fool I claim to be the greatest living authority.” Gissing’s own voice is audible here. It comes out too in the extensive notes he made for a novel to be called “Among the Heathen.” In these notes – fragmentary, elliptical, impulsive – we can almost see the flicker of Gissing’s creative mind. They would certainly repay extended analysis, but what I want to emphasize here is the attitude to women they betray. “The *idleness* of women, whence all evils,” reads an early

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note, and before long the outline for “Among the Heathen” moves into a huge section on a Mrs. Twills, an appalling compound of vulgar jealousy, persistent envy, irrational touchiness and awesome incomprehension. “Love of raw meat” is attributed to this monster, as well as “small vocabulary,” “utter inhospitality,” bad cooking, and “Bitter hatred of other women.” Marital disrespect, it soon emerges, is also a prominent feature of her character. “Sudden ill-humour with husband without discoverable cause,” reads one note, and another gives a sample of her conversation: “Tell your Daddy he’s a pig.” The suspicion that the fictional Mrs. Twills (whose actions in the plot, unlike those of other characters, are scarcely specified in the notes) might owe more than a little to the actual Mrs. Gissing, is strengthened by the discovery that this plan was prepared in November 1894, only a short time after a diary entry recording Gissing’s disgust with Edith and ending with the sentence “I have no words for the misery I daily endure from her selfish and coarse nature.”<sup>20</sup> Desperate misogyny is unfortunately the hallmark of much

of Gissing's work in the mid 1890s. "Among the Heathen" may be added to the evidence of its autobiographical origin.

Gissing was right in his article on realism to insist that without the personality of the workman no literary art could exist.<sup>21</sup> The Scrapbook certainly reveals him as a realist, in his social enquiries and passion for facts, but it also shows how, even at this stage, his own personality has coloured the entries, converting them from data to symptoms. This is true even of the news reports, where the selectivity betrays his concerns. It is truer still of the fictional outlines, which frequently weave variations on his traumas. An example may be taken from the dossier "Ideas":

Short story: Youth suffering from privation is on the point of stealing, under circumstances which must have led to his discovery. At the critical moment he receives news of inheritance, or something of the kind, & is saved. Grows to honour and dignity, developing excellent qualities.

No one familiar with Gissing's biography could fail to find pathos in this four-line replay of his own unhappy fate.

In this article I have tried to draw attention to the Scrapbook as a valuable resource for Gissing scholars, and have argued that its value might be seen in three ways. It deepens our sense of Gissing's realism by exposing the broad social areas he researched and the specific details he deployed. It shows how he processed raw materials, adapting and altering his initial

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ideas. And finally it reveals, or perhaps confirms, the lineaments of his own imagination, the landscape of the Gissing world. Now that Gissing's letters are being published in a multi-volume collected edition, I would maintain that the Pforzheimer Scrapbook is the single most important manuscript source that might be made available to Gissing scholars. Clearly what we need is a convenient edition, with notes, annotation and critical analysis. The task would not be an easy one. Who will rise to the challenge?

<sup>1</sup>See *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester, 1978), hereafter cited as *Diary*; Jacob and Cynthia Korg (eds.), *George Gissing on Fiction* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1978), hereafter cited as *Fiction*; Jacob Korg (ed.), *George Gissing's Commonplace Book: A Manuscript in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library* (New York: New York Public Library, 1962), hereafter cited as *Commonplace Book*; Pierre Coustillas and Patrick Bridgwater (eds.), *George Gissing at Work: A Study of His Notebook "Extracts from My Reading"* (Greensboro, N.C.: ELT Press, 1988), hereafter cited as *Extracts from My Reading*. For kind permission to publish extracts from documents in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Shelley and His Circle Collection I am indebted to the Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation, Inc.

<sup>2</sup>I am grateful to Pierre and Hélène Coustillas for supplying me with a copy of their transcript of the Scrapbook to supplement my own less than comprehensive notes.

<sup>3</sup>*Charles Dickens, A Critical Study* (London: The Gresham Publishing Company, 1902), p. 83; Gissing, "The Place of Realism in Fiction" (July 1895), in *Fiction*, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup>Allchin may be found in *Will Warburton*, Everard and Hubert in *The Odd Women* and *Demos*.

<sup>5</sup>*Human Odds and Ends* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1898), p. 262.

<sup>6</sup>Also published in *Human Odds and Ends*.

<sup>7</sup>The first and fourth of these appeared in *A Victim of Circumstances and Other Stories* (London: Constable, 1927), the third and fifth in *Stories and Sketches* (London: Michael Joseph,



1938).

<sup>8</sup>*Born in Exile* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester, 1978), pp. 80, 35, 129, 195, 134.

<sup>9</sup>*New Grub Street* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 35, 52, 67.

<sup>10</sup>*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Summer XXVI; Spring VIII.

<sup>11</sup>*Human Odds and Ends*, p. 199.

<sup>12</sup>“Gissing’s ‘Indispensable’ False Starts: An Annotated Checklist of his Discarded Novels,” *Gissing Newsletter*, XXVI, 1 (January 1990), pp. 2-17, at p. 8.

<sup>13</sup>The dossier entitled “Trade of Letters” is also highly relevant to *New Grub Street*.

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<sup>14</sup>Cp. *Diary*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>15</sup>Letter to Hardy, 25 July 1887 (U.C.L.A.); published by Pierre Coustillas in “Some Unpublished Letters from Gissing to Hardy,” *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. IX (1966), no. 4, pp. 197-209, at p. 200.

<sup>16</sup>*Hamlet*, I.ii.133.

<sup>17</sup>For a fuller account of these divided attitudes, see my *The Paradox of Gissing* (Unwin, 1986), chap. 5.

<sup>18</sup>*Diary*, p. 211.

<sup>19</sup>See *The Paradox of Gissing*, pp. 152ff.

<sup>20</sup>*Diary*, p. 350.

<sup>21</sup>See note 3, above.

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#### The Gissing Ballade

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Christopher Morley’s “Ballade of Books Unbought,” with its refrain, “Gissing’s ‘By the Ionian Sea,’” which appeared in the April, 1990 number of the *Gissing Newsletter*, is one of the many allusions to Gissing by a writer who remained a firm supporter through times when Gissing was known mainly as an obscure figure lost in the recesses of the minor Victorian novel.

While I have not been able to locate a file of the *New York Evening Post* (now long defunct), I am fairly certain that the ballade appeared in the “Bowling Green” column Morley conducted for this newspaper between 1921 and 1923. Morley was one of a breed of journalist-bookmen who flourished in the ’twenties and ’thirties in the cities of the eastern United States, writing columns which appeared regularly in various periodicals, a group which included H. L. Mencken, Franklin P. Adams and Don Marquis. The “Bowling Green” column, partly written by Morley, partly by his readers, who used it to express their literary interests,

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was soon moved to the *Saturday Review of Literature*, where Morley was a contributing editor, and where it appeared for many years. Morley discovered Gissing through *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, a book which encouraged him to specialize in the familiar essay, although his interest in Robert Louis Stevenson, whom he read much earlier, was probably an even more important influence. He reported that he never went into a used bookshop without looking for Gissing titles, a habit many others have fallen into.

Morley was born in Haverford, Pennsylvania in 1890, the son of cultivated English parents. His father, Frank Morley, was a professor of mathematics who had been at King's College, Cambridge, and had come to America to teach at Haverford College, and later at Johns Hopkins University. After graduating from Haverford College, Christopher Morley spent three years at New College, Oxford, as a Rhodes Scholar, and while there published a first volume of verse. When he returned to the United States in 1913 he entered the publishing business, following the example of his maternal grandfather, who had been associated with Chapman and Hall in England. He worked as a reader of manuscripts with the firm of Doubleday, Page and Company, and soon undertook a variety of literary jobs as editor and columnist for various periodicals.

In 1917 he published his first novel, *Parnassus on Wheels*, which was the real beginning of an enormous output of essays, novels, poems and editions that eventually amounted to over fifty titles. He was an editor of the Book-of-the-Month Club, a columnist and contributing editor for the *Saturday Review*, and a reader for various publishers, and he collaborated in producing *Bartlett's Quotations*. Activities of this kind, together with his prolific independent publications, made him a familiar, almost an unavoidable figure to the reading public.

Morley wrote in all of the genres, including the drama, but his most significant productions are his novel, *Kitty Foyle*, and his numerous essays, which include literary opinion in the form of comments on writers and introductions, and brief, masterly performances on such humble subjects as "The Art of Walking," "On Filling an Inkwell," "Tadpoles" and "Doors," *Kitty Foyle* is a realistic narrative about the misfortunes of its heroine which recalls George Moore's *Esther Waters* rather than any work by Gissing, and is thoroughly uncharacteristic of Morley. Most of his production is that of a relaxed, cheerful, pipe-smoking booklover who is

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eager to recommend his favorite authors and tell anecdotes about his travels and daily life. His usual style is in the whimsical, bookish, intimate and witty tone of a devoted reader whose normal environments are the publisher's office, the library and the bookshop. He was, for example, a Sherlock Holmes enthusiast, founded a club called the Baker Street Irregulars, and made use of Holmesiana in his columns. He also had a special taste for the out-of-the-way and out-of-print, and this taste no doubt led him to Gissing.

I was unable to find that he had devoted any of his dozens of essays to Gissing until Pierre Coustillas informed me that his 1929 collection, *Off the Deep End*, contained "A Note on George Gissing." In this piece, written to greet the Modern Library edition of *New Grub Street*, Morley attempts to give his genuine, but limited admiration for Gissing its exact dimensions. He strongly recommends *New Grub Street*, but with characteristic benignity suggests that its portrayal of the evils of the publishing world is exaggerated. He then turns to the question of Gissing's paradoxical attraction for the small group of enthusiasts to which he himself belongs, saying "each inoculate wonders in his private skull what anyone else could find relishable in books so mournful, prosy and ironic."

Morley first read *The Odd Women* at about this time, and his judgment of it is sharply ambiguous. He reports that the sequence of unremitting woes in its first few pages, where Dr. Madden and three of his daughters are dispatched in quick succession, gave him something to laugh at when he was in a low mood. But after what he considers an absurd beginning, there is "really fine stuff," and he especially admires the character of Rhoda Nunn. In a memorable formulation, Morley concludes that Gissing tormented his characters in order to express his theories of "human happiness and decency." He is "the ideal novelist for moments of depression."

Many of Morley's works contain allusions which imply that Gissing was a familiar figure, but hardly reveal who he was or why Morley liked him. The title establishment of his 1921

novel, *The Haunted Bookshop*, is located on a street in Brooklyn implausibly named Gissing Street, which is intersected by other literary thoroughfares such as Hazlitt Street and Wordsworth Avenue – all, of course, perfectly fictional. As a result, while Gissing's name appears frequently in the pages of the novel, there is nothing substantive about him in it. A list

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of favorite books in the inner sanctum of the bookshop's owner, Roger Mifflin (a personage held over from *Parnassus on Wheels*), begins with the poems of Francis Thompson and ends with *The House of Cobwebs*. At one point Mifflin tells his young woman assistant that she ought to read Gissing's work, and threatens to read "A Charming Family" from *The House of Cobwebs* to her, but his wife prevents this, and instead he gives the girl the book so that she can read it in bed. What might be called a Gissing-like atmosphere is present, for books and reading are constantly mentioned, and Mifflin refuses to advertise or become engaged in serious business, and says that he has moved to Gissing Street to get away from "the ordinary rules of commerce." It is clear that Morley, like his character, found Gissing to be a congenial spirit.

Unfortunately, the novel itself is a rather tiresome story about a young woman from the country who comes to work in the Brooklyn bookshop run by the oppressively kind Mr. Mifflin. It involves a foolish plot about the capture of a German spy which can hardly be excused on the ground that it was meant to appeal to sentiments still in circulation so soon after World War I.

1921 was also the year of the ballade republished in the *Gissing Newsletter*. Morley wrote a great deal of light verse, and the ballade was a favorite form. The allusion to Gissing in the poem is characteristic – it projects Morley's love of little-known books, but says nothing about the author. He did not reprint it in his collection of verse, *Parson's Pleasure* (named after a bathing spot at Oxford on the Isis), but the volume does contain a "Ballade of Librolarceny" whose refrain is "Where are the books that I have lent?" and which mentions, among many others, "Where are my Gissings gone, I hint? | Whose bookcase do my Conrads fill?" The wish he expressed in the first ballade was fulfilled, for Morley records that he was "united in holy booklock" with a copy of *By the Ionian Sea* on the day that the man who came daily to stoke the furnace brought a puppy for the children. The dog was named "Haphazard Gissing I," to commemorate this acquisition, and thereafter played a prominent part in Morley's writings.

The dog is the protagonist of his 1922 novel, *Where the Blue Begins*. Originally intended for the Morley children as a story about their dog, it grew irresistibly into a novel in which the dog, Gissing, behaves in every respect like a human being, being served by a butler, working for a time as a manager in a department store, entering the church and going to sea. The canine

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Gissing is supposed to be pursuing some ultimate truth about life, and while Morley thought of *Where the Blue Begins* as a quasi-religious fable, it was published as a children's book and was his first great success. It has no relation whatever to the author, Gissing, and Morley rather apologetically admitted it, saying: "I realized very well when I wrote a book using George Gissing's name for a character of somewhat enigmatic nature, that it was an indefensible thing to do, but that character would accept no other name. I have often thought apologetically about this because I know that a good many readers have supposed that there might be some subtle satire intended. There was none."

The *Atlantic Monthly* article listed in Wolff's secondary bibliography, "Pebbles from Gissing Pond," is a fuller version of a passage from one of the talks Morley gave in 1930 when he was awarded a Rosenbach Fellowship in Bibliography. (These lectures were published as a volume titled *Ex Libris Clarissimis*, which is the preceding item in Wolff's bibliography.) He says there that he suggested to the publisher he worked for – no doubt, Doubleday, Page –

that some of Gissing's novels be reprinted, and that the suggestion was met with a "look of dismay" from the editorial board. He wanted to acquire a first edition of the *Ryecroft Papers* (though he does not say whether he ever succeeded), and expresses envy of those who can look forward to reading the book for the first time. There follows an anecdote. While waiting at what he discreetly calls an Italian restaurant near Washington Square in New York (the essay published in the *Atlantic Monthly* openly calls it a speakeasy), he met a woman who volubly praised a book that had meant much to her, though she could not recall its name. But Morley and another man could identify it, from her description, as *Ryecroft*.

Gissing, says Morley, would have needed this woman's devotion. "He had magnificent powers," says Morley, but never showed a happy relation between the sexes – a very quiet suggestion that his failure reflected his own experience. "Gissing," he says, "is one of the few authors for whom I have ever deliberately gone to the dealers in rarity and bought first editions." But the only first editions he mentions are *The Odd Women*, and the copy of *By the Ionian Sea* which led him to name his dog after its author. He informs his audience that the inscribed copy of *Ryecroft* which Gissing gave to Morley Roberts during the latter's visit to the dying author at St. Jean de Luz was never returned by the American friend to whom it was lent.

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It is therefore probably still in the country, and Morley archly concludes by asking his listeners to let him know if it is found, "so we can get in touch with the man to whom it really belongs."

Three of the essays about "Gissing" in the Morley canon are devoted to the dog. The one called "Gissing" recounts the dog's arrival, and tells how he jumped into a pond not far from Morley's Long Island home to retrieve a stick; as a result, the pond was dubbed "Gissing Pond." "Gissing Joins a Country Club" is a lighthearted treatment of the dog's exile to the Bide-a-Wee Home for Friendless Animals after he had threatened to bite the neighbor's children. "A Letter from Gissing" is purportedly a communication from this establishment in which the dog reports that the other dogs questioned him about his odd name, and he said that he was named after a writer, "but none of the roughnecks had ever heard of him." At the time, this was a common situation among people, as well as dogs, and it was one which Morley was doing his part to correct.

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The Gissing Family Remembered:  
A Letter from J. W. Walker to James Digby Firth

Pierre Coustillas

Anyone who has enquired into the geographical and social background of the Gissing family from the 1850s to the First World War is familiar with the full-length history of Wakefield brought out by J. W. Walker in 1934, *Wakefield: Its History and People*, which was reissued in a revised and enlarged form in 1939 and reprinted in 1967 with a preface by H. Milnes Walker. In its second format the account of the city's history extends to over 700 pages published in two volumes which are profusely illustrated and, although several other books on Wakefield are essential to local historians and to scholars interested in the Gissings and their

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friends, Walker's magnum opus still is and is likely to remain for years *the* book on Wakefield. However, many grateful users of the two volumes must have regretted that the Gissing family appears nowhere in these, the reason being obviously that the author refrained from mentioning

one of the city's most famous sons because of a certain unfortunate incident in his early life. A man who has a word to say of the Binks and Benington families, W. S. Banks and Miss Milner, one feels, cannot have been unaware that Gissing was a familiar name in Wakefield for seven or eight decades.

Evidence of this was produced a couple of years ago when a copy of Thomas Waller Gissing's book, *The Ferns and Fern Allies of Wakefield and Its Neighbourhood* (1862), with an interesting letter inserted, was offered at an auction sale and acquired by a London antiquarian bookseller who is a regular contributor to the *Times Literary Supplement*. The letter, printed below, was written by John William Walker at the age of eighty-two, and it is clear that it was a reply to an enquiry made by its recipient, James Digby Firth, F.L.S., whose bookplate is pasted on the inside front cover of the book.

The writer of the letter is identified at some length in the preface of two and a half pages to his history of Wakefield. "John William Walker," writes his relative H. Milnes Walker, "was the son of Thomas Walker, a medical practitioner. Members of his family had been doctors since the seventeenth century, the earliest reference to the family being in a pledge at Wakefield Manor Court in 1274. [...] Born in 1859 and qualifying in medicine in 1882, Walker entered his father's practice the following year, [and] married Constance Elizabeth Holdsworth, daughter of Dr. Samuel Holdsworth, a descendant of John de Haldeworthe of Haldeworth near Hipperholme [...] As Honorary Surgeon to the Clayton Hospital at Wakefield from 1887 until his retirement in 1920 he gave much of his time to the surgical work of the hospital and was responsible for many improvements; his work as a surgeon was recognised by his election in 1941 to the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, an honour which gave him great personal pleasure."

Walker was a very active man with many cultural interests. He played a prominent part in the educational and charitable organisations of Wakefield and was a distinguished local archaeologist. His interest in local history has been traced back to the time when he was a medical student in London and an assiduous reader at the British Museum and the Public

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Record Office. It is not unreasonable to suppose that he may have found himself in the former place when Gissing was working there in the early 1880s. He joined the Yorkshire Archaeological Society, on whose notepaper his letter to Firth is written, in 1884 and was to become its President fifty-four years later, after holding at various times, we are told by H. Milnes Walker, "the position of joint honorary Secretary, honorary Treasurer and Vice-President." He founded the Wakefield Historical Society in 1924 and was its President until 1948. In a handwritten note which he may have intended to use as a dedication to a new edition of his history of Wakefield, he says he spent his middle years in Berkshire. The Cheshire address he wrote from in 1941 would seem to have been his last but one, for he died at Churchill Court, in Somerset, in February 1953. He was the author of a variety of books and articles connected with Wakefield, the bulk of which appeared after his retirement, from the 1920s to the 1950s.

His letter to Firth about the Gissing family is remarkable for the accuracy of the information it contains. Usually the factual information on the subject that appeared before the 1960s is riddled with mistakes. Even the author of the obituary of Algernon Gissing in the *Evesham Journal* (13 February 1937), although exceptionally knowledgeable about the Gissings, the Bedfords and the Russells, made some errors. Walker must have been a man who cared for accuracy. It is pleasant to note that he claimed to remember Thomas Waller Gissing well, for he was only eleven at the time George's father died in 1870; pleasant also to read that he describes him as "a very intellectual man" and "a very good botanist." The next point in his letter is confirmed by a photograph of the members of the Microscopical Society taken on 19 March

1862. On this photograph – a variant of which, obviously taken on the same day, has recently emerged from oblivion – are to be seen (standing from left to right) John Binks, Dr. J. D. Moore, Mr. Naylor, T. W. Gissing, and Dr. Milner, his friend, the brother of the novelist's first schoolmistress, of whom a portrait has also been recently discovered; and (sitting from left to right) Mr. J. Wainwright, a solicitor, Dr. Samuel Holdsworth (J. W. Walker's future father-in-law), Dr. T. G. Wright, Dr. Thomas Walker (J. W. Walker's father) and one P. W. Jones, the West Riding Asylum surgeon. With characteristic prudence, Walker had first written that T. W. Gissing "died about 1870, but I am not sure of the exact year." He obviously checked before posting his letter.

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The book which, it seems, he was offering to sell for 3/6 does indeed contain a list of 193 subscribers, with additions (2) and corrections (3) that testify to T. W. Gissing's own concern for accuracy. Thus, where in the main list we read: "Waddington, E. Esq., L.R.C.P.," we find in the Additions and Corrections: "Waddington, E. Esq., Member of the King and Queen's College of Physicians, Dublin, L.R.C.P., Edinburgh." The list, as one could expect, includes "Walker, T. Esq., Surgeon" and "Holdsworth, S. Esq., M.D.," not to speak of many of T. W. Gissing's friends and acquaintances such as the Rev. W. T. Alderson, the Wakefield Prison chaplain (whose grandchildren Ellen Gissing taught in the late 1880s), W. S. Banks, John Binks, Matthew Bussey Hick, E. A. Leatham, the Wakefield M. P., R. B. Mackie who was to be the latter's successor at Westminster, George Mander (whom George mentions in his letters to Algernon), William Medley, the Derby chemist, and, last but not least, the quasi-mythical Miss Whittington, who subscribed for six copies!

New to us is the information that the contents of T. W. Gissing's second botany book, *Materials for a Flora of Wakefield*, had first appeared in *The Naturalist* in 1866.

Walker must have been a diligent collector of information on the inhabitants of Wakefield and their descendants. His knowledge of the Gissing genealogy was, for an outsider, quite sound. He gives the three sons of Thomas Waller Gissing in the correct order and happens to know that Algernon was a solicitor some sixty years earlier; he also knows that Margaret and Ellen, who died in 1930 and 1938 respectively, once kept a children's school in Wakefield, and that they went to live in Aysgarth. Walter, he correctly records, was killed in the Great War, and he gives Alfred's address accurately, as though he had been in touch with him.

Why indeed did Walker choose not to write a paragraph on the Gissings in his history of Wakefield? Short of mentioning George's literary achievement, he might at least have given his readers some account of the many activities of Thomas Waller Gissing as a pharmaceutical chemist, botanist, amateur poet and local Liberal politician. While collecting information on life in Wakefield in the 1850s and 1860s he doubtless came across his name dozens of times. But Walker, although not in the sense Gissing gave the phrase in *New Grub Street*, was a man of the day. Born a Victorian, only two years younger than Gissing, he remained a Victorian in the reign of George VI – and Elizabeth II.

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THE YORKSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
(Founded 1884)

President: J. W. Walker, O.B.E., F.S.A.

Twemlow Hall,  
Holmes Chapel,  
via Crewe  
4 August 1941

Dear Mr. Firth,

I well remember T. W. Gissing, he was a chemist in Wakefield, a very intellectual man, a member of the Wakefield Microscopical Society, as was also my father and father-in-law.

He died in 1870, but I am not sure of the exact month. Born at Halesworth in Suffolk, 1829.

His "The Ferns and Fern Allies of Wakefield and its neighbourhood" is a small 8vo. of 54 pages and 26 coloured plates of ferns illustrated by J. E. Sowerby, printed by R. Micklethwaite of Wakefield in 1862. In second hand catalogues it is usually priced at about 3/6.

The book was issued to subscribers, of whom there were nearly 200.

"Materials for a Flora of Wakefield" was printed in 1867 by J. Van Voorst, Paternoster Row & Geo. Tindall, Huddersfield, first printed in "The Naturalist," 1866.

Gissing had 3 sons & 2 daughters.

The eldest was George, the novelist; the second William, and the third Algernon, a solicitor; all are now dead. The daughters kept a children's school in Wakefield and were very successful, and ultimately went to live at Aysgarth where they died.

George Gissing had two sons. Walter was killed in the Great War, Alfred is still living, I believe; was at Barbon, Carnforth, Westmorland, but I believe now at Aysgarth.

T. W. Gissing was a very good botanist, and much respected in Wakefield, where he held a very good position.

I hope the above may be of some interest to you.

Would you care to join The Yorkshire Archaeological Society? If so I should be very pleased to propose you at the next Council Meeting.

Sincerely yours,

J. W. Walker

J. Digby Firth Esq., 347 Otley Road, Leeds 6

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#### Gissing in Italy: a Second View

George Gissing, *Da Venezia allo Stretto di Messina*, Introduction and translation by Francesco Badolato, Roma: Herder Editore, 1989, pp. 228.

If it is possible today to speak of a reputation of George Gissing in Italy, certainly a key role has been played by Francesco Badolato, who, for several years now, has focused his research on the work of the Victorian author. Always with great competence, and I would say with philological acumen, Badolato has not only edited many of Gissing's texts – and the volume *Da Venezia allo Stretto di Messina* is the latest example of this kind of endeavour –, but has given an original contribution to the study of the links that exist between Gissing and Italian culture. In many articles and essays – invariably stimulating and rich in source material – the Italian scholar analyzes how the novelist's imagination was influenced by the culture-laden landscapes and how these same landscapes stimulated his already aroused sensibility to the classical world. As Gissing himself writes in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, "to think of Italy was to feel myself goaded by a longing which, at times, made me literally ill; I, too [like Goethe], had put aside my Latin books, simply because I could not endure the torment of imagination they caused me" (Autumn XIX). For Gissing, Italy represents all this – and *Da Venezia allo Stretto di Messina* is the vivid and palpitating diary of this Italian "illness." In fact, the present volume is the translation of the journal Gissing kept during his three trips to Italy – precisely from October 1888 to February 1889 (from p. 34 to p. 138 of the text), from

November 1889 to February 1890 (from p. 141 to p. 163) and, lastly, from September 1897 to April 1898 (from p. 167 to p. 220).

Gissing's manuscript, now held by the New York Public Library, was edited and published by Pierre Coustillas with the title *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (1978). As Badolato justly observes in his Introduction to the text: "Perusing the pages dealing with Italy, we note that Gissing

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distinguishes himself not only as a humanist, historian, art critic and sociologist, but is especially memorable for his human warmth and candour, which he demonstrates each time he mingles with the simple and humble folk, wanting to understand his fellow-man and to apprehend the changes that have taken place in those same areas which he visited through the centuries" (p. 24). Undoubtedly, from the pages of the *Diary* emerges a completely new image of the writer which enriches and corrects the portrait – often coldly intellectual and detached from common humanity – that has been handed over to us by Gissing's biographers.

But the book is particularly useful to the Italian scholar because it brings to light *the writer's method*. Gissing, before being a travelling diarist (he often amused himself by describing landscapes and copying inscriptions on tombstones), is above all a writer who transmutes this particular kind of *écriture* into literature. In this respect, it is worth underlining that Badolato's sensitive translation, always very careful in not "forcing" the original text, offers to the Italian audience pages of very interesting reading. For example, Gissing's annotations regarding his visit to Naples is brilliantly translated as "Da Porta Capuana la strada si snoda attraverso la parte più *disgustosa* di Napoli [...] Le case più piccole sono luride, sporche in modo inverosimile. Poco più avanti si raggiunge il luogo dove tutti i carri di Napoli sembrano versare i loro carichi di rifiuti. C'è un terribile odore che si estende attorno per il raggio di un miglio. Dal lato opposto ci sono gli agricoltori i quali sembrano usare i rifiuti della città come concime. E' difficile descrivere la ripugnanza che si prova alla visita del quartiere" (p. 45). The above passage is the translation of the following lines: "From the Porta Capuana the road leads through the most disagreeable part of Naples [...] The smaller houses indescribably filthy. A little further on, and you reach the place where all the dirt-carts of Naples seem to shoot their loads; there is a horrible stench for about a mile of road. On either side, market-gardens which appear to use the filth of the town as manure. The ugliness of the district cannot be described" (*Diary*, p. 69). But this is not the Italy sought after by the author. His visit to Paestum, which took place several days after, repaid him for all his labours: "The Temple of Neptune, a golden brown; contrasting strongly with the white of the so-called Basilica, next to it. I picked a fragment of marble, and, at same time a bit of the travertine; the one quite cold in the hand, the other warm. Exquisite views all round. Blue line of sea, with Capri and the Sorrento peninsula.

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But the most striking is to stand in the middle of the temple of Neptune [...] Think that these columns have echoed to the Greek speech!" (*Diary*, p. 75). This is the real Italy discovered by the writer – a land of contrasts – and for this reason rendered all the more fascinating and suggestive. These conflicting scenes make up Gissing's Italy, which in another work exclusively devoted to its southern parts, *By the Ionian Sea* (1900), give us a passionate testimony of his quest for a classical culture that, in a society completely dedicated to the cult of Mammon, only survives in those ruins that initially lured him during his pilgrimage to *Magna Graecia*. It is not going too far to say that, in a way, the contrast between the past and the present is implicitly the key note of this book which conveys the same suggestions we can find in the *Diary*. It should be evident by now that Gissing's trips to Italy, instead of being journeys



towards a definite geographical entity, are attempts to return to the past – a past which seems to constitute the only veritable certainty of this Victorian writer.

During his Roman sojourn, Gissing avidly notes in his journal: “As I ascend homewards from the Forum, I always hear singing in my head: *Dum Capitolium / Scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex*. [So long as with the silent virgin the pontiff shall ascend the Capitol.] After dinner, home and read Horace’s First Epistle. – At nine o’clock went out, to see for the first time the aspect of Rome at night” (*Diary*, Saturday, December 8, p. 90). Wherever he is, Gissing seems to have a double response towards his environment: the present is always a source of delusion and semantically neutral while the past, enlivened by its classicism, is what gives impetus to his language. It is this sense of the past that makes Rome by night a different city, exciting but unreal at the same time.

Yet this nostalgic traveller is not really a character with a truncated sensibility, unable to appreciate the present. Apart from those moments where he abandons himself completely to the emotion aroused by a cultural discovery of unrepeatable uniqueness – which happens many a time –, Gissing is an attentive observer of the daily life around him, so much so, that the pages of his diary, very often, contain acute sociological notations, which, as Badolato noted, are of great help in the understanding of the socioeconomic condition of Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. – Francesco Marroni, University of Pescara.

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#### A Note of Thanks

In his farewell address to our readers, “From Dorking to Wakefield,” Chris Kohler thanked various persons who were instrumental in producing and distributing the *Gissing Newsletter* for twenty-two years. In turn we must thank him warmly for his efficiency and good humour as publisher of the *Newsletter*. His interest in Gissing became noticeable from across the Channel in 1964 when he offered some Gissing titles in his very first catalogue, and I responded enthusiastically. Five years later, that is at a time when selling books by Gissing first meant finding second-hand copies, he took over the business side of the *Newsletter* and from then on gave much time to it which he might well have devoted to other activities, for Chris Kohler is not solely associated with books and manuscripts. For years, not only did he keep the *Newsletter* alive, but he allowed it to develop in size, and assuredly encouraged Gissing studies more than anyone in the book trade. Many scholars and earnest readers of the novelist’s works could testify to his willingness to help even in matters that do not pertain to bookselling proper. Consequently it is with some nostalgia as well as heartfelt gratitude that I, together with Jacob Korg and Shigeru Koike, see him withdraw from the foreground of the Gissing scene, more especially as publisher of the *Gissing Newsletter*. May he prosper for many years!

P. C.

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#### Notes and News

With great regret we announce the death of Frank Woodman of St. Bees, who was known to our readers as the author of two articles on Gissing and the Lake District and on Gissing’s relationship with G. C. Williamson. Frank Woodman, a chemical engineer by profession and a

lifelong Gissing enthusiast, was a quiet, disinterested man who was always prepared to help, and gladly attended any ceremony concerning his favourite author. Many of us will remember seeing him in Wakefield last May when the Gissing Centre was formally opened.

A day school on "Three Victorian Novelists," chaired by Dr. David Grylls, will be held in the Department for External Studies, Rewley House, Wellington Square, Oxford on Saturday, 16 March 1991. Julian Thompson will discuss *Barchester Towers*, Peter Kemp will speak of *Middlemarch* and David Grylls will devote his own lecture to *New Grub Street*. The three speakers will attempt to relate the novel they discuss to the author's work as a whole and to the development of Victorian fiction. A review by David Grylls of John Sloan's book *George Gissing: The Cultural Challenge* is soon to appear in *Notes and Queries*, so is an entry on *New Grub Street* he has contributed to a new edition of *The Reference Guide to English Literature* (St. James Press).

On Sunday, 21 October, the topic of "Bookshelf," a radio programme transmitted on BBC Radio 4, was biography, and the speakers included the novelists Paul Bailey and Margaret Fowler. There was much discussion of Gissing's view that "the only true biographies are to be found in novels," but "true" was misquoted as "good" and there was disagreement about what Gissing meant, since apparently nobody knew the context of his statement. The same proposition was debated at the first-ever Waterstone's Debate in London on Tuesday, 6 November. It was opposed by the biographer Richard Holmes, who compared a biography to "a handshake down the years, that can become an arm-wrestle." The *Sunday Times* for 11 November had a paragraph on the subject. We are grateful to Dr. Grylls for this information.

Shirley Slotnick has sent a cutting from the *New York Times* for 31 August in which Gissing is mentioned in a familiar context. The article, entitled "The Many Similarities at the Ends of Centuries," is a review by Michiko Kakutani of Elaine Showalter's recent book, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (Viking, \$19.95). The phrase "sexual anarchy" is borrowed from Gissing's letter to Bertz of 2 June 1893. It occurs in a paragraph which has often been in the minds and under the pens of students of feminism in the 1890s.

Elaine Showalter has written on Gissing and women on several occasions, notably in her introduction to the New American Library edition of *The Odd Women*. Michiko Kakutani is not enthusiastic about the book under review. "This sort of approach to criticism," the reviewer concludes, "with its arbitrary choice of examples and its insistence on seeing everything in terms of sexual politics, ultimately diminishes many of the works it seeks to illuminate: it substitutes ideology for esthetics, and in doing so turns literature from a rich and ambiguity-filled art form into a fuzzy branch of sociology."

For some years Shirley Slotnick has belonged to an informal reading group. A dozen people meet eight times a year and spend six or seven hours discussing some literary work which has been read by all the participants. One such meeting was held at her Brooklyn home on 30 September, and it was devoted to *A Life's Morning*. Video films on Gissing and his novel, available from The Gissing Trust, were shown, to the delight of Shirley Slotnick's friends, some of whom are now reading other books by Gissing.

Dr. Mauro Minervino of the University of Calabria has practically completed his book on

Gissing. It will be published by Rubettino, of Soveria Mannelli, Calabria. On 10 November he began a series of talks on Radio 3-Regione Calabria with one on Gissing. The series is to continue for another twelve weeks, on Saturdays at 2.15 p.m. The programme is intended for Calabrian people with an interest in cultural matters. (Information received from Francesco Badolato.)

Mr. Hiroshi Takayama has sent a copy of his new book, the title of which, literally translated, means "The Odd Aspects of the Fin-de-Siècle" (Tokyo: Sanseido). The author discusses Rachel Bowlby's book, *Just Looking*, in some of his chapters. Shigeru Koike reports that the volume contains no reference to Gissing.

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#### Recent Publications

William Amos, *The Originals: Who's Really Who in Fiction*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1985.

The author correctly records that, in Morley Roberts's *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, Maitland stands for Gissing. He gives a sketchy account of the Manchester episode and its immediate consequences. But William Amos makes a few extraordinary statements – of course Gissing was not sent to Owens College by his father, nor did he go to Manchester to marry Nell on his return from America in late 1877 (p. 333). Whether Masterman in H. G. Wells's *Kipps* (1905) is George Gissing is likely to remain doubtful (p. 345). Not so the resemblances between the circumstances of Gissing's death and those of Edward Ponderevo in *Tono-Bungay* (1909). The French *religieuse*, in actual life as well as in the book, had dirty nails (p. 413).

Martin Seymour-Smith, *Guide to Modern World Literature*, London: Macmillan, 1985. Defines Gissing's realism on p. xxiii ("a drabness of atmosphere which is so severe that it is richly suggestive") and opens his section on "British Literature" with paragraphs on Gissing. He comments at some length on *Born in Exile* (pp. 211-12) and offers a brief comparison between Gissing's fiction and Orwell's on p. 300.

Michael Draper, *H. G. Wells* (Macmillan Modern Novelists), London: Macmillan, 1987.

Gissing appears on pp. 4, 73, 75 and 96. Michael Draper, who has been the editor of *The Wellsian* since 1985, mentions the friendship between the two writers, quotes the passage about Gissing's novels in *The Wheels of Chance*, and echoes Wells's preposterous views on Gissing's classical education.

Andrew Davies, *Literary London*, London: Macmillan, 1988. Contains several references to Gissing and his novels in connection with Clerkenwell (*The Nether World*), the British Museum (*New Grub Street* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*) as well as what the critic calls Fitzrovia. See chapters 2, 4, 7 and 8.

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J. R. Hammond, *H. G. Wells and the Modern World*, London: Macmillan, 1988. Mr. Hammond refers to Gissing on pp. 7, 25 and 148. He deduces from Wells's correspondence with James, Gissing and Bennett that the writing of Wells's novels involved a lengthy process of revision and stresses his prescience as a critic of Stephen Crane, Gissing, Conan Doyle,

Turgenev, Tolstoy and others. *The World of William Clissold* is the world “of a man looking back on his past life from a vast perspective of time and presenting a distillation of his experience [...] The result is a text of unusual intimacy, as revealing about Wells as *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* is about Gissing.”

Sally Mitchell (ed.), *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1988. Besides an entry on Gissing on pp. 329-31, has a number of thematic entries in which he appears (the New Woman, urban poverty, social problem fiction, etc).

Owen Knowles, *A Conrad Chronology*, London: Macmillan, 1989. Gissing is mentioned three times: in the entries for 25 December 1899 (like Conrad, he contributed to *The Ghost*, a play by Stephen Crane); June 1901 (he met Conrad at H. G. Wells's, and Conrad showed him the manuscript of “Amy Foster”) and 21 December 1902 (Conrad hears of Gissing's high praise for *Youth and Other Stories*).

Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-c. 1918*, Cambridge University Press, 1989. Connects *Demos* and *The Nether World* with the decadent movement (pp. 162-63). “Gissing's work provides an interesting example of degeneration in the novel, which would merit an extended analysis.” In *The Nether World*, “physiognomy is [...] determining: ‘[Joseph's] face was against him; the worn, sallow features, the eyes which so obviously made a struggle to look with frankness, the vicious lower lip, awoke suspicion and told tales of base experience such as leaves its stamp upon a man for ever.” In *Demos* “the body had been used even more pessimistically and conservatively to signify the inherent physical or rather physiological obstacles to social mobility.” Gissing, Pick contends, affirms a form of racial determinism. Anyone who deals with the question of his affinities with the decadent movement should be aware of

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what Gissing said of Max Nordau's *Degeneration*. Pick's bibliography contains volumes which were familiar to Gissing, notably, besides Nordau's fat tome, Arnold White's *Problems of a Great City* and Ribot's *Heredity*.

Marion Wynne Davies (ed.), *Bloomsbury Guide to English Literature*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1989. Has an entry on Gissing (p. 560) which is about adequate for a reference work of that kind, and two significant mentions of him in chapter V, “The Nineteenth-Century Novel.”

Anon., “Recent Books: II Books Briefly Noted,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 45, no. 1, June 1990, p. 124. A note on John Sloan's book.

Jacob Korg, “Book Reviews,” *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 33, no. 4, Summer 1990, pp. 674-76. Review of *George Gissing: The Cultural Challenge* and *George Gissing at Work*. The same number contains a Gissing bibliography for 1989 which, as usual, is highly selective, yet mentions items which appeared in little-known journals. – An advertisement for *The Collected Letters of George Gissing* is printed on p. 580.

Alfredo Cattabiani, “Viaggi in Italia: Chi capisce e chi no,” *Il Sabato*, Anno XIII, no. 45, 10 November 1990, p. 89. Review of *Da Venezia allo Stretto di Messina*, with a comparison between Montesquieu and Gissing as travellers. Gissing knew what he was writing about.

Francesco Badolato, “‘Uno scherzo di Natura’ di George Gissing, nella stesura originale recuperata da Pierre Coustillas,” *Il Corriere di Roma*, Anno XLIII, no. 584, 15 November 1990, p. 4. A long review article of *A Freak of Nature or Mr. Brogden, City Clerk*.

John Goode, “Unexpected Tales: Hardy and Gissing,” *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920: Essays and Poems in Memory of Ian Fletcher*. Special Series, no. 4, 1990, pp. 145-49. This is a personal assessment of Ian Fletcher’s contribution to Hardy and Gissing studies.

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John Sutherland, *Mrs. Humphry Ward: Eminent Victorian and Preeminent Edwardian*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990. There is an important paragraph, on p. 143, which suggests that Mary Ward borrowed part of her plot in *Marcella* from *Demos*, which she was indeed known to have read.

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### Information for Contributors

*The Gissing Journal* publishes essays and notes on Gissing and his circle. Contributions may deal with biographical, critical, bibliographical and topographical subjects. They should be addressed to the editor, Pierre Coustillas, 10 rue Gay-Lussac, 59110 La Madeleine, France.

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