

THE GISSING JOURNAL

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

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Devil’s Advocate  
George Gissing’s Approach to the Woman Question

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In George Gissing’s novels, women are drawn to the life, ‘red in tooth and claw,’<sup>1</sup> their vitality the natural outcome of the author’s divided imagination. Gissing’s intuitive grasp of the female psyche enabled him to capture the often conflicting aspects of their consciousness, and arguably, this ability to understand and exploit the complexity of their nature, largely explains his controversial attitude to women. The author is frequently exasperated by the women in his novels, but because he usually acknowledges their strengths as well as their weaknesses, he arouses in his readers strongly conflicting emotions – admiration, contempt, even pity. Gissing is almost never judgmental, rather he likes his characters to learn from their experiences, not to be destroyed by them, and his women, often the most maligned characters in his novels, usually have a greater potential for growth than their male counterparts. The deliberate contrasts between negative and positive women, and progressive women and regressive men, register the author’s respect for the courageous, self-improving female, and sympathy for the less able of

her sex, which suggests to me that his rancour is disingenuous, a conscious device designed specifically to signal the deeper concerns underlying his hostility.

In his novels, Gissing argues the case for women by conspicuously inveighing against them, and one has only to look carefully at the often quoted, but frequently misinterpreted, passage from his letter to Eduard Bertz to find compelling evidence of this strategy:

My demand for female “equality” simply means that I am convinced there will be no social peace until women are intellectually trained very much as men are. More than half the misery of life is due to the ignorance & childishness of women. The average woman pretty closely resembles, in all

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intellectual considerations, the average male *idiot* – I speak medically. That state of things is traceable to the lack of education, in all senses of the word. Among our English emancipated women there is a majority of admirable persons; they have lost no single good quality of their sex, & they have gained enormously on the intellectual (& even on the moral) side by the process of enlightenment, — that is to say, of brain-development. I am driven frantic by the crass imbecility of the typical woman. That type must disappear, – or at all events become altogether subordinate. And I believe that the only way of effecting this is to go through a period of what many people will call sexual anarchy. Nothing good will perish; we can trust the forces of nature, which tend to conservation.<sup>2</sup>

For the most part, critics seize upon Gissing’s remarks about women’s “crass imbecility,” and their being on a par with the “average male idiot,” as confirmation of his anti-feminism, and wilfully ignore the rest of the text.<sup>3</sup> But there is a great deal in the passage which suggests that Gissing’s criticism is not so much directed at women, as at the prevailing hierarchy, which operates on the principle of sex discrimination, and effectively precludes females from attaining any form of self-determination. Moreover, the passage deals sympathetically with those who actively challenge the existing rule, going on to discuss emancipated women, of whom the majority are “admirable persons,” having lost none of their female qualities, but having gained vastly in terms of intellect and morality. And if, of the spirited few in the van of the women’s movement for social and educational reform, the majority advance enormously through “a process of enlightenment,” then clearly there is immense potential for the rest of womankind. Given Gissing’s earlier comment that much of life’s misery is caused by women’s “lack of education,” then logically, equality of opportunity holds out the promise of a happier life, not only for women, but for society as a whole.

Significantly, Gissing uses the phrase “nothing good will perish,” rather than “nothing will perish,” as a result of the impending “sexual anarchy,” implying not only that good will be preserved, but also that many social ills will be eliminated.

Gissing’s letter was prompted by his friend’s enthusiastic response to *The Odd Women*, the novel which, he had earlier informed Bertz, would “present those people who, congenitally incapable of true education, have yet been taught to consider themselves too good for manual, or any humble, work. [...] a study of vulgarism – the all but triumphant force of our time. Women will be the chief characters.”<sup>4</sup> In the event, however, the novel is really concerned with

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the causes underlying women’s inferiority, and although *The Odd Women* is indeed about a

group of mentally and socially maladjusted women, the principal female character embodies all the qualities that Gissing found admirable in independent women: Rhoda Nunn, and characters like her, forcibly challenge the author's gloomy prognosis.

Gissing's novels address many social issues – education, marriage, class, poverty –, exposing, through perceptive and ironic characterisation, the specious principles upon which the whole social structure is based; his “most frequent fictional strategy is to take a definable social evil [...] and then to explore its ramifications through a detailed study of personal relations.”<sup>5</sup> So much has been written about Gissing's bitter resentment at having to live among the poor, that his distaste for the impoverished classes is largely undisputed, and assumed to account for his often unsympathetic treatment of the working class in his fiction.<sup>6</sup> Virginia Woolf's article on Gissing claims that, uniquely among writers of his time, he made no secret of the fact that he hated the poor. She argues however that “to hate the vices of the poor is the way to incite the best kind of pity” and that for Gissing “[t]he measure of his bitterness is the measure of his love of good.”<sup>7</sup> I believe that Virginia Woolf has uncovered an important key to the author's work, which not only gives an insight into his negative view of the poor, but also explains his apparently conflicting attitudes towards women. Gissing consistently plays the provocateur in order to arouse his readers' sense of injustice, and in so doing he makes them think, makes them question the actual words on the page. Again in a letter to Bertz, Gissing unconsciously reveals the enabling nature of his work: “It is strange how many letters I get from women, asking for sympathy & advice. I really can't understand what it is in my work that attracts the female mind.”<sup>8</sup>

The nineteenth-century poor remain victims of oppression because they lack the educational opportunity to improve their circumstances; in the case of women however, virtually all, regardless of class, are denied the right of educational equality and, in consequence, remain intellectually incapable of challenging the existing rule. Therefore, in stressing women's shrewishness, or ridiculing their blind acquiescence to social conditioning, Gissing is not reviling women, but rather in revealing the more negative aspects of his female characters, he is demonstrating the helplessness of their situation, and thus exposing the iniquities of social morality, which George Orwell argues, using *The Odd Women* to illustrate his point, is central to all Gissing's work:

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In *The Odd Women* there is not a single major character whose life is not ruined either by having too little money, or by getting it too late in life, or by the pressure of social conventions which are obviously absurd but which cannot be questioned. An elderly spinster crowns a useless life by taking to drink; a pretty young girl marries a man old enough to be her father; a struggling schoolmaster puts off marrying his sweetheart until both of them are middle-aged and withered; a good-natured man is nagged to death by his wife; an exceptionally intelligent, spirited man misses his chance to make an adventurous marriage and relapses into futility; in each case the ultimate reason for the disaster lies in obeying the accepted social code, or in not having enough money to circumvent it.<sup>9</sup>

Orwell's comments give credence to Virginia Woolf's view that hatred evokes pity; that in disparaging human weakness, Gissing is inciting his readers to question the underlying cause of it.

Like many novelists, Gissing uses elderly figures to represent the bedrock of conventional society, but he draws these characters ironically, playing the devil's advocate specifically to reveal the absurdity of immutable social mores. Indoctrinated from birth, the older generation

remains steadfastly resistant to social change, but the response is purely automatic, most of these characters, especially the women, being pathetic, puppet-like creatures functioning mechanically within the limits of their social code. Through women like Mrs. Tyrrell in *Thyrza*, Gissing demonstrates the need for radical social change:

Mrs. Tyrrell was one of those excellently preserved matrons who testify to the wholesome placidity of woman's life in wealthy English homes. Her existence had taken for granted the perfection of the universe; probably she had never thought of a problem which did not solve itself for the pleasant trouble of stating it in refined terms, and certainly it had never occurred to her that social propriety was distinguishable from the Absolute Good. She was not a dull woman, and the opposite of an unfeeling one, but her wits and her heart had both been so subdued to the social code, that it was very difficult for her to entertain seriously any mode of thought or action for which she could not recall a respectable precedent. By nature she was indulgent, of mild disposition, of sunny intelligence; so endowed, circumstances had bidden her regard it as the end of her being to respect conventions, to check her native impulse if ever it went counter to the opinion of Society, to use her intellect for the sole purpose of discovering how far it was permitted to be used.<sup>10</sup>

There are many such characters throughout Gissing's work – Mrs. Warricombe, Mrs. Mutimer and Mrs. Waltham, Mr. Lord, Virginia and Alice Madden and Mr. Widdowson<sup>11</sup> – each a slave to social custom, and it is because of these dinosaurs that Gissing proposes “sexual anarchy.” Annabel Newthorpe's father in *Thyrza* is a rare exception – a ray of hope for the future, perhaps – his relationship with his daughter being:

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of a kind not frequently existing between father and daughter; fellowship in study made them mental comrades, and respect for each other's intellectual powers was added to their natural love. What did they not discuss? From classical archæology to the fire-new theories of the day in art and science, something of all passed at one time or another under their scrutiny. (T: pp. 158-59)

Not all Gissing's socially conditioned characters are old. Paula Tyrrell is out of the same mould as her mother, and as such upholds the patriarchal rule. Fleeting rebellious, Paula is quickly subdued by her authoritarian husband:

Mr. Dalmaine was to the core a politician. He was fond of Paula in a way, but he had discovered since his marriage that she had a certain individuality very distinct from his own, and till this was crushed he could not be satisfied. It was his home policy, at present, to crush Paula's will. He practised upon her the faculties which he would have liked to use in terrorizing a people. (T: p. 368)

At the end of the novel, there is another glimpse of Paula: “still charming, but it must be confessed a trifle vulgarised. Formerly she had not been vulgar at all [...] Mentally, she was at length formed, and to Mr. Dalmaine was due the credit of having formed her” (T: p. 480). Through Paula we see the continuing effect of deeply entrenched paternalism.

Gissing's novels commonly feature ineffectual, repressed females, who are more to be pitied than condemned. But these characters are almost always counterbalanced by free-thinking, self-motivated women, whose intellect and independent spirit undoubtedly arouse the author's greater interest and admiration. Ada Warren, Totty Nancarrow, Mrs. Ormonde, Dora Milvain, Janet Moxey, Mary Barfoot, Rhoda Nunn, Mrs. Abbott and Irene Derwent are sympathetically drawn to demonstrate women's ability to lead fulfilling, self-determined lives.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the feeble women have an important role in Gissing's novels, as victims "trapped in many and various ways, by class, by sex and by money."<sup>13</sup> Isabel Clarendon, Thyrsa Trent, Paula Dalmaine, Marian Yule, the Madden sisters and Alma Rolfe excite Gissing's sympathy because their spirit has been crushed, or warped, by environmental and social conditioning.<sup>14</sup> As David Grylls points out, Gissing has a "gift for empathy" which allowed him "to write understandingly about women," yet his ability to think in oppositions made him also unjust to them.<sup>15</sup>

That Gissing attached great importance to women's education is explicit in his letter to William Blackwood concerning the publication of a new novel:

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I have seen many notices of "Mona Maclean," & must get hold of it. Everything that concerns the education of women – the one interest of our time, the one thing needful – strongly appeals to me.<sup>16</sup>

He believed that culture improved both mind and character, as is evident in his correspondence with his sisters, where he persistently tried to influence their tastes in literature and learning.<sup>17</sup>

Gissing was nevertheless strongly opposed to the proliferation of superficial education, which according to Stephen Lord in *In the Year of Jubilee* turns out:

'trashy, flashy girls, – the kind of girl you see everywhere, high and low, – calling themselves "ladies," – thinking themselves too good for any honest, womanly work. Town and country, it's all the same. They're educated; oh yes, they're educated! What sort of wives do they make, with their education? What sort of mothers are they?'<sup>18</sup>

In the novel, the French sisters are typical representatives of bogus gentility: "[t]hey spoke a peculiar tongue, the product of sham education and mock refinement grafted upon a stock of robust vulgarity. [...] Ada had frequented an "establishment for young ladies" [...] Beatrice had "done" Political Economy; Fanny had "been through" Inorganic Chemistry and Botany' (YOJ: p. 7). Their "sham" education contains not a shred of the character-building culture so vital, in Gissing's view, to true education, and consequently the sisters receive scant sympathy from their creator. In *The Odd Women* however, the Madden sisters reveal the tragic consequences of inadequate training, when through force of circumstances they have to earn their own living, and while Gissing deplores bourgeois pretentiousness, he can fully empathise with society's helpless victims. Each in their own way, the Madden sisters illustrate the plight of the unsupported female in middle-class England.

While Gissing uses the French sisters' specious refinement to demonstrate the superficiality and vulgarity of "sham" education, through Jessica Morgan's misconceived sense of intellectual superiority, he registers its potential for inducing incurable vanity. It is "overweening conceit," not love of culture, that fuels Jessica's lust for useless information:

Her brain was becoming a mere receptacle for dates and definitions, vocabularies and rules syntactic, for thrice-boiled essence of history, ragged scraps of science, quotations at fifth hand, and all the heterogeneous rubbish of a "crammer's" shop. When away from her books, she carried scraps of

paper, with jottings to be committed to memory. Beside her plate at meals lay formulæ and tabulations. She went to bed with a manual and got up with a compendium. (YOJ: pp. 299, 17)

Overwrought with excessive cramming, Jessica's "motive of vanity" deserts her as, with "[n]o hope of 'passing,'" she prepares to "face the terrors, the shame, that waited her at Burlington House." Jessica gains no wisdom from her painful ordeal, rather she exults in the experience, and "[h]er failure to matriculate was forgotten in the sense that she offered a most interesting case of breakdown from undue mental exertion" (YOJ: pp. 225, 266).

Gissing clearly views "sham" education as a spurious substitute for real education, and *In the Year of Jubilee* is a severe indictment of society's disingenuous response to women's demand for educational equality.

Nancy Lord's education had continued until she was eighteen, and though it differed little from that of the French girls, she "deemed herself a highly educated young woman, – 'cultured' was the word she would have used" (p. 14). Untroubled by financial need to seek a career, she nevertheless believed that her education would help her to achieve independence. As a young adult Nancy is totally self-absorbed, and her visit to the Monument during the Jubilee celebrations focuses explicitly on this facet of her nature:

In her conceit of self-importance, she stood there, above the battling millions of men, proof against mystery and dread, untouched by the voices of the past, and in the present seeing only common things, though from an odd point of view. Here her senses seemed to make literal the assumption by which her mind had always been directed: that she – Nancy Lord – was the mid point of the universe. (YOJ: p. 104)

Seeing things "from an odd point of view" is a crucial phrase, because Nancy learns through painful experience just how odd and mistaken her point of view had been. Pre-figuring the pain she is to experience as a result of her seduction by Tarrant on an idyllic afternoon in the Devonshire countryside, Nancy's way both to and from the glade is impeded by briars: on their way back "Tarrant followed, and in the deep leafy way he again helped her to pass the briars. But their hands never touched, and the silence was unbroken until they had issued into the open lane" (YOJ: p. 126). Clearly the tangle of thorns is a warning which Nancy recklessly

disregards, and, as they leave their idyll, Tarrant's mannered silence tacitly foreshadows Nancy's abandonment once he has fulfilled his debt of honour.

Forced by her inheritance into secrecy about her marriage, with child, and about to be deserted by her husband, Nancy tells Tarrant that she feels that she is in "threefold bondage": "To you, because I love you, and couldn't cease loving you, however I tried. Then, to my father's will, which makes me live in hiding, as if I were a criminal. And then [...] [b]efore long some one else will rule over me. – What an exchange I have made! And I was going to be so independent.' Throughout her trials and tribulations, Nancy is unconscious of her growth in self-reliance and her development as a compassionate human being: "[t]he severity of her self-judgment, and the indulgence tempering her attitude towards Tarrant, declared a love which had survived its phase of youthful passion. But Nancy did not recognise this symptom of moral growth" (YOJ: pp. 208, 290-91).

Disappointingly, Nancy's moral growth suppresses her independent spirit, and the novel ends with her unqualified acceptance of her husband's selfish terms and conditions. One can only assume that Gissing is again signalling that "sham" education is no substitute for real education, offering as it does superficial refinement in place of genuine learning. Nancy's dreams of independence were unsoundly based, because she had neither the qualifications, nor the motivation, to achieve her goal. What does emerge however is Nancy's inherent capacity to fend for herself, had this latent quality been fully developed.

Despite its potential to counteract social ills, Gissing appears to have been ambivalent about the merits of mass education. This leads Gillian Tindall to believe that "[i]n theory, he had a reformer's fervour for the idea that the riches of literature and intellect should be made accessible to all [...] In practice [...] he seems to have been repelled to see [...] Education travestied into a means to spurious gentility or vulgar *arrivisme*."<sup>19</sup> However, this argument takes no account of irony which, Gissing complained to Gabrielle Fleury, was an aspect of his work consistently overlooked by critics:

The truth is, girlie, that very few people in England have intelligence in art. My motives are too subtle. You know that I constantly use *irony*; and this is never understand [sic]; it is all taken in the most stupid literal sense.<sup>20</sup>

As Brian Walker's thesis maintains, the ironic viewpoint "accepts and presents life as a juxtaposition of two mutually incompatible ways of seeing things." It is "a method not of seeing

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'true' meanings beneath 'false' pictures, but of seeing both aspects as conditioned and determined by the other."<sup>21</sup> Assuming that Gissing sincerely believes that only genuine education can ensure women's independence, then Nancy's regression clearly demonstrates the need for educational reform. Nancy has proved her capacity to act independently, but she is not equipped educationally to follow this through on a practical level. It seems barely credible that Gissing intends us to see Nancy's compliance with Tarrant's double standards as total capitulation, when she has already demonstrated her capacity for personal growth by supporting both herself and her child independently of her husband. As a reviewer of *In the Year of Jubilee* pointed out:

The matron who cultivates deliberate ignorance of life will see no merit in Nancy, and will be shocked by the terms on which Tarrant and his wife eventually make the stability of their happiness.<sup>22</sup>

As an alternative to the traditional role of women, *The Odd Women* "upholds the dignity of singleness"<sup>23</sup> through Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot, "who attempt to give the 'odd' women enough practical education to enable them to survive economically without marrying."<sup>24</sup> Although Alice, Virginia and Monica Madden remain victims of social constraints, others do not; trained and guided by Rhoda and Mary, most of the single women in the novel affirm their right to equality and independence, in accordance with Mary's simple logic:

...girls are to be brought up to a calling in life, just as men are. It's because they have no calling that, when need comes, they all offer themselves as teachers. [...] We can't earn money in any other way, but we can teach children! A man only becomes a schoolmaster or tutor when he has gone through laborious preparation [...] and only a very few men, comparatively, choose that line of work. Women must have just as wide a choice.<sup>25</sup>

Rhoda Nunn is undoubtedly Gissing's most convincing depiction of female independence, "unique in the energy and articulacy with which she challenges society's conventions, as she feels them threatening her right to self-determination."<sup>26</sup> Although Rhoda has an egoistic centre which tends to subvert her basic integrity, Gissing's sensitive characterisation discloses the essential selflessness underpinning her commitment to female emancipation. Unlike Mary Barfoot, Rhoda earns her independence only after a long struggle, which generates a fierce hostility towards male-dominated institutions; she sees marriage especially as an insidious trap,

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in which women fritter away their empty lives. Far more moderate in her views, Mary Barfoot warns Rhoda that her hatred is irrational:

'You have come to dislike the very thought of marriage – and everything of that kind. I think it's a danger you ought to have avoided. True we wish to prevent girls from marrying just for the sake of being supported, and from degrading themselves as poor Bella Royston has done; but surely between ourselves we can admit that the vast majority of women would lead a wasted life if they did not marry. [...] Don't you blame the institution of marriage with what is chargeable to human fate? A vain and miserable life is the lot of nearly all mortals. Most women, whether they marry or not, will suffer and commit endless follies.' (TOW: p. 59)

Bella Royston's suicide brings to a head the rapidly developing crisis between Rhoda and Mary over their differing views on female emancipation. Rhoda considers that Mary is wrong in offering help to the fallen Bella because she was the wrong type of girl to begin with; one of the "profitless average," whose "nature was corrupted with sentimentality" (TOW: pp. 57, 58). Unlike Rhoda, Mary believes that hard-line feminism is counter-productive, and she sees women's independence as an alternative to, not a substitute for, marriage:

She did not seek to become known as the leader of a "movement," yet her quiet work was probably more effectual than the public career of women who propagandize for female emancipation. Her aim was to draw from the overstocked profession of teaching as many capable young women as she could lay hands on, and to fit them for certain of the pursuits nowadays thrown open to their sex. She held the conviction that whatever man could do, woman could do equally well – those tasks only excepted which demand great physical strength. (TOW: p. 54)

More aware than Rhoda of the complexities of human nature, Mary is supportive rather than censorial when students fail, her major concern being that of creating for them "the opportunity to challenge the tyrannous limitations imposed upon them by society and forge meaningful lives for themselves."<sup>27</sup> Although Rhoda insists that she has not "the slightest regret" that her harshness had such tragic consequences, the incident marks the beginning of a process of learning which continues through her relationship with Barfoot, and culminates in recognizable moral growth (TOW: p. 130).

As with their education, Gissing shows his support for women's independence by conspicuously arguing against it. He uses Rhoda's extremism purposefully to undermine the

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rationale of the feminist argument, but at the same time, her ability to compromise, and Mary's gradualism, reinforce its logic. Rhoda's true worth emerges through her relationship with Barfoot, when her integrity is put to the ultimate test. Throughout the novel, Rhoda's potentially harmful fanaticism is measured against Mary's kindly moderatism, and in the course of painful experience, Rhoda learns to be more tolerant of human fallibility. *The Odd Women* is not radical in its approach to change, but the necessity for change is nevertheless clearly stated; where conditions are unjust alternative measures must be sought. If the views expressed in his letter to Bertz are to be believed, Gissing's alternative measures lie somewhere between Rhoda's militancy and Mary's gradualism, and express his own particular form of "sexual anarchy."

Jacob Korg affirms that Gissing's concern about the social status of women developed through his involvement in his sisters' education, where he unceasingly encouraged their interest in the Classics and modern languages. Korg maintains that on the subject of women's social status:

Gissing's opinions were clear, consistent, and uncompromising. An enemy of the Victorian myth of the inferiority of women, he believed firmly that women were the intellectual and spiritual equals of men. [...] Like John Stuart Mill he felt that the emancipation of women was an important phase of the general struggle for liberty. In addition, he was convinced that the one false idea of the inferiority of women subtly poisoned the most intimate social relationships and undermined the happiness of marriage and the home. [...] By assuming that every woman would find a place as the protected and inferior partner in marriage, the law, custom, moral standards, and women's education rendered women incapable of independence. [...] In effect, a woman surrendered her identity to the man she married.<sup>28</sup>

The problem is clearly articulated in *The Odd Women*, where Monica, whose instincts for independence have been strengthened by her brief spell under the guidance of Rhoda Nunn, is expected to suppress her own identity in compliance with Widdowson's Ruskinite image of wifely perfection. Unable to endure the constraints of her husband's unremitting tyranny, Monica's rebellion is even more perilous and blindly elusive than her original decision to marry for economic security. In clinging to her conception of man as a protector, Monica reveals herself to be as deeply entrenched in convention as her husband. In Korg's view, Monica is a notable example of "Gissing's ability to dramatize the interplay of social forces and individual psychology."<sup>29</sup>

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John Stuart Mill argued in *The Subjection of Women* that "[w]hat is now called the nature of woman is an eminently artificial thing – the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others,"<sup>30</sup> which John Goode points out "is really to call into question the very process of making the woman an object in ideology."<sup>31</sup> The assorted group of single women in *The Odd Women* number among the "half a million" who confront the problem of their ambiguous status outside the traditional role of wife and mother.

Rhoda Nunn is clearly never more than an object to Barfoot; although he is attracted by her independent spirit, he nevertheless "still desired to see her in complete subjugation to him." Torn between fear that Barfoot's "strong instinct of lordship" would "urge him to direct his wife as a dependent," and excitement over the prospect of adding a new dimension to her work – "no longer one of the 'odd women' [...] she might illustrate woman's claim of equality in marriage" (TOW: pp. 261, 270) – Rhoda's final decision to reject Barfoot is testimony to her capacity for

real personal growth.

Many of Gissing's female characters develop morally and intellectually at times of acute emotional crisis, while his male figures often regress under mental and physical strain. In *Demos* Adela Mutimer finds the moral strength to persuade her bullying husband to give up his wrongful inheritance, and to continue to support him in his hour of need, whereas Mutimer's response to the crisis expresses itself in intense class hatred. In *Isabel Clarendon* Ada Warren spiritedly rejects her father's spiteful bequest in order to create for herself a fulfilling, independent life; Kingcote's lack of courage is responsible for the loss of his beloved Isabel. The ultimate breakdown of the relationship between Rhoda Nunn and Everard Barfoot in *The Odd Women* forces Rhoda to question her own integrity, and in so doing she progresses, not only in self-knowledge, but also in sense of purpose. On the other hand, Barfoot's modernism lacks conviction, and quickly gives way to social convention. It is highly significant that in a crisis Gissing's male characters demonstrably lack the resilience, strength of will and potential for growth so evident in their female counterparts.

Gissing undoubtedly sees education as the only practical means of improving the human condition. Not content merely to sympathise with the under-privileged, he constantly brings to his readers' attention the underlying cause of their plight; on the "woman question," the "typical Gissing novel takes a keen interest in those problems that women uniquely experience because of their place in a patriarchal society,"<sup>32</sup> and by ridiculing their unconscious underpinning of that

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society, he demonstrates the insidious power of paternalism. While the feeble, compliant females in Gissing's novels reveal the power of social conditioning, the new breed of strong-minded, progressive women expose and renounce its ideology, and proclaim their right to self-determination. Rhoda Nunn, Ada Warren (*Isabel Clarendon*), and Janet Moxey (*Born in Exile*) endorse Mary Barfoot's conviction that "whatever man could do, woman could do equally well" (TOW: p. 54). Nancy Tarrant, Mrs. Ormonde (*Thyrza*), and Mrs. Abbott (*The Whirlpool*) on the other hand, testify to women's innate capacity for personal moral growth.

Gissing's empathy with the female psyche enables him to appear at once women's severest critic and their stoutest supporter, a paradox which Eduard Bertz attributes to his being "a realist of the ideal." Bertz possessed a perceptive insight into the complexity of his friend's creative mind: "his artistic objectivity which sees two sides to every question and lifts him above all partisan feeling. [...] Gissing lets the facts speak for themselves, and the facts speak eloquently. [...] this is the way to provoke conscience. [...] there is no more sympathetic or understanding judge of the female heart."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J. D. Jump, ed., *Alfred Tennyson: In Memoriam, Maud and other poems* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1974; rpt, 1989), "In Memoriam A. H. H.," Canto LVI, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>P. F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young and P. Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, 1892-1895*, Vol. 5 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994), 2 June 1893, p. 113.

<sup>3</sup>L. Fernando, "Gissing's Studies in 'Vulgarism': Aspects of his Anti-Feminism," in *George Gissing: Critical Essays*, ed. J.-P. Michaux (London: Vision Press, 1981), p. 108-9; A. Poole, *Gissing in Context* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1975), p. 185; J. Halperin, *Gissing: A Life in Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 183; J. Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1963; London: Methuen & Co., 1965), pp. 185-86.

<sup>4</sup>*The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Vol. 5, 16 February 1892, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>D. Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. xii.

<sup>6</sup>G. Tindall, *The Born Exile: George Gissing* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1974; J. Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography*; M. C. Donnelly, *George Gissing: Grave*

*Comedian* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954; Millwood, N. Y.: Kraus Reprint Co., 1973); A. Poole, *Gissing in Context*.

<sup>7</sup>“The Novels of George Gissing,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 January 1912, in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, ed. P. Coustillas and C. Partridge, p. 532.

<sup>8</sup>*The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Vol. 5, 23 June 1895, p. 351.

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<sup>9</sup>“George Gissing,” in *Collected Articles on George Gissing*, ed. P. Coustillas (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968), p. 52.

<sup>10</sup>*Thyrza* (London: Eveleigh Nash & Grayson, 1927), p. 130. (All subsequent references will be to this edition and incorporated in the text, prefixed by T.)

<sup>11</sup>Respectively in *Born in Exile*, *Demos*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, and *The Odd Women*.

<sup>12</sup>In *Isabel Clarendon*, *Thyrza*, *New Grub Street*, *Born in Exile*, *The Odd Women*, *The Whirlpool*, and *The Crown of Life*.

<sup>13</sup>A. Poole, *Gissing in Context*, p. 176.

<sup>14</sup>In *Isabel Clarendon*, *Thyrza*, *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*, and *The Whirlpool*.

<sup>15</sup>D. Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing*, p. xii.

<sup>16</sup>*The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Vol. 5, 6 December 1892, p. 79.

<sup>17</sup>*The Collected Letters of George Gissing, 1881-1885*, Vol. 2 (1991), pp. 43, 44-45, 53, 72, 107-08, 110, 352.

<sup>18</sup>*In the Year of Jubilee* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987), p. 44. (All subsequent references will be to this edition and incorporated in the text, prefixed by YOJ.)

<sup>19</sup>G. Tindall, introduction to the Harvester edition of *In the Year of Jubilee* (1976), pp. xiii-iv.

<sup>20</sup>*The Collected Letters of George Gissing, 1897-1899*, Vol. 7 (1995), 16 March 1899, p. 318.

<sup>21</sup>B. R. Walker, “Gissing’s Use of Irony,” *Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. XIX, No. 4 (October, 1983), p. 22.

<sup>22</sup>L. F. Austin, *Sketch*, 9 January 1895, in *The Critical Heritage*, p. 232.

<sup>23</sup>D. Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing*, p. 164.

<sup>24</sup>J. Halperin, *Gissing: A Life in Books*, p. 183.

<sup>25</sup>*The Odd Women* (London: Virago Press, 1987), p. 98. (All subsequent references will be to this edition and incorporated in the text, prefixed by TOW.)

<sup>26</sup>A. Poole, *Gissing in Context*, p. 188.

<sup>27</sup>M. Cronin, “The Unclassed in *The Odd Women*,” *Gissing Journal*, Vol. XXXI, No. 2 (April, 1995), p. 6.

<sup>28</sup>J. Korg, *A Critical Biography*, pp. 185-86.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>30</sup>J. S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1861; New York: Prometheus Books, 1986), p. 27.

<sup>31</sup>“Woman and the Literary Text,” in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, ed. J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976; rpt 1977, 1979), p. 238.

<sup>32</sup>C. Harsh, “George Gissing’s *Thyrza*: Romantic Love and Ideological Co-Conspiracy,” *Gissing Journal*, Vol. XXX, No. 1 (January, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>33</sup>Eduard Bertz on Gissing, *Deutsche Presse*, November, 1889, in *The Critical Heritage*, pp. 153-55.

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## Negotiating “The Whirlpool”

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“There grows in the North country,” wrote Arnold Bennett in 1897, “a certain kind of youth whom it may be said that he was born to be a Londoner.”<sup>1</sup> Coming to London, for Bennett, for George Gissing, for Oscar Wilde and hundreds of *fin-de-siècle* writers was a virtual precondition of literary success. “London,” adds Bennett, “is the place where newspapers are issued, books written, and plays performed” (*ibid.*). Protagonists of numerous novels of the 1890s and 1900s, and those of Gissing and his friend H. G. Wells in particular, must learn how to negotiate with London, how to preserve a form of authenticity, or “sincerity,” in the monetary exchanges enforced by the environment of – indeed everywhere, but the metropolis especially. London contains myriad meanings in *fin-de-siècle* literature. It publicly juxtaposes classes, it is a place of sexual danger, it is the heart of the Empire, it is the History of England, it is the unexplored territory within. Arguably with most frequency, however, London is a symbol of capital, a commercial spectacle that is the visible embodiment of commodified human relations.

A reviewer of George Gissing’s *The Whirlpool* noted:

All London speaks to him in the language of money; streets, clubs, theatres, lodgings, restaurants, suggest to him the human fight and fret and fume over money, its conventional tyranny and exigence.<sup>2</sup>

Bennett’s protagonist, Richard Larch, is inevitably drawn into this moneyed heart of the metropolis on his first night in London, encountering this kind of enforced exchange in its most openly conspicuous forms: the newspaper advertisement, the shop-window, the music-hall and the prostitute.

London for Gissing and Wells was both symbol for and a part of the reality of the commodification of human relations, the existence of which is admitted but protested against in their fiction. In the Introduction to *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams quotes Wells as saying “this great towering city was a measure of the obstacle, of how much must be moved if there was [*sic*] to be any change.”<sup>3</sup> Gissing, however, did not have the resource of Wells’ political utopianism to draw upon to resolve the problem of violated authenticity as presented by London. As a radicalised conservative instead, Gissing can only find personal and private

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fictional solutions for necessity of money for survival, as embodied in, represented and caused by, the coterminous capital city, a solution such as the inheritance-funded, private, rural withdrawal of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903).

Gissing’s first published novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) opens in London with the spectacle of, literally, a market. Gissing’s working-class London is a Social Darwinist, mutually competitive micro-economy, whose inhabitants compete for survival on extremely limited resources, and whose morality is economically super-structural, to be afforded only after the most basic biological needs have been satisfied. This pessimistic economic model persists throughout Gissing’s later representations of London and models of his heroes’ *Bildung*. Edwin Reardon and Harold Biffen, the starving artists of *New Grub Street* (1891), complain of having been seduced into poverty by the perceived need for successful writers to live in London:

“Because I was conscious of brains, I thought that the only place for me was

London. [...] London is only a huge shop, with an hotel on the upper storeys.”<sup>4</sup>

Godwin Peak, the hero of *Born in Exile* (1892), perceives the capital as an advertisement for a lifestyle: catching sight of an aristocratic carriage in Hyde Park, he determines to resist his “plebeian” origins, and become recognised by the leisured, cultured class he considers his by right.<sup>5</sup> Gissing wrote *Born in Exile* after moving to Devon with his second wife, Edith, a working-class woman he had met in a music-hall. Within two years, however, Gissing had tired of both Edith and Exeter, and returned to London.<sup>6</sup> The whirlpool had drawn the author in once more.<sup>7</sup>

*The Whirlpool*, written during 1896, and published the year after, is the last of Gissing’s novels to dramatise an attempt by the protagonist to escape entirely the condition of negotiation with the market enforced both by the environment and by bodily need. In the novels that appeared after *The Whirlpool*, this condition is to be accepted, even celebrated, by the resigned protagonist (such as the businessman-hero Piers Otway of *The Crown of Life* or the successful grocer Will Warburton).

The question of “how to live” for Harvey Rolfe, the book’s hero, is formulated by *The Whirlpool* as “where to live.” The novel’s central image of the whirlpool stands for both London and the market. It is difficult to say when it is separately either, for both possible meanings are virtually interchangeable. The whirlpool occupies a specific position, and dislocates personal

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space and identity; for Gissing, it is cash relations that dislocate identity, this dislocation specifically located within the nexus of London. Drawn further into the heart of the symbolic whirlpool and literally further towards the topographical centre of London, Rolfe becomes subject to the disturbing fragmentation and estrangement of modern, and especially urban, existence:

In returning to Gunnersbury he felt hardly more sense of vital connection with this suburb than with the murky and roaring street in which he sat at business.<sup>8</sup>

Initially, Rolfe barely participates in the social and economic life of the capital. He is as free from the influences of the market as it is possible to be without, crucially, living in the country. Despite his age, Rolfe is an ingénu within the urban social community into which he is gradually drawn (like Longdon in the 1899 London novel *The Awkward Age* by Henry James, an early and uncomplimentary reviewer of *The Whirlpool*).<sup>9</sup> Living well within his means, Rolfe has eventually achieved a position of compromise, dependent merely on the consciousness of improvement since his earlier life, and on a certain standard of middle-class luxury. It is the overthrow of this static compromise that will generate the narrative. “The choice between vulgar display with worry, and a simple, refined life with perfect comfort” (W, p. 119) is no choice at all, for the economic conditions of middle-class life in London as defined by this novel do not allow the “perfection” of the latter to exist. “Comfort” has been reified and commodified by the now-booming consumer economy; the objects that permit comfort must be paid for. Comfort cannot exist autonomously and perfectly in, say, the rural seclusion of Wales, but must be maintained through continual, necessary consumption. Mrs. Frothingham has to apologise for noticing how like the normal standard of bourgeois luxury the Rolfes’ “simple life” in Wales actually proves to be (W, p. 134). “There’s no middle way, with peace,” Harvey admits later in the book. “Living nowadays means keeping up appearances” (W, p. 366). Harvey does not, in the late twentieth-century phrase, “live to shop,” but he has had to shop in order to live, and thus

becomes drawn into the network of gazes and façades that is the nature of both London upper middle-class society and the practice of the new leisure activity at the *fin-de-siècle*, shopping.<sup>10</sup>

The violation of Harvey's sincere but untenable position is to begin through sexual desire. The whirlpool also represents the nexus of sexual relations, themselves already heavily associated with money, speculation and London. The word "engagement" touches on the social, sexual, artistic (Alma's concert) and employment nexuses and resonates throughout this novel;

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not only can "engage" also mean to pawn or pledge (obsolete), but also to entangle.<sup>11</sup> It is through gazing at the reified body of the woman that he becomes engaged to (W, p. 102) that Rolfe is forced into the public negotiation of desire that is the marriage-contract. Throughout the novel, the narrator disapprovingly notes Alma's enjoyment of controlling her own representation; through her own love of display and Rolfe's eroticised gaze, wanting to see his purchase before buying, Alma becomes another spectacular commodity on offer in the metropolis. Though the proposal "must not read like a commercial overture" (W, p. 114) the marriage itself must be paid for; as Rolfe himself had earlier admitted, "the educated man who marries on less than a thousand [a year] is either mad or a criminal" (W, p. 5). Rolfe himself has nine hundred; the difference, naturally, is to prove vital.

Rolfe's friend Morphew is a regular, parallel warning to the older man. When Morphew's income reaches a certain point, he will be able to marry his fiancée, due to the price set on her hand by her father: Henrietta Winter is commodified and dealt with "between men."<sup>12</sup> In a characteristic Gissing twist, even when parental authority is successfully overcome (through Mrs. Winter's indignation at the amount left her in Mr. Winter's will – p. 395), Henrietta cancels the engagement because of Morphew's illegitimate child from an affair with an unemployed servant-girl. This earlier union had begun in the London streets, the public spaces of the capital holding the illusory satisfaction of unfulfilled desires.<sup>13</sup> "This beastly town is the ruin of me, in every way," complains Morphew (W, p. 90).

Morphew's only possible recourse is to speculation. The economy in *The Whirlpool* functions on a kind of entropic principle. On the verge of accepting that some kind of participation with the market is inevitable, the Gissing novel nevertheless seems to be warning that you will still never get out of it as much as you put in. Morphew gains one hundred, and loses three (W, p. 91); Mrs. Frothingham attempts to repay the wrong done by her husband, but only to "worthy recipients of her bounty" (W, p. 126); the payment overall from the wreck will be no more than eighteenpence in the pound (W, p. 213). The friction of the market will always reduce one's capital. The more Harvey attempts to realise, the more he will lose, and by the end of the novel, the narrated instability of the plot has certainly decreased his income.

It is perhaps surprising, given the assuredly financial nature of social relations in *The Whirlpool*, that its haggled-over women are rarely categorised as consumer objects. The reason

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for this, I would suggest, is the novel's attempt to dramatise "freedom." Though freedom is indisputably dependent on financial resources, it is still only a part. For Gissing, women have equal, sometimes even greater agency than men, because they are apter at dissimulating, making them better negotiators – "I hate a dirty, lying, incapable creature, that's all, whether man or woman. No doubt they're more common in petticoats." (Rolfe, W, p. 15) – and also because women can renounce sex. It is this ability to manipulate which constitutes their strength, and their danger to the often willingly passive male hero.

The commercialised discourse of spectacle and appearances does inform Gissing's representation of women, not as objects but as sales-women for their own commodified bodies.

The unspoken representative type behind a number of the book's female characters, is not that of the commodity, but that of the prostitute.<sup>14</sup> When the shares of Bennet Frothingham's Britannia enterprise become suddenly worthless, the price of Alma comes down and she is left vulnerable to a commercial transaction (hostile take-over? speculative deposit?) from the characters closest to the workings of the economy, the vulgar self-advertiser Dymes and the self-made millionaire Redgrave (W, p. 84, p. 88). The criminal Mrs. Strangeways has acted as a procuress for the latter. The novel's climax is the result of a virtual act of prostitution by Sibyl Carnaby: it is suggested that Sibyl has slept with Redgrave to ensure his investment in her husband's company. "Such a woman might surely have sold herself to great advantage," (W, p. 34) notes the narrator; Alma, at the height of her indignation with Sibyl, accuses Mrs. Carnaby with a metaphor that links prostitution with urban topography: "a woman who had sold herself for money, whose dishonour differed in no respect from that of the woman of the pavement" (W, p. 363). Carnaby himself even recounts the story of "a woman in London who keeps up a big house and entertains all sorts of people" (W, p. 214), a narrative which exposes the criminal economic basis of Society's supposedly moral façade.

An important qualification needs to be made, however, in viewing the female characters of *The Whirlpool* as prostitutes. Gissing genders as female another economic activity that like prostitution is related to conspicuous display, the metropolis and to the satisfaction of the body – shopping. Like the Carters in *New Grub Street*, the Carnabys continually live slightly beyond their means, and the Rolfes and the narrator fastidiously note the conspicuity of Sibyl Carnaby's consumption:

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Mrs. Carnaby's requirements were one or two expensive trifles, which she chose with leisurely gratification of her taste. It surprised Alma to see this extravagance; one would have thought the purchaser had never known restricted means, and dreamt of no such thing; she bought what she happened to desire, as a matter of course. And this was no ostentation for Alma's benefit. Evidently Sibyl had indulged herself with the same freedom throughout her travels; for she had brought back a museum of beautiful and curious things, which must have cost a good deal. Perhaps for the first time in her life Alma experienced a sense of indignation at the waste of money. She was envious withal, which possibly helped to explain the other impulse. (W, p. 177; see also p. 59, p. 172, p. 216)

A more adept version of Zola's Nana (Hugh's brother notes how well Sibyl has looked after business affairs during Hugh's stay in prison; W, p. 431), Sibyl sells her own body to pay for her spending ("spend" can also mean both to exhaust by using up wastefully, and, in nineteenth-century slang, to orgasm<sup>15</sup>); Sibyl would rather sacrifice her private consciousness of her own virtue than her standard of living. Sibyl's relation to the market is mutual, almost as a form of negotiated labour: like a Gissing hero, she must give something up to get the things she wants (which in her case are very definitely "things," consumer objects). Naturally, following the economy's entropic principle, the virtue she bargains with is held by the narrator to be worth far more than the fripperies that she purchases with the proceeds. This speculation also costs Sibyl's exhausted husband most of his physical capital during his prison sentence – he too is "spent."

Alma Rolfe, to do her credit (as Gissing briefly does in the quotation above before his prejudices get the better of him), is not equally implicated in this mutual process of exchange. Yet the logic of the novel insists that Alma should bow to her economic destiny as an urban woman and succumb to spectacle and publicity, through her career as a musician. (Mrs. Abbott,

before her abandonment, and the music-hall career of Mrs. Buncombe, divorced by Rolfe's landlord as Rolfe marries Alma, provide further examples of the same urban type). Since Alma's career is an attempt at freedom, it cannot flourish without either capital or deception, "insincerity." To succeed, Alma must negotiate again with the hostile, consuming economy of *The Whirlpool*, in the persons of her former would-be purchasers, Dymes and Redgrave. Gissing's muted, qualified feminism may permit the reader to identify in Sibyl's consumption, Alma's artistic ambitions and the excessive socialising of the plain Leach sisters a wish to escape the limitation of the roles defined for them by their gender; but these aspirations are as

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stunted by economic reality as the desires of Gissing's male characters to travel, produce art or study classical literature; the narrator holds that there are values, such as motherhood, which should not be sacrificed in order to satisfy desire.

Thus both heredity (the combination of fraud and insincerity inherited from Bennet Frothingham, and the nervous excitability of her biological mother; W, p. 136) and environment (the flattery of Alma's friends, and the desire to rewrite the meaning of her name in the London newspapers) propel Alma further into the manufacture of fraudulent appearances that is the condition of metropolitan life. This manufacture costs Alma valuable reserves of physical capital; labour for Gissing, particularly in *New Grub Street* and *The Nether World*, is a pathological condition. In *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940*,<sup>16</sup> William Greenslade locates Alma's degeneration within late nineteenth-century discourses of female hysteria, in particularly Herbert Spencer's calculation of the "taxation" exacted on the female body by roles other than motherhood, the role abandoned by Alma to pursue her career. Physically and financially, she has to get out less than she put in: although the concert appears to be a success, the amount of money spent on the inflated signification of advertisements means that it actually makes a loss. Alma recovers from her breakdown, but Dymes's invoice is the ironic symbol of her ultimate failure (W, pp. 404-05).

It is no coincidence that as his wife's desires propel her further into the market, Rolfe is also propelled there by the need to increase his income. A long discussion of the hero's finances is prefixed by the narrator's observation that "Alma took it for granted that Harvey would not allow *their* expenditure to outrun *his* income' (W, p. 208; my italics). Consumption is female; income, except from prostitution, male. The passage of time causes some of Harvey's stock to decrease in value and thus the one character left unaffected by the Britannia crash in Chapter One now has to learn the language of speculation. Earlier, Harvey admits that his purchases of books provide a legible narrative of the development of his life (W, p. 22); now his reading is "the money article in his daily paper" and "financial newspapers." Like that of the solicitor Leach, worked to death by the consumption of his women-folk (W, p. 187), this labour of Harvey's is a pathological condition, violating the nature of his identity, not fertile production, but onanistic speculation:

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He felt like one who meddles with something forbidden – who pries, shamefaced, into the secrets of an odious vice. To study the money-market gave him a headache. He had to go for a country walk, to bathe and change his clothes, before he was at ease again. (W, p. 208)

The elimination of Alma is the consequence of the whirlpool's Spencerian unwillingness to support any authentic or artistic project which does not conform explicitly to the demands of the market. Not only has Art become commercialised – Art that is not commercialised is not

able to survive. Culture has become display, shopping and advertising: “Advertising is a work of art,” proclaims Dymes (W, p. 275); Alma’s Vuillaume is replaced by an inferior shop-bought model (W, p. 188). Mrs. Strangeways’ first husband painted, and “died in a garret or a workhouse” (W, p. 173). Thistlewood attempts to be an artist, and exchanges a finger for “the honour of working himself almost to death to support a very expensive young woman, who cared no more for him than for her cast-off shoes” (W, pp. 376-77) before realising the fatal nature of the artistic destiny, and reducing his ambitions to become a teacher. Successful culture is either debased, as represented by Dymes’ pop tunes (which even the narrator admits are catchy) or imitative, like the photography shop in the Westminster Road. This shop, along with Carnaby’s bicycle factory, is an image of merely economic success: new, democratic technology for “the better kind of clerk” (W, p. 218).

At the height of her urge to re-enter society, Alma claims that as the “wife of a gentleman of independent means [...] all circles should be open to her” (W, p. 226). Such circles are not merely Society, but also the circular downward spiral of those caught in the whirlpool. They are also the circles of Hell in the *Inferno*. Gissing read Dante, in the words of Michael Wheeler “the presiding genius of nineteenth century social criticism,”<sup>17</sup> in the summer of 1885. Later in the book, Carnaby and Rolfe refer to a still earlier version of Hell:

“The whirlpool!” muttered Carnaby, with a broken laugh. “It’s got hold of me, and I’m going down, old man – and it looks black as hell.”

“We shall see the sunlight again together,” replied Rolfe, with forced cheerfulness. (W, p. 320)

The myth referred to is that in which Orpheus escapes Hell by accidentally leaving his wife Eurydice behind there.<sup>18</sup> Sibyl, we learn, keeps her would-be explorer husband in the whirlpool, making bicycles. The revelation of her deception in Redgrave’s death exhausts Alma’s

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remaining physical capital, and she dies (NOT through suicide) after an accidental overdose of her patent-medicine remedy for “fashionable disorder of the nerves” (W, p. 305), the pathological condition of urban living. Rolfe at last can escape to Basil Morton’s house in idyllic Greystone. (One may also remember that after finally leaving Edith in 1897, Gissing too left the whirlpool of London for Italy and then Dorking in Surrey.<sup>19</sup>)

Morton’s existence depends on oxymorons: “It was in the town, yet nothing town-like. [...] He lived by trade, but trade did not affect his life” (W, pp. 322-23). Though Patrick Parrinder notes in his Introduction to the Harvester edition that Morton’s form of economic existence is doomed (W, p. xx), supported in this “sincere” way, Morton may steer clear of the whirlpool, and as such, he hardly appears in the plot of the novel at all. A fund of value is represented by the country-born Mrs. Morton with her life-enhancing breasts (W, p. 324); a parallel value is asserted in the main narrative. Child-rearing is a form of production that, initially at least, can exist outside of the market, and as Gissing admitted in a letter to H. G. Wells (who also wrote a review of *The Whirlpool*<sup>20</sup>), he intends to show that the plot of the novel is partly intended to correct Rolfe’s initially selfish response to the idea of fatherhood.<sup>21</sup>

In Wells’s novel *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, published in 1900 but actually begun in 1896, the year in which *The Whirlpool* was written and also in which Gissing and Wells became friends, the London-named hero’s cultural aspirations are comprehensively defeated by the same kind of economic logic that comes close to ruining Rolfe. Both of Lewisham’s projects, to complete his education and to engage in effective political activity, are foiled by his marriage to the Londoner Ethel and by the simple need to earn money to support their life in the city. Lewisham, like *The Whirlpool*’s Thistlewood, becomes a teacher: education is an abiding

concern of both Gissing and Wells as well as, of course, Herbert Spencer. Bennett's Richard Larch also sacrifices his desire to write on the altar of "comfortable" middle-class married life and the labour necessary to support it.

For Lewisham, the Future cannot be the timetable – the schedule of his life's projected narrative, destroyed on the book's final page, but the Future can be the child. Both Lewisham and Rolfe rescue a form of their initial aspirations through their sons (given the responsibility of women in both novels in pulling the male protagonist closer towards the Whirlpool, it is interesting that the only female child born to either hero lives for only days). Both heroes are, in

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their own terms, failures; perhaps in paternity a form of success can be valorised independently of the market: "fruitless his life could not be, if his child grew up" (W, p. 139). (After the birth of his sons, Gissing's own letters frequently express his concern to establish the welfare of his children as his life's first priority; compare also the final paragraph of *A Man from the North*.<sup>22</sup>) Yet throughout *The Whirlpool*, Rolfe presciently sees a further threat to his posterity in the economic activity that is most destructive of personal identity and social connection – warfare, the activity of the Englishman abroad as shopkeeper with a rifle. The childless hero of Wells's 1909 London novel *Tono-Bungay*, George Ponderevo, survives the whirlpool of advertisement, fraud and prostitution that is London by manufacturing a battleship which will be sold to the highest bidder, an expensive, deadly consumer product which accepts the laws of the market, and allows the hero to banish the London topography that has dominated nineteenth-century fiction. George Gissing's elder son Walter was born in 1891, five years before *The Whirlpool*. He outlived his father by only thirteen years: he was killed in 1916 during the second Battle of the Somme.

<sup>1</sup>Arnold Bennett, *A Man from the North* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>*George Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (London: Routledge, 1972), p. 282.

<sup>3</sup>Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Hogarth, 1993), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>*New Grub Street*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 474.

<sup>5</sup>*Born in Exile*, ed. David Grylls (London: Dent, 1993), p. 103.

<sup>6</sup>Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 191.

<sup>7</sup>In a letter of 11 March 1897, Gissing wrote to Clara Collet: "I need London for my work; in very truth, I can do very little away from it." *The Collected Letters of George Gissing: Volume Six, 1895-1897*, ed. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995), p. 249.

<sup>8</sup>*The Whirlpool* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1897; rpt Hassocks: Harvester, 1977), p. 381. Henceforth abbreviated as W in the text.

<sup>9</sup>*Critical Heritage*, pp. 290-94.

<sup>10</sup>See David Trotter, *The English Novel in History 1895-1920* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 11-26.

<sup>11</sup>*OED*, 4 and 6.

<sup>12</sup>Luce Irigaray, "Women in the Market," in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Cornell University Press, 1985).

<sup>13</sup>One might think of Morley Roberts's typically over-stated description of Gissing's engagement to Edith, perhaps influenced more by *The Whirlpool* than real events, as him rushing out into the streets of London and speaking to "the very first woman I came across."

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Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912), p. 144.

<sup>14</sup>See Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 170-91. For the relations between spectacle, commerce and femininity see Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Gissing, Dreiser and Zola* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985).

<sup>15</sup>*OED*, 11a, 13, 15c. Interestingly, the *OED*'s reference for meaning 1 also genders the activity in the same way: "She spent his money and led him such a life," from *Temple Bar cii* (1894), p. 340.

<sup>16</sup>William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 134-50.

<sup>17</sup>Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 202.

<sup>18</sup>For Gissing and Orphic myth see Samuel Vogt Gapp, *George Gissing, Classicist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936), p. 17.

<sup>19</sup>Korg, p. 224.

<sup>20</sup>*Critical Heritage*, pp. 295-305.

<sup>21</sup>*George Gissing and H. G. Wells: A Record of their Friendship and Correspondence*, ed. Royal A. Gettmann (London: Hart-Davis, 1961), pp. 47-48.

<sup>22</sup>*Collected Letters*, Vol. VI, p. xlii, p. 22, p. 34, p. 155.

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"Hapless flies caught in a huge web?"  
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In the *Gissing Journal* for October 1996, Jacob Korg reported usefully on his "random explorations" for Gissing on the Internet. This article tries to deal more systematically with the topic. Uninformed readers should be aware that what is loosely termed the "Internet" is actually a set of resources, but the two components most likely to interest the Gissing student are the World Wide Web and the Listservs. The first is a vast "virtual library" of interlinked information, and the second comprises thousands of discussion groups covering virtually every human activity, some of them extremely recondite, which work by passing information and queries among their subscribers by e-mail. I deal here mostly with Gissing on the Web, but towards the end I will say something about relevant Listservs. In order not to clutter the text, I have

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collected into endnotes all the Web addresses, any of which can be accessed instantly using a graphical browser such as Netscape Navigator. I made this survey in December 1996-January 1997; like everything written about the Internet it will be incomplete if not obsolete before it appears in print, but I hope to update it periodically. I very much welcome additional information. My e-mail address is peter.morton@flinders.edu.au.

The expansion of literary studies on the Internet is proceeding with startling speed. As soon as the technical problem of setting up a tollgate is solved, so that people can be charged subscriptions, we may well expect that most literary journals and bibliographies will migrate on to it. At the moment, however, as we might expect with a medium which is in no controlling hands, the quality and range of the information are very uneven. Scholar-enthusiasts have already set up websites for many writers of the Victorian era ("The Wild Wilde Web"; "The

Sherlockian Holmepage”), but there are still many gaping holes and areas of neglect.

Gissing, at present, falls into that category. For example, if we go to what is rapidly becoming the site of first resort for all matters of 19th century British history and literature, the Victorian Web at Brown University,<sup>1</sup> we find it contains only one trivial mention of Gissing, even though an author as minor as George Macdonald has his own page of information. The much larger and more inclusive Voice Of The Shuttle: Web Page for Humanities Research<sup>2</sup> contains not a single reference to Gissing at all. These two websites, like most others, depend on input from volunteers; and what they are not given they cannot publish.

The untutored student who goes on his own hunt through the Web is likely to be sympathetic to Marian Yule’s plight in *New Grub Street* as she labours at her father’s behest in the British Museum; indeed, he must soon feel himself like the creature of Marian’s headachy fantasy, “a black, lost soul, doomed to wander in an eternity of vain research.” Fortunately, users, unlike poor Marian, have powerful search engines at their disposal which are themselves to be found at specific websites. (In fact some sites allow the user to conduct searches on several engines simultaneously).<sup>3</sup> A thorough search using five major engines reveals that the total number of distinct references to our author on the World Wide Web is around 200. The vast majority, however, are trivial. Some are just items in the new-accessions lists of libraries and the catalogues of publishers. Then again, many universities are gradually putting all their

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syllabuses, and their faculty members’ bibliographies, on to the Web. Naturally Gissing is required reading for many Victorian literature and history courses, and these make up the bulk of the references. They have no external interest, except to confirm what everyone knows already: that *New Grub Street* and *The Odd Women* are running neck and neck as the most popular texts for tertiary study, and that the other titles are rarely, if ever, set.

The beginning student-reader eager to secure some basic facts about Gissing’s life and writings has only two sites to visit at present. He or she can read the on-line entry from the *Cambridge Biographical Encyclopedia* which despite its brevity contains an error (that Gissing studied at Manchester and “was expelled from the university”).<sup>4</sup> More usefully, the homepage of the enterprising teacher Mitsuharu Matsuoka of Nagoya University, Japan has a section on 19th Century British authors, and within this we find the only page on the Web which is completely devoted to Gissing, with a portrait photograph, a chronology and a briefly annotated list of his writings, taken with acknowledgment from Robert Selig’s study.<sup>5</sup> The list is not complete, however, and some of the comments, such as those on *The House of Cobwebs*, could mislead the beginner.

Other substantial materials are very thin at present. One can read Prof. Korg’s two solid reviews of the first six volumes of the *Letters*,<sup>6-7</sup> and one can read about the prize which the editors were justly awarded for their labours by the MLA in 1995.<sup>8</sup> But there are no lengthy critical essays available on-line; no considered discussions of any of the novels; not even a broad outline of Gissing’s achievements of the kind that might be sought, say, by a secondary-level school-child with an essay to write. However, one very useful development is that the current contents of most of the important scholarly journals are now available and indexed on the Web: *Nineteenth Century Studies* at this site,<sup>9</sup> *Victorian Studies* at this one<sup>10</sup> and, most notably, the *Gissing Journal* here.<sup>11</sup> The Internet scholar will find it easy to locate most of the serious articles on Gissing in future, though he or she still won’t be able to read them on-line.

On the other hand, it may be that your interests are more bibliographical than critical. Perhaps you simply want to buy some second-hand titles to complete your Gissing collection. If you are in the market for a first edition of *Workers in the Dawn*, a copy of this rare book is for sale along with another 179 items for \$US28,000.<sup>12</sup> If you are not quite in that league, try the

fabulous resources of Powell's, who boast of being the largest bookstore in North America. When I looked last, they had 50 Gissing titles for sale; you can order anything straight from

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your screen and their prices and shipping charges seem very reasonable.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps you don't want to buy any Gissing but simply want to read him on-screen. A number of sites on the Web give free access to a rapidly-expanding list of literary texts, some of them quite obscure, with all those useful search features which we have come to take for granted nowadays. As far as I can discover, however, not a single Gissing work is available in that form. Yet all it takes to add one is time, a good clean out-of-copyright edition, a scanner and an OCR (word-recognition) package. Some public-spirited reader of this *Journal* might care to start the ball rolling. Information on how to volunteer may be found at the Project Gutenberg site.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps you have a query about Gissing or would like to identify a reference. In that case you should do what Michele Kohler did when she tried to trace the intriguing, lost 30 letters concerning Gissing: she circulated a request for information to all the members of a Listserv called Ex Libris. The best chance of getting more general queries answered is to post them on the only Listserv where information about Gissing appears regularly. This is Victoria, which, as its name suggests, is a discussion group dealing with every aspect of that era: most of the contributors are teachers of history and literature. Go to this site for a full discussion of how it operates, and how to join it.<sup>15</sup> Victoria has been running for four years and has already built up a formidable archive of queries, information and gossip – helpful, fascinating, sometimes erroneous. You can search these archives year by year 1993-1996 by going here.<sup>16</sup> By my count, the Gissing references in the archives increased from 21 in 1993 to more than 100 in 1995, though they were down to 78 in 1996: probably this more reflects the growing membership of the list than any heightened interest in our author. Sometimes the earnest advice to inquirers makes one wince. For instance, someone who is researching melancholia in the Victorian era was advised to read the complete works of Gissing, and another entered a competition on "Books we wish we hadn't bothered to read" by nominating *New Grub Street*. "Just a long self-pitying screed" was his dismissive judgement.

What about other Listservs? The search engine Deja News<sup>17</sup> indexes a vast archive of material which has appeared on hundreds of other Listservs, but I uncovered only eight minor Gissing items. One, however, offers a snippet of information that was new to me. It is that the word *paparazzi* (intrusive celebrity photographers) is derived from the name of Gissing's landlord, Coriolano Paparazzo, at Catanzaro in *By the Ionian Sea!* The film director Fellini

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happened to be reading this book when making *La Dolce Vita* in the Fifties, and used the name for one of his characters who behaves as do modern paparazzi, and the word spread from there. Whether this is true or not, I have no idea.

Odd items like this reward anyone who trawls through the Web. The most sheerly unexpected Gissing reference which I found was a quotation ("For the man sound in body and serene of mind there is no such thing as bad weather; every sky has its beauty, and storms which whip the blood do but make it pulse more vigorously") which I guess is from *Ryecroft*. I found it being used as an epigraph to details of a university course on the atmosphere of the planet Jupiter.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps there is a Gissing fan in the Astrophysics Department of MIT!

<sup>1</sup><http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/victorian/victov.html>

<sup>2</sup><http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/>

<sup>3</sup>A good site which permits this is The Wired Source at:

<http://www.hotwired.com/wiredsource>

Prof. Korg refers to the search engines as “browsers,” which is not the correct term. I don’t think it is the case, as he says, that some search engines, e.g. Lycos, are “non-literary.” They vary of course in their inclusiveness and indexing strategies, but all the main ones have a universal range. For the purposes of this article, I inspected most of the websites resulting from searches for “George + Gissing” in the following engines: HotBot, Excite, Infoseek, AltaVista and Lycos.

<sup>4</sup><http://www.biography.com/cgi-bin/biography/biography-request.pl?page=/biography/data/G/G.5886.txt.html>

<sup>5</sup><http://lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Gissing.html>

<sup>6</sup><http://sunsite.berkeley.edu:8080/scan/ncl-e/472/reviews/korg.rev472.html>

<sup>7</sup><http://sunsite.berkeley.edu:8080/scan/ncl-e/511/reviews/korg.rev511.html>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.cats.ohiou.edu/~univnews/months/dec95/153.html>

<sup>9</sup><http://www.fandm.edu/Departments/English/Ohara/19thCStudies.html>

<sup>10</sup><http://www.indiana.edu/~iupress/journals/vic.html>

<sup>11</sup><http://www.ualberta.ca/~litir/rpba.html>

<sup>12</sup><http://www.bostbook.com/>

<sup>13</sup><http://powells.com/>

<sup>14</sup><http://www.sol.com.sg/pg/>

<sup>15</sup><http://www.indiana.edu/~victoria/discussion.html>

<sup>16</sup><http://www.indiana.edu/~libref/victoria/index.html>. In fact some of the search engines index these archives and report on the Gissing references within them.

<sup>17</sup><http://www.dejanews.com/>

<sup>18</sup><http://geosys.mit.edu/~jovian/>

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## Book Review

Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (eds.), *The Collected Letters of George Gissing. Volume Eight 1900-1902*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996.

“We mark [...] the growth of power in your work, and look with hope for the time when its business success will more nearly equal its literary merit,” wrote the publisher Henry Holt to George Gissing in August 1901. Holt, who had accepted for American publication Gissing’s novel *Our Friend the Charlatan*, pinpoints for the reader of these letters a familiar source of pressure with which the serious writer of fiction had to contend. Gissing’s own recurring difficulties in gaining a reasonable financial return for his work have been frequently enough reiterated in previous volumes of his correspondence, but in this volume the old complaint is sounded with a note of increasing despair. Writing to his agent James B. Pinker in January 1901 about the forthcoming publication, in England, of *Our Friend the Charlatan*, Gissing begs Pinker to keep in mind that “*this book must be published in the spring*. Not only do I want the money, but it is clear as daylight to me that even my own small public begins to forget my existence. What I have to do now is to publish & publish & publish yet again. I am not going to be beaten.” The necessity for speedy publication and effective advertisement of his writings assumes almost obsessive proportions for Gissing in this period, as he seeks means of deliverance from intense feelings of personal extinction – the likely basis of the professional writer’s fear of critical indifference or neglect.

Of course, such anxieties precipitate their own particular demands and patterns of dependency. Pinker heroically shoulders the burden of expectations which Gissing places on

him (the editors note that the “strictly professional letters bulk large” in this volume; there are 126 to Pinker and another agent, W. M. Colles). There seems to be no evidence that Pinker, a dependable, hard-working professional, does not do all that lies within his power to promote the writer’s interests.

These had not been well served by the firm of Methuen, whose treatment of Gissing was, to put it mildly, quite shoddy. His difficulties with the firm had begun with their dilatory attitude to the publication of *The Crown of Life*, and with their failure to promote it – the correspondence on this subject is in Volume Seven of the *Collected Letters*. Now Gissing finds that the Rochester volumes of Dickens are brought out too slowly; he also meets delay in

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payment for his introductions to them. Moreover, an advertisement for the Rochester Dickens, in the *Athenæum*, acknowledges the prefaces of another writer, but fails to give any acknowledgement of Gissing’s. There were also lingering uncertainties about the future of the eight novels held by Lawrence and Bullen, now that Bullen was in financial difficulties. Fortunately, as the editors remind us, all but one earned a new impression from Bullen in 1901.

Such ill-luck did nothing to alleviate a strong sense of paranoia which threads through Gissing’s business letters in this volume. It was clearly heightened by his recurrent sense that his capacity to produce was beginning to seriously fail him, although it needs to be said that during the two and three-quarter year period covered by this volume he managed to complete *Our Friend the Charlatan*, *By the Ionian Sea* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, as well as a handful of short stories. By early 1901, faced by the hostility of the marketplace, his feelings of domestic claustrophobia (the Passy apartment, under the austere management of Gabrielle’s mother, feels like a prison – although Gissing is usually too tactful to admit it), Gissing is clearly under severe nervous strain – a “crisis,” as Gissing describes it to Pinker. By April, confronted by the diagnosis of serious lung trouble, he is, not before time, forced to separate out the terms of writing and his life. Soon Gissing’s work regime will never again rise beyond a bare three hours a day. At the age of 43 he has become, in effect, a permanent semi-invalid.

The deterioration of Gissing’s health is the other linked major topic of these letters. Witness of this can be found in the noticeable narrowing of the range and scope of subject matter of his correspondence as this volume proceeds. The closing section of the previous volume found Gissing deeply preoccupied by the depressing news from South Africa, and by what he saw as the fast-deteriorating international situation. Early letters in Volume Eight offer evidence that his passionate opposition to the triumphalist war-culture of turn-of-the-century imperialism is not quite spent. The relief of Mafeking in May 1900 prompts him to rebuke Clara Collet for an evidently unguarded outburst of patriotic fervour: “Do you really approve of the spirit which has for immediate result those outbreaks of brutal lawlessness throughout our country...?” And along with W. H. Hudson, he sides with the Boxer rebels against the British authorities in China. Gissing’s brave diagnosis of the signs of the times (including the fate of literature) at a difficult moment attracts very considerable respect, and should be placed

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alongside the work of that outstanding generation of new-liberal intellectuals – L. T. Hobhouse, Charles Masterman, J. A. Hobson, G. P. Gooch and others, who were currently marshalling a thorough-going critique of imperialism from a British perspective. On these matters at least, the author of *The Psychology of Jingoism* and the contributors to a collection of important essays gathered together by Masterman as *The Heart of Empire* (1901) are Gissing’s natural ideological allies. One might even speculate whether, after his death, Gissing’s views might have been aired

to the editorial board of the anti-imperialist *Independent Review* (one of whose members was Masterman) via the Classics lecturer, Rachel White, whom Gissing met at Nayland Sanitorium in June 1901. As the editors of the letters remind us, White subsequently married, in 1906, another member of the editorial board, Nathaniel Wedd (1864-1940), a tutor and friend of E. M. Forster at King's College, Cambridge.

But, not surprisingly, Gissing shows no interest in the questions of domestic reform which Masterman's volume investigated, because, of course, he has no belief in plotting the future path of civilization, already doomed, in his view, to barbarism. Gissing faced in quite another direction from the man who could embrace ideas of societal change with frightening confidence – his friend, H. G. Wells. When Wells's study of the "reaction of mechanical and scientific progress upon human life and thought" – *Anticipations* – emerged towards the end of 1901, Gissing praised a "very notable piece of work" but added that "I must not pretend to care very much about the future of the human race." In 1901, of course, concern for the future of the race was to be highly modern; and it is the pressure of modernity which most tellingly opens up the faultlines which separate the "author at grass" from the "coming man." The spring of 1900 finds Gissing looking for any opportunity to quit a Paris engulfed by the "uproar" of the International Exhibition, which opened that April. Wells, by contrast, bicycles in to Paris to see it, armed with the Exhibition plan which he had asked Gissing to send him, ahead of his trip.

Although far from optimistic in tone, the early letters in this volume do have a kind of jaunty lugubriousness, the hallmark of the style of speech of Gissing's own protagonist Harvey Rolfe in *The Whirlpool*: "My heart fails every time I take up the pen. I say: What's the use, when the end of it all is so manifestly death by hunger – or by some ruffian's pistol-shot?" This is Gissing in January 1900. But the spirited tone of this seems to have evaporated by the following winter.

Yet even during that first winter in the Fleury ménage at the Passy apartment, there are evident signs of tension. He labours on "Among the Prophets," a work which, although

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completed, never got beyond Pinker, who destroyed it on Gissing's instructions. And it is with a palpable sense of relief that Gissing leaves for England where, for the best part of a month, he conducts an energetic round of visits to his family in Wakefield, and friends and publishers in London and Kent. Gissing used Edward Clodd's London home as his base for a few days. His messages to him offer a glimpse of Gissing's need for sympathetic and stimulating male companionship. "My time will be greatly occupied," he writes to Clodd, ahead of his stay in London, "but it would do me good to have a word with you each night before bedtime." Unlike Wells or Morley Roberts, Clodd offered Gissing a friendship which was both disinterested and trustworthy. "Impossible to tell you how I enjoyed my stay in your house," he writes, by way of thanks, "the utter restfulness of it! It has done me good, body & mind." Gissing's appreciation of Clodd's own intellectual hospitality always prompts an answering generosity from Gissing, seen to best advantage in his enthusiastic, yet discriminating comments on Clodd's studies of Grant Allen (1900) and T. H. Huxley (1901).

But the question of Gissing's health continues to dominate. A brief rheumatic attack on his return to Paris would prompt Gabrielle to remind Gissing's friends of what she saw as the folly of making such a trip, tracing the subsequent decline in his health to the visit he first made to Wakefield. Sensibly Gissing, Gabrielle and her invalid mother remove themselves to the countryside at St. Honoré-les-bains, near Nevers in central France, for the best part of six months, during which time Gissing is able to complete *Our Friend the Charlatan*, and Gabrielle a translation of *The Odd Women*. The French countryside clearly agreed with Gissing and Gabrielle, prompting their eventual decision to remove themselves, for good, to the Pyrenees in April 1902. This volume closes in the autumn of 1902, with Gissing in relatively good

psychological shape, his health stabilised, the final form of *Ryecroft* completed. The final volume of the letters will remind us just how temporary this period of respite would be. And given the tragicomedy of the events of mid-1901, detailed in this volume, it is astonishing that such calm, albeit short-lived, could be retrieved.

Readers of these letters will no doubt be familiar with the outlines of the drama which erupted, once a French specialist had diagnosed the deterioration in the condition of one of Gissing's lungs. What followed was a battle between Gabrielle, and to an extent Clara Collet, on the one hand, and the Wells's, and Gissing's English doctors, on the other, ostensibly over the

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issue of Gissing's health. The crisis which undoubtedly threatened Gissing's relationship with Gabrielle was precipitated as soon as Gabrielle, who had intended to remain for a week with Gissing and the Wells's in England, returned without Gissing to look after her mother in Paris. At once a struggle for diagnostic control ensued, infused with an Anglo-French hostility, shown on both sides.

It is difficult to summarise the interplay of personal prejudice and suspicion, social and ethical divergence, and sheer misunderstanding which emerges during this extraordinary nine-week period from June to August 1901. The editors rise to the challenge of this fascinating, but complex affair with enormous skill, as their introduction lays bare, over ten compelling pages, the motives of the participants. As they suggest, none of the participants remain totally unscathed. And the editors perform a notable service in allowing Gabrielle's letters to Clara Collet, H. G. and Mrs. Wells to throw their astonishingly penetrating and candid light on the personality of the man at the centre of the drama, warts and all. Perceptive and intelligent as Gabrielle clearly was, she was not able to explain why Gissing was quite so reluctant to allow his family in Wakefield, whatever their prejudices, to share his pleasure in having met her. Gabrielle certainly overstated the extent to which Gissing was in thrall to Wakefield (she will only name it by abbreviation to "Wak.="), but her feelings of humiliation are entirely understandable. What begins as a medical drama soon modulates into a drama of psychological intensity played through the fracturing social and moral certainties of turn-of-the-century Europe. The possibilities for dramatisation should, hereafter, prove irresistible. For this reader, no aspiring dramatist should pass up the tragi-comic possibilities afforded by Ibsen's late symbolic play, *Little Eyolf*.

William Greenslade, University of the West of England

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#### Notes and News

News from Wakefield first. At a committee meeting of the Gissing Trust last December it was decided to arrange a number of events for 1997. These include talks about Wakefield personalities by John Goodchild and Kate Taylor, and a walk in the town conducted by Anthony Petyt, who will point out the various places associated with the Gissing family. An exhibition, "Views of Wakefield in the nineteenth century," will be held at the Centre in May, all the

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material being supplied by John Goodchild; it will be open for one week and entrance will be free of charge.

D. J. Taylor, whose interest in Gissing's life and work has been reported on several

occasions since he wrote an article celebrating the hundredth anniversary of *New Grub Street* in the *Independent*, once more praised the *Collected Letters* in the *Spectator* for 16 November under "Books of the Year," generously calling the edition "one of the greatest exercises in Victorian literary scholarship." He had reviewed Volume 4 in the *Independent* and is to review Volumes 5 to 9 in the *Times Literary Supplement* shortly. An article from his pen on Grub Street past and present will also appear before long in the *Guardian*, which might do worse than review his Everyman edition of *New Grub Street*, just published simultaneously with *The Whirlpool*.

There was a time when news from the Far East only meant news from Japan. Then in the 1980s we heard that there were some scholars in China who translated and commented on Gissing's work, but since the early death of Mr. Yao Zaixiang all contact with them has ceased. Now as will be seen under "Recent Publications," a Korean academic has written an article on *The Nether World* and we cannot as yet offer more than a translation of the title. A Korean translation of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* was published about 1970, but no one in the West ever seems to have held a copy in his hands. From Japan we have received Ms Ayaka Okada's M.A. thesis, pleasantly entitled "'Far, Far Away': George Gissing's Passion for the Classics." We shall give details in a forthcoming number, either in the form of an abstract by its author or in that of a review. Although articles on aspects of Gissing's classical culture and its manifestations in his work have appeared off and on in the last fifty years, nobody has yet attempted to write a worthy successor to Samuel Vogt Gapp's *George Gissing, Classicist* (1936).

In Italy Francesco Badolato has been as active as ever. A new interview of him, with a photograph, was published in the November-December number of *Il Besanese*, a periodical published in the northern town where he has been living for years, Besana Brianza: "Calabria, Inghilterra, Brianza: le tre anime di Badolato" (p. 20). On 20 February and 6 March he gave lectures on "Three English Travellers in Italy: Lear, Gissing and Douglas," and on "Gissing in Naples, Rome, Florence and Venice" at the Circolo Cultural Il Mosaico of Besana.

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Among forthcoming publications, and likely to appear before Shigeru Koike's selections of short stories in the Iwanami Library and the French translation of *By the Ionian Sea*, there looms an unexpected German publication which is sure to make its mark, Bertz's *Philosophie des Fahrrads*, edited by Wulfhard Stahl. The book, which was and has remained something of a curiosity, is virtually unavailable secondhand in Central Europe, and like many writings published a hundred years ago, it can hardly be fully appreciated without the assistance of footnotes. Bertz mentions a number of utterly forgotten medical practitioners, journalists and cycling champions, most of whom have now been identified. The 250-page volume, which is soon to be available from Wim Snyder Verlag, of Paderborn, at the very reasonable price of DM29.80, will contain Bertz's full text, supplemented by four articles on bicycling which he wrote at the turn of the century. Besides an editorial note, Wulfhard Stahl has contributed an afterword, a bibliography and an index of some 200 names. A portrait of Bertz in the mid-1890s is to be used as a frontispiece or on the front cover. Another aspect of Bertz's work was recently revived by Walter Grünzweig in his book *Constructing the German Walt Whitman* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994). Chapter 19, which deals with Bertz's lengthy comment on Whitman's work, is significantly entitled "Homosexuality." Later this year we should be able to give details about the forthcoming publication of Brian Ború Dunne's *Memoirs of Gissing*, of which short extracts were printed in footnotes to the *Collected Letters of George Gissing*. Dunne was an observer of his life for months in Siena and Rome, and he had a wealth of anecdotes to

relate about his friend's response to life in Italy.

John Hammond, the President of the H. G. Wells Society, kindly informs us that the four volumes of the collected edition of Wells's letters, edited by David Smith, which we announced last year, will be available in the late summer of 1997. A one-volume edition of the best of the letters may also appear sometime in 1998. We are told that the "collected edition" will *not* include any of Wells's letters already published in the Gissing, James, Bennett and Shaw volumes.

In our July 1996 number we mentioned a book by Annie Laurant entitled *Des fers de Loire à l'acier Martin: Maîtres de forges en Berry et Nivernais* (Editions Royer, 8, rue Victor Letalle, 75020 Paris), which contains a great deal of information about the family background of Gabrielle Fleury. The volume, published in October 1995, cost 168 francs. A new volume with

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the same title, but subtitled *Fonderies et Aciéries*, with 66 illustrations as against 53 for the first, appeared in February. It is available at 176 francs either straight from the publisher or from the author, Mme Laurant, 57E, route de la Charité, 18000 Bourges, France.

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#### Recent Publications

##### Volume

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, edited by D. J. Taylor, London: J. M. Dent; Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1997. Everyman Paperback. Pictorial cover featuring a detail from "Fleet Street Looking West" by E. H. Tidmarsh. xxv + 486 pages. £6.99 or \$9.95. ISBN 0-460-87724-0. The volume contains a note on the author and editor, a chronology of Gissing's life and times, an introduction, a note on the text, notes to the text, and suggestions for further reading.

George Gissing, *The Whirlpool*, edited by William Greenslade, London: J. M. Dent; Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1997. Everyman paperback. Pictorial cover featuring "Piccadilly in June" by Rose Barton. xxxii + 462 pages. £6.99 or \$8.95. ISBN 0-460-87781-X. The volume contains a note on the author and editor, a chronology of Gissing's life and times, an introduction, a note on the text, notes to the text, a section on Gissing and his critics, suggestions for further reading, and a text summary.

Bouwe Postmus (ed.), *George Gissing's Memorandum Book: A Novelist's Notebook, 1895-1902*, Lewiston, New York; Salzburg, Austria: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996. Salzburg University Studies. Reddish brown cloth. xiv + 82 pages. £39.95. ISBN 0-7734-4191-3. The volume contains an introduction, the text with 340 notes, two appendices listing the *Huntington Memorandum Book* and the *Commonplace Book* entries used in *An Author at Grass* and *Ryecroft*, a bibliography and a general index.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Buck McMullen, "Literature, English," *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Vol. 53, no. 10, April 1993, pp. 3538A-3539A. Abstract of dissertation entitled "Allergies of Reading:

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Some Ambiguities of Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction." *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* is one of the texts under discussion.

Eun Ae Sung, "Gissing eui Jeo Arae Sesang et natanan nodong Kyegeub gwa yesul," *English Studies* (Seoul National University), Volume 18 (1994), pp. 57-72. A study of the working-class and art in *The Nether World*.

Patrick Waddington, *Ivan Turgenev and Britain*, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1995. Gissing appears on pp. 60-62, 247 and 259.

Serge Soupel (ed.), *La Littérature de langue anglaise des origines à nos jours*, Paris: Ellipses, 1995. Contains a poorly informed paragraph on Gissing, on p. 165.

Robin M. Myers, *Reluctant Expatriate: The Life of Harold Frederic*, London and Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996. Gissing's contacts with Frederic are duly recorded, as well as the few occurrences of Frederic's name in his correspondence in 1898-99. No new information is given on the relationship between the two writers.

Francesco Badolato, "Scrittori vittoriani: Gissing tra positivismo e pessimismo," *Il Corriere di Roma*, 15 July 1996, p. 15. Fourth part.

Anon., "Books briefly noted," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, September 1996, p. 272. Notice of Volume 7 of the *Collected Letters*.

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Martha S. Vogeler, "Book Reviews," *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 40 (1997), no. 2, pp. 184-87. Review of Volume 8 of the *Collected Letters*. The same number contains an article by Penny Boumelha, "The Woman of Genius and the Woman of Grub Street: Figures of the Female Writer in British *Fin-de-Siècle* Fiction," in which Gissing and *New Grub Street* appear six times. Vol. 40, no. 1 of the same journal carries a review by

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Deborah Martinson of a book by Daniel Born, *The Birth of Liberal Guilt in the English Novel: Charles Dickens to H. G. Wells*, which has a chapter on Gissing.

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#### Nature in April

Gissing was a loving observer of nature, who liked to walk along country lanes and watch the plants around him in spring. In February 1902, during the dull winter he spent at Arcachon, he ordered and read *The Country Month by Month* by J. A. Owen and G. S. Boulger (Duckworth, 1902). His copy is annotated in ink, usually at the bottom of pages, and vertical lines in pencil appear off and on in the margins opposite passages of interest to him. Thus under "April: Meadows Pied," he wrote "Buttercups. Valley of the Blythe [...] Cuckoo-flower. The river valley at Budleigh Salterton [...] Cowslip. Field north of Epsom, where Thames valley clay begins," this last note echoing the authors' remark that the "freckled cowslip [...] is essentially a plant of clay lands." A characteristic passage of the book (pp. 157-58), with a vertical line in the margin, is that about the larch: "Whether we see it against the sombre blue of some Scots firs, or against the brown tint now presented by unopened buds of beech, there is something startling in the vividness of its grass-green. We are at once reminded of the strong protest against it made by Wordsworth at the beginning of the last century, when it was first extensively planted in England. We have seen its death-like aspect in winter, upon which he animadverted, and we have grown accustomed to this vivid green, which is undoubtedly, as the poet complained, foreign to our woodlands; but we have to value it as a cheering token of spring, especially when

in addition to the clustered needle-like leaves, the ‘rosy plumelets,’ or young cones, ‘tuft’ its branches.” Gissing confirmed this in the margin: “The mountain side at Nevin, N. Wales.” Clearly his notes are of some biographical interest. Had the book appeared a year before, its connection with *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* would have been worth studying.

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*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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