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“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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Socialism and Conservatism in George Gissing’s  
*Workers in the Dawn and Demos*

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I

In the mid-Victorian decades, the consequences of profound economic, social, political, philosophical, religious and scientific changes could no longer be dispelled from the public consciousness. Social conflicts, the fear of class society disintegrating, of class identity being eroded and of a concomitant threat to the whole social order were prevalent themes of the political discourse. Utilitarianism, the belief in progress and the materialism of the rising bourgeoisie attracted the critical attention of both cultural critics and novelists. New geological and biological theories and the historical Bible criticism undermined the foundations of Christian doctrine. The publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 revolutionized the natural sciences, which since then have dominated man’s thinking on the world and himself. The result was a widespread crisis and, eventually, a loss of faith. Traditional

norms and values were called into question and thrown overboard. The middle classes, which were about to replace the aristocracy as the hegemonic political force, displayed panic fear of the proletarian masses demanding political rights and participation. The extent of this anxiety among the ruling classes became noticeable in the reactions to the so-called Hyde Park Riots in July 1866, which were blown up into a threat to the foundations of society by ignorant, brutalized masses. Social disintegration and cultural degeneration were seen as being in close connection with the rise of socialism and anarchism in the 1880s. Anarchy, in particular, was regarded as the cause and symptom of social, mental and cultural decay. Thomas Carlyle had prepared the ground for such reasonings, and Matthew Arnold took up Carlylean ideas, and developed them further by adapting them to the new social situation.

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The mid-Victorian novel reflected these developments. How strongly the fear of a radical social transformation affected even the liberal section of the middle class is illustrated by George Eliot's novel *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), published in the year of the rejection of Gladstone's Reform Bill, the split in the Liberal Party and the Hyde Park Riots. After the Reform Act of 1867, two topics, the problem of the proletarian masses and the dangers resulting from a democratisation of society remained high on the agenda of the late-Victorian and Edwardian novel. However, the accent of their treatment shifted. Whereas Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot had concentrated on the threat to the socio-political order and had warned of future developments in apocalyptic scenes, Henry James, George Gissing, W. H. Mallock, Joseph Conrad and G. K. Chesterton treated the destruction of cultural and ethical traditions and values as a process that was already taking place. In this article, I shall examine two novels by George Gissing, in particular the way in which he works out these connections.

## II

*Workers in the Dawn* and *Demos* stand out as two prominent cornerstones in Gissing's political thinking. Under the influence of the exiled German socialist Eduard Bertz, whom he had befriended in 1879, and deeply impressed by radical street agitation, he openly admitted his sympathies for radical political circles and positivist philosophy.<sup>1</sup> In a letter to his brother dated June 1880, he calls himself "a mouthpiece of the advanced Radical party."<sup>2</sup> Gissing attended political meetings, delivered a lecture on "Faith and Reason" to a working men's club on 23 March 1879. At the instigation of Frederic Harrison, the then president of the Positivist Committee, he published three articles in John Morley's *Pall Mall Gazette*<sup>3</sup> in September 1880. In the same year, his first novel came out. *Workers in the Dawn* earned him the high esteem of Harrison and useful literary contacts.<sup>4</sup> In this novel, Gissing's openness to social reforms manifests itself in the optimistic socio-political and philosophical views expounded by Tollady. At a time of heightened social tensions, *Demos* was published two years after the electoral reform of 1884 in the same year as Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima*, Mallock's *The Old Order Changes* and Walter Besant's *Children of Gibeon*. In "the most didactic and snobbish of his novels,"<sup>5</sup> Gissing not only refutes the diverse socialist currents, which had channelled

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their activities in different organizations since the publication of *Workers in the Dawn*, but he also distances himself from all endeavours to bring about a moderate democratic and social reform. This trend has already become apparent in *The Unclassed* (1884), where Waymark, with distinctly autobiographical references to Gissing, retrospectively acknowledges:

I often amuse myself with taking to pieces my former self. I was not a conscious hypocrite in those days of violent radicalism, working-man's-club lecturing, and the like; the fault was that I understood myself as yet so imperfectly. That zeal on behalf of the suffering masses was nothing more nor less than disguised zeal on behalf of my own starved passions. I was poor and desperate, life had no pleasures, the future seemed hopeless, yet I was overflowing with vehement desires, every nerve in me was a hunger which cried to be appeased. I identified myself with the poor and ignorant; I did not make their cause my own, but my own cause theirs. I raved for freedom because I was myself in the bondage of unsatisfiable longing.<sup>6</sup>

This disillusionment found its clearest expression in *The Nether World* (1889). Its outcome was the complete abandoning of his political and social commitment. A social pessimism founded on Schopenhauer's fatalism<sup>7</sup> ousted even the slightest hope of social change and the positivist optimism for the future. Gissing's essay "The Hope of Pessimism" (1882)<sup>8</sup> bears testimony of his rejection of Auguste Comte and his embracing of Schopenhauer. Here and in *The Unclassed*, he depicts human beings as bad and unhappy. Only the artist has some reason for being optimistic, for the condition of man provides him with his subject-matter. An English translation of Schopenhauer's main work *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1818) was not published until 1883, but Gissing read German and had been studying the philosopher since 1879. In his later works, there are but very few reminiscences of positivist ideas.

Nevertheless, it would be a simplification of facts to portray the early Gissing as a radical and the later Gissing as an arch-conservative or even a reactionary. The anti-democratic, elitist and pessimist traits of his later novels can be traced back to his early works. As David Grylls remarks on *Workers in the Dawn*, "from the very beginning the calls for action are echoed by cries of despair."<sup>9</sup> As early as 1883, they take on concrete form. In a letter to his brother Algernon dated 18 July, Gissing writes: "Philosophy has done all it can for me, and now scarcely interests me any more. My attitude henceforth is that of the artist pure and simple."<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Gissing's lifelong affinity to the Liberal Party, his stern pacifism and

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anti-militarism make it even more difficult to determine his political standpoint.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Gissing did not identify with the way of living or the values of a single social class, but he is equally distrustful of the aristocracy, the working class and the middle classes, whose commercialism he denounces in his novels of the 1890s.

In *Workers in the Dawn*<sup>12</sup> and in *Demos*, Gissing presents different schools of radical and socialist thought and their respective concepts of social change. The picture he draws, however, bears no resemblance to contemporary political reality.<sup>13</sup> In particular, he fails to bring out clearly ideological differences, to distinguish between (reformist) radicals and (revolutionary) socialists. Gissing's political sympathies and antipathies are given vent to in the portrayal of his characters, who in some cases are reduced to mere caricatures, as well as in the cultural values attached to them.

The political and social commitment of Arthur Golding, Samuel Tollady and Will Noble is derived from altruistic motives and a distinct sense of justice. In ideological terms, they represent a mixture of Marxist social analysis, materialist philosophy of history and positivist strategy of change. The bourgeois French Revolution of 1789 and the socialist Paris Commune of 1871 form the historical points of reference of their thought. After the death of Tollady, an ethically motivated radical of the older Chartist generation and an adherent of Comte's philosophy of history, Noble becomes the leading personality and the source of intellectual

inspiration in the working men's club. His political views can be characterized as moderately social-reformist. His analysis of existing society starts out from class division, which he accepts as a necessary principle. He does not aim at abolishing class society, but at distributing social resources justly and at recognizing the claim to a secure existence as a natural right.<sup>14</sup> Noble favours workers' self-help based on the organization and above all the political and ethical education of the workers:

*We must get taught!* The rich domineer over us not only because we are poor, but still more because we are too like the animals, we have too little of that grand intellectual power which, by taking entirely the place of bodily strength, distinguishes civilisation from barbarism! (*Workers*, II, p. 19; see also I, p. 278)

In *Workers in the Dawn*, as in *Thyrza* (1887), this process of education and social reform, which is at the heart of Comte's *religion of humanity*, is upheld by the better-off workers and artisans who are the recruits of Noble's club.

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Like Walter Besant, Gissing belittles the importance of class antagonism. To him, it is not so much the result of socio-economic reality as the manifestation of a cultural antagonism. Since the 1830s it had been common practice to confront proletarian barbarism with bourgeois or aristocratic civilization. Taking up this tradition, Gissing distinguishes between civilization and the working masses who eke out a miserable existence in the slums at "an elementary stage of civilization."<sup>15</sup> His attitude to these masses is thoroughly ambivalent.<sup>16</sup> Gissing's feelings of guilt, desperation and repulsion are rooted in his autobiographical experience.

The workers in *Workers in the Dawn* "are variously seen as both victims and criminals, objects of compassion, deserving aid, and objects of physical and moral abhorrence, who spurn all the aid that is offered. Both perspectives are found in the tours of the slums."<sup>17</sup> Gissing's sympathy is restricted to single individuals such as Emma Vine, whose life circumstances he delineates with a great deal of sensitivity and detailed, realist talent for observation. The masses as a social force are treated with utter contempt, as his semi-autobiographical work, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903) was also to demonstrate. Like Thomas Carlyle, Benjamin Disraeli, Charles Kingsley and Charlotte Tonna, Gissing looks down on them as an accumulation of intellectually and emotionally dull, physically and morally degenerate beings. By using metaphors such as "monster" (*Demos*, pp. 445, 456), "wild beasts" (*Demos*, p. 456), "a great strong beast" and "the huge brute",<sup>18</sup> he demonises them collectively. A typical example of this tendency is the following passage taken from *Demos* shortly before Mutimer's murder:

Picture them, the indignant champions of honesty, the avengers of virtue defamed! *Demos* was roused, was tired of listening to mere articulate speech; it was time for a good wild-beast roar, for a taste of bloodshed. Scarcely a face in all the mob but distorted itself to express as much savagery as can be got out of the human countenance. (p 453)

Daniel Dabbs, "the proletarian pure and simple" (*Demos*, p. 34), represents the amoral, uncultured masses which turn out to be neither worthy of the commitment of individual idealists nor ready for socialism nor capable of being humanized. In *Demos*, Gissing assigns the extremist socialists, whom Eldon disparages as anarchists, to the masses, thereby discrediting them. In *The Crown of Life* (1899), he condemns them wholesale: "At its best, a smiling simpleton; at its worst, a murderous maniac."<sup>19</sup> Yet, neither in *Demos* nor in *Workers in the*

*Dawn* are there characters who could be identified explicitly as anarchists. The masses and anarchy are synonymous with the destruction of everything Gissing holds in high regard. Like the professional trade union agitator in Disraeli's *Sybil*, Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and Dickens's *Hard Times*, Roodhouse is a dangerous demagogue seducing the mob. In Roodhouse's dissociation from Westlake's and Mutimer's movement Gissing brings together two divisions occurring in the English socialist movement in the 1880s: the secession of the *Socialist League* from the *Social Democratic Federation* and the schism within the *Socialist League*, in which the differences between working-class propagandists from the East End (Roodhouse) and William Morris (Westlake) and his adherents from the West End had become irreconcilable. Roodhouse, whose motto is "Blood and iron!" (*Demos*, p. 226) demands the arming of the working class, and he considers murder as a legitimate political means. He accuses Westlake and Mutimer of stabilizing the system by diverting the masses from the revolutionary struggle. As Roodhouse is portrayed exclusively in negative terms, it is difficult to specify his political ideology. Halperin views him as a Marxist,<sup>20</sup> Lelchuk regards him as "a fanatic anarchist ideologue," and then goes on to denounce him as a "nihilist apostle."<sup>21</sup> Roodhouse can be considered as an anarchist only on the presumption that anarchism is a purely negative political philosophy. This view can be found in stereotypes and clichés, which have dominated the political and popular discourses for centuries.

John Pether in *Workers in the Dawn* is an example of such a demonised anarchist. Anticipating the phrenological theories of Cesare Lombroso, Gissing immediately establishes parallels between his external appearance and his political views: "His face was strongly smeared with grime, and his long, skeleton-like hands, which rent the silk as if they took a pleasure in destruction, were black and hairy like those of a gorilla" (I, p. 353). Pether, whose mother was hanged as a murderess, is not driven by intellectual convictions but by a private grievance. He is classified as a bloodthirsty, mad and ape-like "gloomy fanatic" (I, p. 365)<sup>22</sup> glorifying violence indiscriminately. His speeches betray an insatiable desire to crush and ridicule the Christian maxim of brotherly love. Employing blood and fire metaphors, he formulates a vision of purification of both man and society by violence and destruction. Tollady's death gives him the occasion for a passionate and impressive *J'accuse*, which contrasts Tollady's ideals and humanist ethics with existing tyranny and makes Golding shudder with horror. Pether's disappointment, political frustration and the seeming futility of peaceful

means of social change are expressed in apocalyptic visions of violence, which are sharpened in the face of death:

not a house shall be left standing, not the latest-born of our tyrants shall live another hour! [...] Fire these houses, and kill every living creature that flees from them! It grows dark, but the fires will light us to our work. No pity! No mercy! Aye, the women and children, too! Kill, kill, kill! (II, pp. 203f.)

While struggling with Golding, he inadvertently sets fire to his flat and dies symbolically from the result of his blind fanaticism. Because of his radicalism, he is denied admission to the working men's club. He remains politically isolated and makes no effort to get out of this situation. The relationships between the state socialist organizations, Roodhouse, and Pether reflect the state of the socialist movement, which between 1880 (*Workers in the Dawn*) and 1886 (*Demos*) differentiated into distinct organizations and ideological currents.

Gissing thematizes one more attempt to escape the mechanism and structures of the existing socio-economic order. Mutimer's settlement functions on Owenite principles and offers an alternative form of work and living to carefully selected workers and their families. The reasons for the failure of this anachronistic experiment are not to be sought in economic conditions. Instead, Gissing focuses on the characters, on moral and ethical attitudes and on the consciousness of individual workers. In *Demos*, almost all of the socialists act from egoistic motives, primarily envy. With the exception of Westlake they are all characterized by dishonesty. Rodman and Dabbs renounce socialism as soon as their future is financially secure. Adela's brother Alfred compensates for physical inadequacies, and he hates Eldon. Not only are the men behaving thus, but also Mutimer, the spiritual founder and practical organizer of the New Wanley project. He combines Joseph Chamberlain's radicalism and Charles Bradlaugh's atheism.<sup>23</sup> His personal and political failure symbolizes the decline of socialism which Gissing takes to be inevitable. Mutimer's principles undergo a progressive process of erosion. Right from the beginning, personal ambition, egoism and a desire for social promotion depreciate his political and social ideals.<sup>24</sup> They influence negatively his political career as well as his human relationships, in which the feeling of social superiority is coupled with the contempt for people of a lower social rank. His decision to marry Adela and to sever his relationship with the working-class woman Emma Vine indicates the betrayal of his class. As time progresses, the settlement is gaining a new status as "a stepping-stone" (p. 278) for him on his way to political

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power at the end of which he imagines himself as President of a future English republic. Mutimer's claim to power and authority is displayed in the episode where he sacks the worker Rendal for having contravened the prohibition of alcohol. In spite of Adela's request, he refuses to reverse his decision, which seriously threatens the livelihood of Rendal's family, because he fears a loss of authority and wants to make an example of the man's dismissal at all costs. It is not human feelings, solidarity and social responsibility that determine Mutimer's actions, but egoistic power interests. After having lost New Wanley to his arch-enemy Eldon, his pathological need for admiration and his excessive vanity are reinforced. Without the slightest moral qualms, he takes money from an unknown patron in order to support himself. His activity as "professional agitator" removes him even further from the masses; "he belonged to no class at all" (p. 411). Finally, he shares in capitalist speculations which in the last analysis result in his downfall. However, one has to make allowances and recognize that this financial business is not run in his own interests, but in those of workers from the East End. Gissing gradually redirects the reader's sympathy. Whereas he depicts the masses in increasingly negative terms, he presents Mutimer in a more positive light. Mutimer falls victim to the bloodthirsty mob, and thereby an ironic twist is given to Eldon's characterization of him as "Demos grasping the sceptre" (p. 77). It is no coincidence that the workers turn against him just at that moment when his actions follow altruistic motives. In this process, Mutimer is gaining self-knowledge and Adela's fullest sympathy.

Not only are collective political or violent actions and isolated alternative experiments doomed to failure from the outset, but philanthropy is not a solution to social problems either. In *Workers in the Dawn*, Helen Norman enthusiastically devotes her energies to private charity and educational work. She is a handsome, virtuous, intelligent, agnostic woman with a social conscience and an idealised counter-image to the alcoholic prostitute Carrie Mitchell. The contradictory philosophies of Comte, Schopenhauer and Shelley have had a formative influence on the Madonna-like figure.<sup>25</sup> However high her and Heatherley's commitment to ease social misery in the East End may be,<sup>26</sup> however honest her motives arising from Christian brotherly love, and however hard she tries to understand and feel sympathy for the poor, she is inescapably faced with the lack of success and effectiveness of her actions.

Like Richard Kelmarsh and Dan Dunstan in Philip Gibbs' *The Spirit of Revolt* (1908), John Pether argues against private charity on principle. He hints that philanthropists act from

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insincere motives, he highlights the demoralising and humiliating effects of charity on the recipients, and he pinpoints their function in maintaining the existing social system:

What are the miseries of the poor to you? You have your great house to live in, and your fine clothes to wear; what do you know of suffering? Do you lack amusements? Haven't you your theatres and your balls, your carriages and horses to show yourself with in the park; can't you eat and drink of the best from morning to night? Isn't this enough, but you must look for new excitement in gaols and hospitals and the holes which such as we call homes? You help the poor! Do you know that every penny you give in charity, as you call it, is poison to the poor, killing their independence and that sense of liberty which is the only possession they can hope to boast of? Do you know that you accustom them to think of you rich as the lawful holders of all the fruits of the earth, from whom they must be glad to receive what scanty crumbs it pleases you to throw them, when they ought rather to rise as one man and demand as an eternal right what you pride yourself in giving them as a boon? (I, pp 369f.)

As early as *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing doubts the possibility of changing the slum dwellers, whom he considers to be impervious to reformation. Golding endeavours unsuccessfully to get his wife to stop drinking: "I cannot raise her to my level" (II, p. 391).<sup>27</sup> Helen must learn by experience that people living in misery, and driven by hunger and sheer fear for their livelihood are concerned first and foremost about their survival and social reforms, and are interested only secondarily in raising their ethical, intellectual and cultural standards. Gissing does not hold poverty or social conditions, "the criminal indifference and the actual cruelty and oppression of the higher ranks of society" (I, p. 259), responsible for the hopeless situation of the workers, but he puts the blame on their own sluggishness, lethargy, ignorance, depravity and class prejudice. Gilbert Gresham talks of the "self-brutalization [...] of these gaol-birds" (I, p. 258). Even though this comment is made by an arrogant, cynical upper-class snob and dandy, it is supported by Will Noble and his programmatic demand for educational work. The moral Helen Norman passes on to her pupils emphasizes this: "There is hardly an evil from which we daily suffer which has not *ignorance* for its cause" (II, p. 415). The diverse secular and religious variants of determinism (materialism, fatalism, predestination) severely limit the scope of action and the free will of the individual, and run counter to an optimistic attitude. Tollady demonstrates the ambiguity which arises from proclaiming human powerlessness and, at the same time, asking

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people to contribute actively to social change, to make their own history.

Whereas Gissing plainly condemns the masses, Philip Gibbs shows more sympathy for them in *The Spirit of Revolt*:

The poor are all fatalists. Earn and spend, is their motto. Their life is so grey, that when they've got a bit they go on the bust, as they call it. They must get a little excitement somehow, just to feel they're alive. Why do they drink? I'll tell you – they drink to live. It stimulates their low vitality, and lifts them

up even for a little while out of the dull and dreary rut. [...] People who live in Hell naturally behave like devils. (p 60)

Dan Dunstan, a labour politician rooted in the working class milieu, comes to a conclusion similar to Hubert Eldon's. As distinct from Gissing's hero, however, he puts the futility of education down to the socio-economic conditions and centuries of habituation to servitude. In accordance with his materialist philosophy, he demands a transformation of their material and social surroundings. In contrast to the cultural pessimists Gissing and Mallock, Walter Besant stands for a social romantic, politically naive belief in progress. He presents the workers not as a threat to society, but as the lethargic victims of capitalist excesses who can be raised to a higher cultural and moral level under the leadership of enlightened members of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. In his semi-utopian novels *All Sorts and conditions of Men* and *Children of Gibeon*, he advocates educating the workers as a possibility of transcending economic and social antagonisms and of solving social problems.<sup>28</sup>

### III

The tension between politics, art and culture is a main theme in Gissing's work.<sup>29</sup> Influenced by Schopenhauer's Platonic identification of the good with the beautiful,<sup>30</sup> Gissing regards art as a means of escaping life.<sup>31</sup> In *Workers in the Dawn*, Arthur Golding personifies the dilemma of being caught between his sense of social justice and moral responsibility, on the one hand, and cultural interests, on the other hand. He has to decide in favour of either political and social commitment, which includes the necessity of manual labour to earn a living, or the life of an artist. This alternative, the importance of which for his own future Golding has already grasped as a youth, is personified by Will Noble and Gilbert Gresham. The political activist Noble strictly negates art as "idle self-gratification" (II, p. 304) and as politically irrelevant. In

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contrast, the cynical painter Gresham rejects all social and political responsibilities. In *Workers in the Dawn*, political activity and artistic work cannot be reconciled. Gissing insists on the absolute autonomy of art and, in the Romantic tradition, accentuates the cult of the genius. Like Henry James, who in "The Art of Fiction" (1884) was to oppose an aesthetic calling for a socially engaged art, and, in accordance with naturalism and aestheticism, he demands a neutral attitude of the artist towards his material.<sup>32</sup> Samuel Tollady alone believes in the possibility of a synthesis between politics and art and confirms Golding in pursuing his artistic leanings. Significantly, he dies at the end of the first volume. Like Gissing himself, Golding decides to give way to his inner urge, and he feels as if he were reborn: "I feel like a new man to-day" (I, p. 248).<sup>33</sup> His decision in favour of art amounts to the identification with a certain class. This in turn has a concrete personal dimension. Golding breaks away from Carrie and turns to Helen Norman. Whereas the working-class woman Carrie is a hindrance to the development of his creativity, Helen has an inspiring effect on him. It is her persuasiveness that encourages him to follow the path of art and makes him give up the political work he had made the centre of his life after Tollady's death. She proclaims it the right and duty of genius to raise itself above the others and to forsake all social duties in order to contribute to cultural progress by means of artistic achievements.

But nothing in this world is more useful than the beautiful, nothing works so powerfully for the ultimate benefit of mankind. [...] Genius has always had, and always will have, laws to itself, laws not applicable to the mass of mankind. (II, p. 269)



Golding then refuses to engage actively in Noble's club. However, he does not pursue his artistic career vigorously. In his freely-chosen American exile, he works neither politically nor artistically. When he receives news that Helen Norman has died, he puts an end to his unsettled life in which he has lost all orientation and ideals. Among Gissing's protagonists, he is the first spokesman of Schopenhauer's ideas. His life-story illustrates the thesis that solitude and suffering are essential features of life. The negation of the will to live manifests itself in the longing for death as the final release from suffering.<sup>34</sup>

While in *Workers in the Dawn* the synthesis of politics and art fails to be achieved, in *The Unclassed* and in *Demos* such a possibility is out of the question from the start. Westlake is the only character to strive for a reconciliation of political and artistic work. He is a well-to-do

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socialist with a middle-class background and in many ways reminiscent of William Morris, the eminent Victorian writer, painter, craftsman, designer, cultural critic and political activist. Gissing appreciates him as a man of letters with noble ideals and motives. However, Eldon and Mr. Wyvern voice their displeasure and their astonishment at his political activities, which they disapprove of and think to be detrimental to his artistic achievements.<sup>35</sup> Contrary to Ruskin, Morris and Shaw, Gissing emphasizes that social and political commitment is irreconcilable with art.

Mutimer's political views and cultural ideas are directly opposed to those held by the cultivated Westlake. His one-sided interest in material considerations is judged to be a grave deficiency. One of his characteristic features is "the profound distrust of culture, which was inseparable from his mental narrowness" (p. 301). Mutimer's private library contains books written from a radical perspective on political, social and economic themes, but neither belles-lettres nor historical literature.<sup>36</sup> This reveals his mental narrowness and philistinism and illustrates "the incompleteness of his education and the deficiency of his instincts" (p. 42). His utilitarianism leaves no room for reading fictional literature, which he dismisses as "idle reading" (p. 257). The want of paintings in his house evokes an impression of coldness and alienation in his visitors. In Mutimer, Gissing associates intellectual limitations and cultural ignorance with socialism and democracy – democracy which, in a later novel, he has a character condemn as "the fatal enemy of art."<sup>37</sup> To him, social, intellectual and cultural superiority are inextricably linked. Democracy is tantamount to the domination of mediocrity, it incarnates "the ascendancy of the average man."<sup>38</sup> Lacking a leadership with high ethical standards, it degenerates into the despotism of the mob. Socialism and democracy lead to "the triumph of ignorance and brutality."<sup>39</sup>

Gissing was sceptical about the possibility of raising the cultural standards of the masses. In *Thyrza* as well as in *Demos*, he rejects state education, which at the end of the nineteenth century was hailed as social progress.<sup>40</sup> He criticizes its orientation towards utilitarian principles, its promotion of competition, egoism and one-sided practical technical skills. Such a system produces mindless, lethargic, ignorant people like Jonas Clay in "A Son of the Soil."<sup>41</sup> Far from civilizing man and fostering the sense of beauty, school education destroys cultural values and leads us directly to barbarism. Gissing's notion of culture is elitist. For him as for Henry James, culture is limited to the aristocracy and the upper middle class, which have reached a higher

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physical, intellectual and moral level of development. Unlike Matthew Arnold in his seminal work *Culture and Anarchy*,<sup>42</sup> Gissing believes that culture does not transcend class boundaries. Mutimer represents "the best qualities his class can show" (p. 33), but also "the combative

principle, even the triumph, of the uncultured classes” (p. 69).

#### IV

Having dismissed several possibilities of overcoming social and economic defects, Gissing indicates briefly an alternative perspective which, however, is individualistic, politically vague and unpractical. “If further social progress was to be made, he believed, it would be through the efforts of individuals who could transcend the materialism of the age and exert their mental faculties peacefully.”<sup>43</sup> The emphasis on individualism and the scepticism about institutions such as the Church and the State, which Tollady and Helen Norman accuse of being corrupt and indifferent to social problems, are characteristic of Gissing’s novels.<sup>44</sup> The detachment from these institutions is considered as the prerequisite to the emancipation of the individual. Hubert Eldon, Mutimer’s antagonist, is the torchbearer of Gissing’s criticism of democracy and conception of culture. The intellectual and wealthy aristocrat recognizes the unjust distribution of political power and material wealth and the social misery of the masses. Nevertheless, he places cultural values above the material welfare of the people. Eldon, whose driving force is “the love of beautiful things” (p. 339), despises the workers and their aspiration to material security. A flourishing culture and artistic creativity are based on inequality: “Art [...] is nourished upon inequalities and injustices!” (*The Emancipated*, p. 100). Democracy and socialism are seen not only as a threat to culture, but also to nature. On the basis of a conservative criticism of capitalism, Eldon loathes industrialisation, the domination of Carlyle’s mechanical age and material progress, since they destroy the unscathed landscape which to Eldon symbolizes aristocratic values and traditions. In *Demos*, the responsibility for this development lies not with the bourgeoisie and capitalism, but with socialists like Mutimer who destroy an idyllic landscape by establishing the New Wanley cooperative experiment.

At the end of *Demos*, the aristocratic, hierarchical principle of society triumphs, and the “country house ideology” is presented as “a normative alternative to socialism.”<sup>45</sup> John Goode assesses this as “a dangerous sympathy with the oppressed met with a pessimism which turns

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itself into the sentimental endorsement of an oppressive system.”<sup>46</sup> Eldon’s ideal is a benevolent despotism<sup>47</sup> in the tradition of Disraeli and Carlyle who sought their models of new social relationships in an idealised feudal past. Eldon’s aestheticized version of Disraeli’s *Young England* model is given a humanitarian and social dimension by Adela Waltham, who personifies justice, altruism and brotherly love. Unlike Disraeli, Gissing denies a union of the aristocracy and the working class any future perspectives. Even a union between the working class and the bourgeoisie does not promise to be successful as the failed marriage of Adela and Mutimer demonstrates. In both cases, the cultural gap between the classes is insurmountable. Class barriers are established as naturally given. The attempt to transcend them contravenes nature. Against this, Adela’s marriage to Eldon represents “an ideally conceived fusion of culture and refinement, of bourgeois morality and aristocratic privilege, in which there is not only a restoration of the old order, but its spiritual rejuvenation.”<sup>48</sup> The positions of Eldon and Adela converge in Wyvern, who feels a humanistic sympathy with the poor, yet refrains from political commitment. He shares Eldon’s scepticism about progress, but accepts it as a necessary historical development. Against Eldon and like Disraeli, he holds the bourgeoisie responsible for negative social and economic trends the aristocracy and the working class have to suffer from:

I denounce the commercial class, the *bourgeois*, the capitalists – call them what you will – as the supremely maleficent. They hold us at their mercy, and their mercy is nought. Monstrously hypocritical, they cry for progress

when they mean increased opportunities of swelling their own purses at the expense of those they employ, and of those they serve; vulgar to the core, they exalt a gross ideal of well-being, and stink in their prosperity. The very poor and the uncommercial wealthy alike suffer from them; the intellect of the country is poisoned by their influence. (*Demos*, p. 385)

The demolition of New Wanley and the scenic reconstruction of the valley is an escapist solution which will not be permanent: “The restoration of Wanley is less a gesture of hope than of despair.”<sup>49</sup>

## V

In the 1880s, a general feeling of uncertainty and fear gave rise to a veritable flood of novels dealing with the socialist movement. The critical engagement with the new political and social forces took place on two levels. A large number of trivial novels with an alarmingly low

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aesthetic standard consciously put themselves at the service of a malicious campaign against all reformist and social revolutionary forces. Democracy, socialism, anarchism and nihilism were all considered to be one in essence, to be threatening public order, freedom and private property. These fictional works were published by well-known publishers and attained a large circulation reaching a wide audience. They served a number of functions: to disparage and criminalize political adversaries and innovative artists, to deflect attention from socio-economic and political problems, to hide the absence of viable solutions, to prevent a discussion of and reflection on a radical social alternative, to cement the political and social status quo, to legitimize claims to power, to sanction repressive measures against critical voices, to name scapegoats.

Gissing and a number of other writers who meet high aesthetic standards share to a certain degree the ignorance of socialism and anarchism, equate them with violence and destruction and use similar clichés and stereotypes in their character portrayals. In contrast to the trivial novelists, they put their emphasis on a critique of civilisation and culture rather than on the political and ideological aspects of socialism. Furthermore, they include the social and political Establishment in their criticism of the contemporary situation. Their novels, which develop their subject in a much more complex way, put part of the blame for social disintegration and cultural degeneration on the ruling classes. Although they have different political and social backgrounds and ideologies, they all are deeply affected by the social and cultural change taking place in the late nineteenth century, and endow their works with a profound pessimism concerning the prospects of Victorian society and culture.

[This article is a revised translation of a chapter on George Gissing in my *Anarchismus und Literatur in England: Von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, Heidelberg, 1997].

<sup>1</sup>For Gissing and positivism, see T. R. Wright, “George Gissing: Positivist in the Dawn,” *Gissing Newsletter*, April 1984, pp. 1-20. Martha S. Vogeler, *Frederic Harrison: The Vocations of a Positivist* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 181-87.

<sup>2</sup>Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing* (Athens, Ohio, 1990), Vol. I, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup>They were published together under the title *Notes on Social Democracy* with an Introduction by Jacob Korg (London, 1968).

<sup>4</sup>On the initiative of Turgenev, Gissing in 1881-1882 wrote articles on British politics and cultural topics for the Russian journal *Vyestnik Evropy*.

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<sup>5</sup>Peter Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London, 1971), p. 77.

<sup>6</sup>*The Unclassed*, ed. with an Introduction by Jacob Korg (Brighton, 1983), p. 211.

<sup>7</sup>For Gissing's pessimism, see C. J. Francis, "Gissing and Schopenhauer," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, June 1960, pp. 53-63. Jude Brigley, "Gissing and the Limits of Total Pessimism," *Gissing Newsletter*, April 1983, pp. 12-20. For the relationship between determination and free will in Gissing's novels, see David Grylls, "Determinism and Determination in Gissing," *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. 45 (1984), pp. 61-84.

<sup>8</sup>In George Gissing, *Essays and Fiction*, ed. with an Introduction by Pierre Coustillas (Baltimore, 1970), pp. 75-97.

<sup>9</sup>David Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing* (London, 1986), p. 28.

<sup>10</sup>*Collected Letters* (Athens, Ohio, 1991), Vol. II, p. 146.

<sup>11</sup>See Pierre Coustillas, "The Political Opinions of George Gissing: A Survey," *Elizabethan and Modern Studies: Presented to Professor Willem Schrickx on the Occasion of his Retirement*, ed. J. P. vander Motten (Gent, 1985), pp. 67-74.

<sup>12</sup>For Gissing's representation of radicalism in *Workers in the Dawn*, see Andrew Whitehead, "'Against the Tyranny of Kings and Princes': Radicalism in *Workers in the Dawn*," *Gissing Newsletter*, October 1986, pp. 13-28.

<sup>13</sup>For the controversy over the treatment of socialism in *Demos*, see John Goode, "Gissing, Morris, and English Socialism," *Victorian Studies*, December 1968, pp. 201-26. Alan Lelchuk, "*Demos*: The Ordeal of the Two Gissings," *Victorian Studies*, March 1969, pp. 357-74. John Goode and Alan Lelchuk, "Gissing's *Demos*: A Controversy," *Victorian Studies*, June 1969, pp. 431-40.

<sup>14</sup>*Workers in the Dawn*, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by Pierre Coustillas (Brighton, 1985), Vol. 11, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup>*Demos: A Story of English Socialism*, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by Pierre Coustillas (Brighton, 1972), p. 149.

<sup>16</sup>See John Sloan, *George Gissing: The Cultural Challenge* (Basingstoke, 1989), p. 23.

<sup>17</sup>Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing*, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup>George Gissing, *Our Friend the Charlatan*, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks, 1976), pp. 139f.

<sup>19</sup>George Gissing, *The Crown of Life*, ed. with an Introduction by Michel Ballard (Hassocks, 1978), p. 291.

<sup>20</sup>John Halperin, *Gissing: A Life in Books* (Oxford, 1982), p. 76.

<sup>21</sup>Lelchuk, "*Demos*: The Ordeal of the Two Gissings," pp. 371, 372.

<sup>22</sup>Whitehead, "'Against the Tyranny of Kings and Princes,'" pp. 24-27, mentions some interesting parallels with Robespierre Pegler, alias "89," in Richard Whiteing's novel *The Democracy* (1876). He assumes that these characters are modelled on the communist and atheist agitator Dan Chatterton, who in the 1870s and 1880s had gained notoriety.

<sup>23</sup>See John Lucas, "Conservatism and Revolution in the 1880s," *Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century: Essays*, ed. with an Introduction by John Lucas (London, 1971), p. 190.

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<sup>24</sup>See *Demos*, pp. 36, 49, 229, 276.

<sup>25</sup>Golding compares her with Raphael's Madonna di San Sisto, whom the positivists regarded as a symbol of humanity. See Marion Spies, *Skeptizismus im spätviktorianischen*

*Roman* (Frankfurt, 1991), p. 293.

<sup>26</sup>For the gap between the Church and the workers, see Peter d'A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton, N. J., 1968), pp. 72-79. H. McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (Hamden, 1974).

<sup>27</sup>Gissing implies that Golding also has egoistic motives: "Arthur's equanimity was restored. After all she was dependent upon him. He had it in his power to relieve her from a disagreeable life" (Vol. II, p. 100).

<sup>28</sup>See *All Sorts and Conditions of Men: An Impossible Story* (London, 1898), p. 104.

<sup>29</sup>See Jacob Korg, "Division of Purpose in George Gissing," *PMLA*, June 1955, pp. 323-36. Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing*, pp. 30ff.

<sup>30</sup>See "Zur Metaphysik des Schönen und [zur] Ästhetik," *Parerga und Paralipomena: Kleine philosophische Schriften*, Vol. 2 (Frankfurt, 1986), pp. 490-532. "Über das innere Wesen der Kunst," *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Vol. 2 (Frankfurt, 1986), pp. 521-27.

<sup>31</sup>"The Hope of Pessimism," p. 95.

<sup>32</sup>See Wim Neetens, *Writing and Democracy: Literature, Politics and Culture in Transition* (New York, 1991), p. 69.

<sup>33</sup>For art in *Workers in the Dawn*, see John Goode, *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction* (London, 1978), pp. 51-56. Golding anticipates Waymark's decision: "I have no longer a spark of social enthusiasm. Art is all I now care for, and as art I wish my work to be judged" (*The Unclassed*, p.211).

<sup>34</sup>See Spies, *Skeptizismus*, pp. 303f., 312.

<sup>35</sup>Gissing himself articulated his astonishment at Morris's political involvement in the socialist movement. In his letter to his brother of 22 September 1885 he takes the court case against Morris because of "disorderly conduct" and "striking a policeman" as the opportunity to pinpoint the contradiction between art and politics and to advise Morris to keep away from politics: "Think of William Morris being hauled into the box for assaulting a policeman! [...] what the devil is such a man doing in that galley? It is painful to me beyond expression. Why cannot he write poetry in the shade? He will inevitably coarsen himself in the company of ruffians." *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 349. See also "The Poet in the Police-Court," *Saturday Review*, Vol. 60 (1885), p. 417.

<sup>36</sup>Private libraries are a common means of characterisation in Gissing's novels. They function as "an index to [their] owner's mind" (*Workers*, Vol. II, p. 218). Noble possesses only books of a political and socio-economic interest. Tollady's library contains English, German and French classics and an extensive collection of historical works.

<sup>37</sup>*The Emancipated*, new Introduction by John Halperin (London, 1985), p. 100.

<sup>38</sup>*Born in Exile*, new Introduction by Gillian Tindall (London, 1985), p. 264.

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<sup>39</sup>*The Emancipated*, p. 100. See John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London, 1992).

<sup>40</sup>For earlier voices critical of state school education, see Raimund Schöffner, "William Godwin und die Anfänge der libertären Pädagogik," *Erziehungsideale in englischsprachigen Literaturen: Heidelberger Symposium zum 70. Geburtstag von Kurt Otten*, eds. Dieter Schulz and Thomas Kullmann (Frankfurt, 1997), pp. 141-62.

<sup>41</sup>*Human Odds and Ends: Stories and Sketches* (London, 1898), pp. 296-302.

<sup>42</sup>See Goode, "Gissing, Morris, and English Socialism," p. 216.

<sup>43</sup>Coustillas, "The Political Opinions of George Gissing," p. 72.

<sup>44</sup>See Gissing's letter to his brother Algernon, dated 8 June 1880: "First and foremost, I attack the criminal negligence of governments which spend their time over matters of relatively

no importance, to the neglect of the terrible social evils which should have been long since sternly grappled with." *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 281-82.

<sup>45</sup>Goode, *George Gissing*, pp. 88f.

<sup>46</sup>Goode, *George Gissing*, p. 45.

<sup>47</sup>See also *Denzil Quarrier*, edited and with an Introduction and Notes by John Halperin (Hassocks, 1979), pp. 28, 33.

<sup>48</sup>Sloan, *George Gissing*, p. 67.

<sup>49</sup>Lucas, "Conservatism and Revolution in the 1880s," p. 214.

\* \* \*

### Monkshouse, Northumberland: Fact into Fiction

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No reader of Gissing's exemplary study of the works of Dickens can have failed to be struck by the repeated and high praise Gissing accorded to what he regarded as one of the great master's most admirable qualities, his ability to know so well how to use his eyes. Dickens's art is praised as "wonderfully true in observation," his descriptions are "trustworthy," the highest merit of his sketches is their "veracity" and "exactitude of observation" and the secret of his subtle power to paint accurately "the human beings, no less than the social conditions he saw about him" is seen to reside in the keen "glance which missed no minutest feature of what he saw."<sup>1</sup>

Gissing made a careful distinction between Dickens' pursuit of veracity in fiction and the modern "school of strict veracity, of realism" with which, to an extent, he aligned himself. Dickens's readiness to compromise the claims of the strictest truthfulness in fiction either

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through considerations of conventional morality or in response to the demands of the market-place is opposed to the uncompromising frankness of the novelists inspired by the achievements of contemporaries like Zola in France and George Moore at home. Yet Gissing's preoccupation with the concept of veracity in fiction is not merely the result of his wide-ranging and intimate familiarity with the works of Dickens. It is surely a reflection too of one of his own fundamental artistic strengths: the accurate portrayal of people, places and practices that he had actually seen and observed. Throughout his career the preservation of verisimilitude remained of paramount importance to Gissing.

Obversely, he had admitted, many years before, to his friend Eduard Bertz, that "invention [was] the weakest of [his] various weak points,"<sup>2</sup> which may account for his lasting dependence on "material" collected in his *Scrapbook* and various other note-books. Jacob Korg, in his critical biography of Gissing, commenting on a comparable phenomenon, concludes: "So many of the minor details of the novel [*The Unclassed*] are drawn from Gissing's own immediate experiences that they cast doubt upon his ability to find other sources of material."<sup>3</sup> The inability here attributed to Gissing, however, is firmly disproved by the existence of a multitude of notes,<sup>4</sup> accumulated over all the years of his literary activity. It was the solid facts of life, laboriously gleaned during extensive prowls about the East End, his regular attendance at the police courts, from newspaper reports, or in temporary lodgings in the most extraordinary corners of London (or, of Wales, for that matter), that he came to rely on as the indispensable building bricks for his books. How greatly he valued those alternative sources of realistic details taken from life, is emphasized in a letter to Thomas Hardy, written two months before his death.

In it he admits to his fellow-writer the inadequacy of much of his final novel, *Veranilda*. One feels that it is precisely because of its lack of verifiable, observed reality, that Gissing pathetically dismisses the very book he had so long desired to write and researched so exhaustively, as: “rubbish – mere effort of the imagination.”<sup>5</sup>

This (late) depreciation of the importance of the imagination may be seen as complementary to Gissing’s constant cultivation of the principle of veracity or verisimilitude in fiction. That he instinctively adopted this critical position from the very start of his writing career, may be illustrated with reference to two early stories written during his year in America, “A Mother’s Hope,” and “An English Coast-Picture.”<sup>6</sup>

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Monkhouse, near Bamborough, Northumberland, c. 1880

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During a recent visit to the Northumberland coast, the present author could establish the amazing extent to which the memories of Gissing’s visit to that part of the world as a 10-year-old boy were worked into the fabric of these early stories, written in Chicago nine years after the event, at the age of nineteen, when he embarked upon his life as a writer. Many of what Robert Selig called the “guidebooklike” details of “An English Coast-Picture,” to me seem to be the product of Gissing’s retentive memory rather than drawn from any particular guidebook to the area. It is not, after all, very likely that a description of the interior of Monkhouse, where in the summer of 1868 Gissing had spent “a glorious two-months’ holiday”<sup>7</sup> with his mother and the other Gissing children (William, Algernon, Margaret and Ellen), would have been included in any such guide. Similarly, given the young Gissing’s frequent trips to the Farnes, there seems to have been no need for him to supplement his firsthand knowledge with information available in guidebooks. Moreover, he was well aware of the dangerous temptation of turning to such publications for inspiration. This is proved by the advice he gave to his brother Algernon in 1883: “Shun assiduously anything that can suggest the guide-book.”<sup>8</sup> The fraternal advice is even more remarkable once we realize that Gissing is once again referring to the Northumbrian scenes he remembered from his boyhood; he had tried to help his brother – who had just started

his career as a writer – by suggesting the latter write a love story set at Bamburgh (Bamborough) and the surrounding countryside, with other topographical references to Holy Island (Lindisfarne), the Farnes and the Cheviots.

The tranquil beauty (and the wintry terrors) of this region also serve as the setting for “A Mother’s Hope,” another early story first published in America in 1877. Though Gissing locates the action in a fishing village on the Yorkshire coast, there are a few clues that allow us to identify the setting as the stretch of the Northumbrian coast between Bamburgh and North Sunderland. The catching of sand-eels the young mother in the story is engaged in, reminds us of a sentence from one of Gissing’s earliest letters, written at Monkshouse in July 1868 and sent to his father at Wakefield: “Yesterday we were fishing for sand eels and got six and Mr Patterson said he would give us some hooks and a line to lay but it was too late that night and this morning we are going to get some more and are waiting until the people come from North Sunderland to get them.”<sup>9</sup> We soon learn that the young mother is married to a sailor by the name of James Patterson, who is assumed to have been drowned in a storm off the shore.

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Clearly, in distant Chicago Gissing felt there was no need to modify even marginally the name of the Patterson family with whom he had stayed at Monkshouse. Selig is surely mistaken when he associates the story with another family vacation at Seascale on the Cumberland coast, if only – quite apart from the clues given above – because the sunrise described in the opening paragraph is doubtless over a stretch of coast situated on the eastern edge of England.<sup>10</sup>

Today Monkshouse stands, barely changed from the days of Gissing’s visit, 130 years ago, in its lonely spot in the dunes on the Northumbrian coast, facing the Farne Islands. It is not known for certain how long Monks’ House (or some earlier building) has been standing on this site. In a charter dating from 1257 Henry III granted to the Monks of Farne a plot of ground on which they might build a storehouse, near his Mill of Brocks mouth. Whoever chose the site, chose well. The sheltered position is more apparent when, walking along the beach, one suddenly comes upon the clustered buildings (i.e. Brockburn, Monks’ House proper, Cuthbert’s Cottage and Brownsman Cottage, the latter added in 1957) than when, from inside them, one looks out to a great arc of sky and sea and shore. The coast road passes by immediately to the west. Until the thirties of this century it was a sandy cart track wandering through the dunes. A little stream or burn, long known as Brock Burn, runs under the road and through the garden to fan out across the beach into a little bay. Monks’ House originally was a granary and ferry house for the Farne Islands. It also comprised a graveyard and chapel. But these were removed when the house was restored by an old sea captain who retired there and fitted his bedroom with bunks. The property was long in the possession of the Thorps, who sold it to the birdwatcher, Eric Ennion, in 1947. Cuthbert’s Cottage was originally St Cuthbert’s Inn. Ennion and his family dined in a room known to them as “Patterson’s Parlour.”<sup>11</sup>

It was Robert Patterson and his wife Hannah, who were in occupation in 1868 when Gissing, his mother, brothers and sisters stayed at Monkshouse. The couple had lived there since the 1840s and were to remain until c.1875. The Pattersons (the surname is given as Pattinson in the census data for 1851, 1861 and 1871, while *Kelly’s Directory for Northumberland* [1860] mentions Robert Patterson as the landlord of St Cuthbert’s Inn, Monk’s House) at the time were both 75 years of age, and apparently still hale and hearty enough for letting out accommodation during the summer months, when Monkshouse, and especially, St Cuthbert’s, the public house, were much frequented by bathers and tourers. Originally, Robert Patterson had earned his living

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as a “white fisherman,” but he later combined his fishing activities with the less dangerous and



less demanding duties of innkeeper (“licensed victualler”). Given the public nature of his job, it is not surprising that Patterson gave his name to the room where so many people – locals and visitors – had so long enjoyed his hospitality. Gissing, certainly, in memory and imagination revisited this beautiful stretch of the English coast, where he had found such unclouded happiness.

<sup>1</sup>George Gissing, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (London: Blackie & Son, 1898), pp. 26, 17, 41, 37, 36.

<sup>2</sup>“To Eduard Bertz,” 4 November 1889, *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. IV, eds. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, Pierre Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1993), p. 139.

<sup>3</sup>Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 65.

<sup>4</sup>“To Eduard Bertz,” 5 March 1891, *Collected Letters*, vol. IV, p. 276.

<sup>5</sup>“To Thomas Hardy,” 20 September 1903, *Collected Letters*, vol. IX (1997), p. 127.

<sup>6</sup>See: *George Gissing: Lost Stories from America*, ed. Robert L. Selig (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992). “A Mother’s Hope” was first published at Chicago, in *The Alliance*, 12 May 1877, p. 364, under the pseudonym G. R. Gresham. The same pseudonym was used for “An English Coast-Picture,” which first appeared in *Appletons’ Journal* (New York), n.s. (July 1877), pp. 73-78.

<sup>7</sup>More than 25 years after his Northumbrian holiday, in a letter to his friend W. H. Hudson, Gissing spoke about it in these glowing terms: “I am very familiar with the bit of Northumbrian coast you spoke of. As a boy, I spent a glorious two-months’ holiday at a farm called Monkshouse, a mile or two north of North Sunderland, & we used to go over to the Farne Islands, with delight in them (it was egg-time) such as you can imagine. At Monkshouse, the kitchen was supported by a huge wooden pillar, which we were told was the main mast of the ‘Forfarshire’ – the ship to which Grace Darling went out. Bamborough is of course unspeakably glorious.” (Cp. George Gissing, “To W. H. Hudson,” 18 September 1894, *Collected Letters*, vol. V (1994), p. 235.)

<sup>8</sup>“To Algcrnon,” 9 November 1883, *Collected Letters*, vol. II (1991), p. 178.

<sup>9</sup>Cp. George Gissing, “To Thomas Waller Gissing,” 25 July 1868, *Collected Letters*, vol. I (1990), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>The descriptive details in the following passage are clearly based upon the remembered dangers Gissing associated with the Northumbrian coast and the winter fury of the waves of the German Ocean beating upon it: “At night the thick cold mists lay heavily upon the sea, and the breakers rolled sullenly all down the long Yorkshire coast. Not infrequently the great winds rose and lashed the ocean into fury, and then there were more wrecks, more hopeless longings for those who had gone forth never to return, more widowed wives and fatherless children.”

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(*George Gissing: Lost Stories from America*, ed. Robert L. Selig, p. 40-41.) What is now known as the North Sea, was called the German Ocean in the nineteenth century; hence Gissing’s use of “ocean.”

<sup>11</sup>The information contained in this paragraph was chiefly taken from: Eric Ennion, *The House on the Shore: The Story of Monks’ House Bird Observatory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), pp. 15-16.

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## The Lamb House that Gissing Saw

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Eastbourne

“Please express to him that it will give me very great pleasure to see him, and that if he only *will* let you convey him over I will surround him with every solicitude in my power. But don’t think of doing anything so arduous as to come for a couple of hours so dreadful a way. Come over in time for luncheon, of course, but stay and sleep [...] I can put you both up for the night easily – and it’s a far better business than the other system of – what shall I say? – all cry and no wool. Let us at least have as much wool as possible.”<sup>1</sup>

The hospitable Henry James was writing in response to the suggestion by Wells that he should bring his friend, George Gissing, to meet James in his home, Lamb House, in Rye. Gissing was staying with Wells and his wife at their home in Sandgate, a few miles down the coast. Rarely had Gissing received such an invitation. He had arrived from France in late May, 1901 in a starving condition as a result of the spartan regime operated by Gabrielle and her parsimonious mother, Mme Fleury. Mrs. Wells set about reversing the process and Gissing gained seven pounds within a week. By mid-June he had gained nine pounds and was in a better condition to face the abundant hospitality of James when they arrived on June 17. In Lamb House breakfast was supplied to guests in their rooms but, in addition, a large breakfast was laid out in the dining room where there was an enormous, luxurious display of side dishes – ham and eggs, scrambled eggs and kidneys etc, etc. Gissing must have thought he was in another world.

James would emphasise the welcome awaiting guests by descending the steep streets to the railway station below the town to meet them. The attractive branch line miraculously escaped the Beeching axe. The station remains neat and active as a focal point in the lower part of the little town. Then came the slow ascent up the cobbled way to the High Street and then higher to a glorious cluster of white weather-boarded, tile-hung and timber-framed houses

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surrounding the majestic parish church from the tower of which watch had been kept for the marauding French who sacked the town three times during the Hundred Years War. In 1721 James Lamb, thirteen times Mayor of Rye, rebuilt a house in West Street, facing the west end of the church. He only retained the brick-vaulted wine cellars. The house gave shelter in 1726 to George I when his ship ran into a severe storm on the Camber Sands. It now stands four-square reflecting the character of the distinguished man of letters who arrived to take possession one hundred years ago in 1898. The solid front door with its bold brass knocker leads into the wide, oak-panelled entrance hall which now displays pictures of established writers of the day who enjoyed the hospitality of their host, Henry James. In addition to Gissing there are Chesterton, Conrad, Wells, Beerbohm, Belloc, Ford Madox Ford, Kipling, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Gosse and Edith Wharton. To the left is the drawing room, also fully panelled in oak, opening to the delightful walled garden. To the right is the small parlour for use by guests as a writing room. Sadly, the detached Garden Room where James wrote many of his best works, was destroyed on 18 August 1940, by a direct hit from a German aircraft. The loss included nearly two hundred books, many of them presentation copies from authors.

James loved Lamb House. He declared that he was prepared to offer the whole bristling State of Connecticut in exchange for one brick from the battered purple wall of his Rye garden. Gissing also fell under its spell. With Wells they talked long into the night. James entertained his guests with reminiscences of Turgenev in Paris and they no doubt discussed the works of contemporary British writers. They all admired Meredith but Kipling was another matter. When Kipling was married in 1892 James had given the bride away and had seen them off on their

round-the-world honeymoon. His early admiration for Kipling's work was not sustained although he continued to visit them. Gissing, on the other hand, considered Kipling to be "doing incalculable harm to the human race" and did not neglect any opportunity to say so. It is not surprising that Kipling's considerable library at Bateman's, also in East Sussex, does not contain a single work by Gissing. Kipling's daughter, Elsie, also established a large library which included a number of books which belonged to her father. It is now in Wimpole Hall, near Cambridge. It also lacks a work by Gissing. Both properties are now owned by the National Trust, as is Lamb House.

On a lighter note they could have recalled the antics of Stephen Crane when, fresh from the international success of *The Red Badge of Courage*, he arrived in the nearby village of

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Brede in 1899. He rented Brede Place, one of the finest examples of medieval domestic architecture in the south of England, and there kept open house to a host of friends and acquaintances on a generous scale. James seems to have had a certain amused affection for Crane although the frequent invasions of Lamb House by his large assembly of rowdy parasites were not appreciated. Crane's brief occupation of Brede Place culminated in the well-documented celebrations for Christmas 1899 when he wrote "The Ghost," a play based on the legend of the Giant of Brede. One of the characters, called Peter Quint Prodmore Moreau seems to have been an amalgam from James's *The Turn of the Screw* and Conrad's *Nigger of the Narcissus*. Gissing was one of ten writers invited to contribute a word or two and so be billed in the programme as an author. Gissing's contribution was "He died of an indignity caught in running after his hat down Piccadilly." Humour was infectious.

A copy of the programme bearing the autographs of eight of the ten "authors" present at the single performance on 28 December 1899 in the Brede School House has been preserved in the Crane Collection in the Columbia University Library. Henry James, Robert Barr, Joseph Conrad, H. B. Marriott-Watson, H. G. Wells, Edwin Pugh, A. E. W. Mason and Stephen Crane were present. Only Gissing and Rider Haggard were absent. A. E. W. Mason played the role of the ghost. Mrs. H. G. Wells played the piano. A memorable night indeed to be followed the next night by a grand ball at Brede Place which, by contrast, proved to be tragic. The exertion of the ball together with the play were too much for Crane and he suffered a severe lung haemorrhage in the night. Wells was sleeping in the house and was asked to go for help. He later reported that his last clear memory of that fantastic Brede House party was riding his bicycle through the wintry night into drizzling dawn to call up a doctor in Rye.<sup>3</sup> A foretaste of his ill-fated journey four years later when in response to a telegram from Gabrielle and in spite of a severe cold he set out on Christmas Eve for St. Jean-Pied-de-Port.

Both James and Gissing had recently visited Italy. Both had written about their travels. It has often been suggested that the Smith, Elder three-decker of *New Grub Street* which is still in the glass-fronted bookcase in the morning room was presented by Gissing at the end of his visit to Lamb House. This is proved to be incorrect by two inscriptions in the handwriting of James. On the fly leaf it reads: "Henry James, Lamb House 1898." On the next page, the second

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inscription reads: "George Gissing at Lamb House with H. G. Wells." This no doubt means that James acquired the book in 1898 and added the second inscription after the Gissing visit. The thank-you gift was in fact a copy of the recently published *By the Ionian Sea*, which James acknowledged on 20th June.

Dear George Gissing,

I am in a better position to express my high appreciation of your very generous present of your beautiful book, from my having immediately possessed myself of its contents. I have passed the happiest afternoon, of rain without & peace, it would appear (obscure omen!) within, in this delightful occupation, which has been like giving me your company for another day – carrying on your too short visit. I find the sumptuous volume charming; at once eloquent & light, vivid & easy, kind to the dear old Italy, yet firm with her, & charged with all the poetry & melancholy that should be, as well as touching on just the things that had I, impossibly, had your chances, I should have wanted to touch on myself. I've been holding my breath over you at Cotrone, really fearing to lose you, but letting it out again finely at Catanzaro, for which place you have made me also entertain a sentiment. What an *heroic* episode your Cotrone; &, in short, what a distinguished production!

I further much feel your allusion, in your note, to the element of worry in your life; so that, please, I'm not indulging in mere form of speech when I hope you may before too long again give me a chance to see, *here*, if I mayn't a little bedim for you that consciousness. Nothing would give me more pleasure than to try. But may it meanwhile fade somewhat in your impending retreat.

Believe me yours most truly,  
Henry James<sup>2</sup>

The visit provided Gissing with a rare glimpse of a writer's world so different from his own. His health was fast deteriorating and on medical advice from his old friend, Dr. Henry Hick, who lived at New Romney, between Rye and the Wells's home in Sandgate, he went to a sanatorium in Suffolk before leaving England for the last time. The shrewd James was to remark to Sidney Colvin in late December 1903, "Poor Gissing struck me as quite particularly marked out for what is called in his and my profession an unhappy ending."<sup>4</sup>

Lamb House\* with its retained atmosphere of Jamesian dignity and its many copy letters scattered around the dining room, provides a focal point for turn-of-the-century men of letters which it would be hard to equal.

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\*Lamb House, home of Henry James from 1898 to 1916, is a National Trust property. The walled garden, staircase, hall and three rooms on the ground floor are open to the public from April to the end of October on Wednesdays and Saturdays only from 2 pm to 6 pm. The house and gardens are administered and largely maintained on the Trust's behalf by the tenant.

<sup>1</sup>Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray, eds., *Henry James and H. G. Wells*, London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959, p. 71-72.

<sup>2</sup>Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, Pierre Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, Vol. VIII, 1996, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup>*Experiment in Autobiography*, London: Victor Gollancz and The Cresset Press, 1934, Vol. II, p. 615.

<sup>4</sup>E. V. Lucas, *The Colvins and their Friends*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928, pp. 279-80.

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### Book Review

Mark Connelly, *Orwell and Gissing*, New York, Washington D. C. etc.: Peter Lang, 1997.

The affinity between the novels of Gissing and George Orwell has often been noted before. Mark Connelly has now gone into the subject in thorough detail, and states his thesis succinctly in his last sentence: "To understand Orwell fully, one must first read Gissing."

Orwell was reading Gissing at a time when his books were out of print and, as Orwell complained, hard to find. As early as 1940, in reviewing a novel critical of socialism by Ernest Bramah, he called Gissing "a much greater writer" who shared this antagonism. In a 1942 article he says that "George Moore, or Gissing, or Thomas Hardy," who are named as writers with greater sensitivity than Kipling, would not have written better books about the army because they had no access to scenes of that kind. These casual references show that Orwell knew and admired Gissing's novels at a time when few others read them, and he expressed his admiration more fully in an informative review of the 1948 reprints of *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool*. He identified these novels as "minor works," and regretted that neither *The Odd Women* nor *New Grub Street* were available. The essay was written in 1948 for a journal,

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*Politics and Letters*, which failed to publish it, and did not appear until June, 1960, when it was published posthumously in the *London Magazine*.<sup>1</sup> "Merely on the strength of *New Grub Street*, *Demos* and *The Nether World*," Orwell wrote, "I am ready to maintain that England has produced very few better novelists..."<sup>2</sup> He was sufficiently interested in Gissing to consider writing a biography, but felt that he would be unable to do the necessary research.

Connelly's catalogue of the parallels between the two authors is quite convincing. He maintains that Orwell's admiration for Gissing was based on similarities of temperament and social position as well as on his agreement with much of Gissing's social criticism. Both were sensitive to the deprivations of the poverty they suffered, and took the life of the poor as one of the major themes of their fiction. Their favorite protagonists are impoverished young men of literary tendencies who, as Connelly shows, suffer a kind of neurotic shame at their poverty. While both authors were critical of the social system, they offered no coherent alternative, but survived in a kind of ideological vacuum, denouncing the superficiality of the life they saw about them, and feeling that they were exiles from it. Both were devoted to Dickens, and wrote admiring criticism about his work. Both died at the same age – 46.

There are, however, contrasts between the two, and while Connelly mentions some of these, he is less thorough here. Gissing, who was no democrat, bitterly attacked the vulgarity and coarseness of the common people. Orwell, on the other hand, while frequently critical of the English working class, is also capable of sympathy, was closely attentive to such aspects of their culture as pubs and comic postcards, and *Homage to Catalonia*, his book about Spain, suggests that he saw hope for social justice in an egalitarian system. His wit and capacity to laugh at incongruities are qualities nearly completely lacking in Gissing. The latter would not, of course, have served as a policeman in Burma, or volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War, as Orwell did. Orwell supported himself by contributing steadily to periodicals, a path that Gissing could bring himself to follow only late in his career, and only by sticking to his usual medium of fiction. Orwell had much to say about contemporary politics and social movements, topics which hardly interested Gissing, though he opposed the militarism and imperialist expansion of his time. On the other hand, Orwell did not share the passion for antiquity which was so important a part of Gissing's character.

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Connelly finds that Orwell's essay on Dickens, which appeared in 1939 in his volume

*Inside the Whale*, is indebted to Gissing's *Charles Dickens*, and cites a number of the ways in which Orwell's views of Dickens correspond with those of Gissing. Both agreed that Dickens took a middle-class attitude toward proletarian activism, regarding it with suspicion, that his sense of progress and historical change was not strong, and that he sentimentally overvalued private benevolence toward the poor. In spite of their reservations, both singled out Dickens' honesty and his ability to hold his readers as major strengths.

Gissing is mentioned only once in Orwell's long essay, at a point where he deals with Gissing's speculation that Dickens, in spite of the satire he directed at classrooms, sent his son to Eton because he regretted the lack of a formal education himself. Orwell suggests that Gissing was mistaken here, and that Dickens did not feel this to be a handicap: "...he lost nothing by missing it, and on the whole he seems to have been aware of this."<sup>3</sup> This observation, that the novelist had no need of an education that presumably included study of Greek and Latin literature, seems to have an oblique relevance to Gissing, who, of course, depended on the classics for inspiration throughout his life.

Connelly considers *New Grub Street* to be "the obvious influence" on Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, and there are some telling parallels in spite of the sharp differences in tone between the two novels. Both deal with poverty through the figure of an atypical, educated protagonist, whose literary ambitions are crushed by lack of money. Gordon Comstock also suffers from sexual deprivation, a theme Gissing treats elsewhere, though Connelly sees it illustrated in Biffen's hopeless love for Amy Reardon. He ingeniously detects the fact that Ravelston in Orwell's novel and Milvain in Gissing's occupy similar positions as more prosperous, friendly enemies of the hero. There is a strong plot parallel as both failed writers refuse to follow convention, and stubbornly propel themselves into hopeless positions, feeling a kind of romantic attraction in the lowest levels of poverty. The two novels end differently. Reardon dies, while Comstock cheerfully embraces convention, takes a job and marries, perhaps embarking on the kind of married life Reardon led, so that *New Grub Street* would take the place of a sequel to *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*.

Women's emancipation was not one of Orwell's subjects, and Connelly's chapter on women is concerned with the sexual relationships which are so central in the novels of both authors. Repression, miserable marriages, and the distinction between coldly respectable women and accessible but disreputable ones are conspicuous themes in their novels. Connelly points

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out that *Workers in the Dawn* and Orwell's *Burmese Days*, novels which are unlike in nearly every other respect, contain heroes who are torn between contrasting female figures and are driven to suicide by disappointment in love.

*The Odd Women* was one of Orwell's favorite novels, and Connelly believes that he "sought guidance" from it in his treatment of women characters, especially those in *A Clergyman's Daughter*, and in fact some minor female characters resembling the Madden sisters appear in Orwell's novel. Its young heroine herself is enough like the Madden sisters to be reduced to a lonely Christmas dinner of sandwiches and lemonade eaten outdoors, and Orwell, in a pointed allusion, has her reading *The Odd Women* as part of these festivities. A long speech by the heroine's unwelcome suitor warning her of the dire fate of single women sounds as if it was inspired by the message of Gissing's novel. The many unfortunate women in *A Clergyman's Daughter* are victims, not of sexual discrimination, but of such general social evils as small-town gossip, the exploitation of hop-pickers, urban homelessness and mercenary private schooling. As Connelly observes, there are certain themes missing from Orwell's novel which are emphasized in Gissing's, such as reforming feminism and sexual repression. To these he might have added masculine tyranny and infidelity and unhappy marriage, all of which tend to formulate the woman problem in a way that Orwell does not attempt.

Connelly's idea that Gissing's *Demos* can be paired with Orwell's best-known book, *Animal Farm*, is amusing, but his justification is that both are critiques of socialism. His chapter consists mostly of an analysis of *Demos* with such observations as: "...like the pigs in *Animal Farm*, Mutimer is immediately corrupted by power." The books are aimed at similar targets, but they are so disproportionate that it seems unlikely that there was any connection between them in Orwell's mind.

Orwell and Gissing shared a love of nature, and lamented the encroachments of industrial settlements on the English landscape. Many of the passages of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* express the recluse's delight in his country environment, and both authors have moments when characters are arrested by a sudden spasm of joy inspired by the beauty of nature. Connelly sees that both thought of contact with the natural environment as a healing, uplifting resource that was being lost in the turmoil of city life, and he feels that this attitude is an aspect of their pessimistic view of technological progress.

As Connelly observes, Orwell's belief in "a faith in humanity, a sense of universal brotherhood" enabled him to hope that a benign form of Socialism might ultimately be

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achieved. Gissing briefly shared this hope in his youth, but the mature novelist had no such faith, and felt that the only course for the humanist surrounded by a vulgar civilization was to "keep apart" as Ryecroft does. "I am no friend of the people," writes Ryecroft, undoubtedly speaking for Gissing here, "...they inspire me with distrust, with fear...and often move me to abhorrence." And he marvels "to think that at one time I called myself a socialist, a communist, anything you like of the revolutionary kind... no man ever lived, who was, in every fibre, more vehemently an individualist." This was not an attitude that Orwell approved, and it was a part of his genius that he was able to appreciate, and to make use of Gissing's accomplishment in spite of this fundamental disagreement about human nature. — Jacob Korg

<sup>1</sup>It is reprinted in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968, Vol. IV, pp. 428-36.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid* p. 433.

<sup>3</sup>*Collected Essays*, Vol. I, p. 427.

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1898: Three of Gissing's Books Discussed by Fellow Novelists

PIERRE COUSTILLAS

The year 1898 was a busy one for Gissing. It began in Rome and ended in Dorking. He wrote several short stories, "The Ring Finger" under inauspicious cosmopolitan circumstances in his room at the Hotel Alibert, "At Nightfall," "The Peace-Bringer," "The Elixir" and "Fate and the Apothecary" at 7 Clifton Terrace, Dorking, as well as a few prefaces to the Rochester Edition of Dickens's works, but his main work was *The Crown of Life*, which was within some two weeks of completion at the year's end. That he also read much that appeared in newspapers and periodicals, including articles about him and his work, is also on record. Thus we know that he read W. E. Henley's review of *Charles Dickens, a Critical Study* (diary, 9 March, and *Critical Heritage*), a leader in the *Daily Chronicle* about *The Town Traveller* (diary, 29 September, and *Critical Heritage*), a long article on *The Whirlpool* by Greenough White in the *Sewanee Review*

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(diary, 4 November and 7 December, and *Collected Articles*), and was told of Andrew Lang's review of *Charles Dickens* in *Longman's Magazine* (diary, 3 September, and letter to Clodd). But he was not like Percy Dunn in "Spellbound" and did not spend days in public reading-rooms. Of the three reviews reprinted below, two of them are not likely to have been read by him. One characteristic they have in common – they were written by fellow novelists. Hamlin Garland (1860-1940), as a leading practitioner of American naturalism, had some affinities with the early Gissing, despite his optimism and his concern for local colour. He was little read in England and is chiefly remembered as the author of *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) and *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917). Walter Besant (1836-1901) need not be introduced – Gissing's contacts with and opinion of him may be found in his diary and correspondence. A clipping of Besant's review of *Charles Dickens* was kept by Gissing in an album held by the Beinecke Library. As for Arnold Bennett (1867-1931), the Edwardian novelist and journalist whose first novel, *A Man from the North*, appeared in 1898, he had not yet made any reputation for himself at the time of Gissing's death. He reviewed a number of Gissing's works anonymously or pseudonymously from 1895 onwards; his article in the *Academy* for 16 December 1899, signed E. A. B. did not escape Gissing's notice. *Hearth and Home* is not known to have ever been read by him. "Sarah Volatile" was identified by Anita Miller in her bibliography of Bennett's works.

Hamlin Garland, "George Gissing's *Whirlpool*"  
*The Book Buyer* (New York), February 1898, pp. 38-40

Mr. George Gissing is a writer of whose work I have hitherto been entirely uninformed and so came to the reading of his latest hook quite unprejudiced in judgment. My first impression was that Mr. Gissing studies realities and seeks to construct in the image of life. The story deals with people who not only might live, but probably do live, in England, on certain streets and in certain houses.

There is neither caricature nor affectation in his work. He has a serious outlook on life, it would appear, and respects the rights of his characters. So much appeared in the first fifty pages. The tone of the book, while not sombre, was low in key and unattractive in color. The method was that of a serious Englishman – diffuse and not always fresh in phrase.

As I read on, one of the most marked characteristics of this novel seemed to me to be the unfolding of the actual worry over daily bread which beset the men and women whose histories make up the book. No matter how fair and leisurely they seemed at first, there came a time when I was informed of their cares and trials. All were struggling to keep head above the waters

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of the whirlpool. Their little incomes concerned them prayerfully. They were forced to pinch and save; they agonized over investments.

This gave a note of reality which many English novels utterly lack. In their pursuit of the lover novelists are prone to ignore the working woman and the business man. "Income" with the people in "the whirlpool" is a daily and almost hourly subject for care-taking. Harvey Rolfe, a man of leisure, in a single evening (at the club and on his way home) discusses incomes with three anxious friends, and makes a couple of loans. The Abbotts and the Carnabys meet with disaster, and Cecil Morphew is obliged to borrow of Rolfe to start into shop-keeping.

This is but one of the many convincing methods of the book. The reader feels himself among real people, though they are not clearly individualized to American minds. The final revealing touch of characterization which would bring Rolfe and Alma very near to the reader, Mr. Gissing seems unable to give. I am not presuming to say what this final word should be,



because it lies beyond the conscious self. It comes not by taking thought upon it, but by waiting for it. It rises like a bubble from the sub-conscious will, without toil or trouble. Mr. Gissing works for all he gets – works hard with infinite pains and much sound and manly thought. He has little of Kipling's sudden flashes of illuminating insight, and nothing of Howells' all-pervading humor, but he obtains respect and admiration from the start. There is some mighty vigorous language in the book:

“Domestic life is played out,” says Rolfe. “There isn't a servant to be had unless you're a duke and breed them on your own estate. All ordinary housekeepers are at the mercy of the filth and insolence of a draggled-tailed novelette-reading feminine democracy.”

“War is England's ‘Banting.’ It's the only thing that keeps England sound.”

“Naturally children are a nuisance, especially if you live in a whirlpool.”

“There's the whirlpool of the furiously busy. Round and round they go; brains humming till they melt or explode.... When there's no leisure, no meditation, no peace and quietness – when instead of conversing, people just nod or shout to each other as they spin round and round the gulf – men and women practically return to the state of savages in all that concerns their offspring.”

“The fewer children people have the better. It's bad to see the little squalling brats in the filth and smoke down yonder and worse still in this damned London. Great God! When there is so much of the world clean and sweet, here we pack and sweat together, a million to the square mile.”

The effective figure of the whirlpool runs throughout the book, but the story is after all the story of a man and a woman, Harvey Rolfe and Alma Frothingham. The plan of the novel is not discoverable early – only when the final page is turned does it take on any definite form or purpose; even then it is questionable whether the author's purpose was clear to himself. It is a long book – they are accustomed to plodding through three-volume novels in England, it appears. It is too long. It could be put into very much less space, and make much easier reading.

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The book ends because of the death of Alma – so it would seem that she and her experimental marriage with Rolfe formed the principal theme. Rolfe himself is a type not yet common in America, and the author's attitude toward him shows that the man who lives a quiet and thoughtful life, without earning a dollar of his income or benefiting the world by his studies, is regarded by other Englishmen as a valuable citizen in a most enviable position. It must be admitted that over against Morpew and Carnaby, and Dymes and Redgrave, Rolfe does seem a very pleasant gentleman. “The Whirlpool” does not teem with joyous and lovely characters.

Early in the book Bennett Frothingham, father of Alma, suicides, leaving an enormous wreck of business behind, and out of the disgrace and poverty which follow, Alma determines to push on with her violin playing (which has hitherto been but a vanity and a lure of men), and become a professional concert artist. She is saved from the horrors of earning her living in this way by Rolfe, who offers her marriage on the most generous and manly terms. At this point the story might conceivably stop, but it does not. The Rolfes go to Wales, determined to live far from the whirlpool which had ruined so many of their friends. Rolfe's income provides a comfortable home without care, and for a few years all is peace with Alma. But at last both agree that Wales is just a little remote and unexciting, and they return to London, where Alma begins again to dream of a public appearance as a violinist. Motherhood and the affairs of a small home have proven insufficient to fill her life.

At this point the first false note of the book is struck. The inevitable seducer makes his appearance in the person of Mr. Cyrus Redgrave, who has thin hair, a melodious voice, and a huge fortune. It would not do to let the experimental free marriage succeed. The liberty allowed Alma by Rolfe must be somehow abused. Hence a seeming intrigue with Redgrave, which ends

in sending Alma to morphine and Rolfe to the country, bitter and broken. All this does not seem to me to follow from the character of the woman up to that point. It appears to me to be a relapse into convention in order that the story should go on with growing intensity.

Just here is the difficulty which the historian of an experimental marriage must always face. If the marriage turns out to be happy, if nothing happens, then the story is uneventful. The great novel-reading public would yawn over Alma and Rolfe going happily and in decent wise toward old age on a basis of equal rights in the marriage bond. The British matron and the young person also, must be able to say "I told you so. What a pity those advanced marriages always turn out ill."

Mr. Gissing seems a thinker of very considerable ability and should be above any such weakness. Given the two lovers, Alma and Rolfe, with their problem of adjusting themselves, under an ideal compact, to their small income and to "The Whirlpool," including the problem of the artist nature and the mother nature, there is no need to introduce the cigarette-smoking seducer. The intrigue with Redgrave comes with special unreality into a story which is in most respects a serious and dignified study of modern English life.

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Walter Besant, "The Voice of the Flying Day,"  
*The Queen*, 7 May 1898, p. 793

I desire to express my gratitude to Mr George Gissing for having written a little book on Charles Dickens which was very much wanted. First of all, it reveals the writer, whose novels are at last getting the reputation which they deserve, in a new light, namely, that of an appreciative and yet discriminating critic. It is curious how the personality of a writer, even in criticism, constantly reveals and asserts itself. In a poet, a novelist, an essayist, we expect to find the writer revealing himself, but not in a critic. The reason is, I suppose, because we do not often take the trouble to consider what a critic says. Now in the book before me we do consider very carefully what the critic says. For the time has come when Dickens wanted a critic. As for myself, and those of my own standing, we were brought up to worship Dickens – not to criticise or to examine him. Some of his writings we liked better than others, but we worshipped the author. When I was a boy I believe there was another writer named Thackeray, but I knew nothing about him; his books did not come my way. He had written quantities of things, such as "The Fatal Book," the "Coxe Tuggeridge Coxe Papers," "Rowena and Rebecca," "Vanity Fair"; but we boys knew him not. Later, when we left school, we made his acquaintance. Dickens we knew by heart, but Thackeray we knew not at all. To this day my attitude towards Dickens has always been that of absolute surrender, admiration and affection. I can find no fault in him because I have never looked for any. There are little peculiarities, say. If you remind me that the Adelphi melodrama is more than suggested in certain scenes, I reply that it may be so; very likely it is so; yet, on the next page Mr Gamp comes in again – what matter about the little bit of melodrama? You tell me, again, that the plots are poor in construction, and do not always hold together. Very well; as you please; for my own part I care very little about the plot, because I am thinking about Henrietta Petowker and the collector, and Sweet Snevellieci and the Phenomenon. I have gradually become aware that to the younger generation Dickens has become a writer to be criticised. I have even known some young men unhappy enough not to laugh over the immortal Sairey; they call her vulgar. It really was high time for an examination of Dickens more critical than was possible ten years ago, and yet written by an appreciative pen. And so I beg leave to recommend, very honestly and heartily, Mr George Gissing's book called "Charles Dickens."

Sarah Volatile, "Books and Authors"  
*Hearth and Home*, 29 September 1898, p. 749

No one would have suspected that Mr Gissing, author of all the most depressing novels of modern times, possessed a secret inclination towards the farcical, the jolly, the frankly amusing. It seems incredible. Yet *The Town Traveller* has clearly been written with an intention to amuse. And it does amuse. Dozens of episodes in the history of Mr Gammon the town traveller, and

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Mrs Bubb, the lodging-house landlady, and Polly Sparkes the programme-seller, and Mrs Clover of the china shop, are really funny, and prove that Mr Gissing can find food for laughter when he goes forth into the Kennington Road in search of material. Mr Gammon is a delightful and very original character, but I think that the author has given most pains to Polly Sparkes – as vulgar a little hussey as ever wore a white apron and took sixpence from you for a bill of the play. Her adventures, sentimental, tragic, and otherwise, have been contrived not only with full knowledge of the type, but with an extraordinary ingenuity. *The Town Traveller* is, of course, at its basis, sordid – for Mr Gissing seems to confine himself strictly to one stratum of society – but I will guarantee it not to be depressing; indeed it is exhilarating. That Mr Gissing should have unbent so far as to write such a book is a good sign, for it argues that he has achieved the success which has long been his due. Perhaps he will not count this volume among his serious work. Yet, in one way, it is just as serious, artistically, as anything he has done. And, in any event, it is well for him to make us laugh occasionally.

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#### Notes and News

A constant flow of miscellaneous Gissing news reaches us, little of it of crucial importance, yet worth recording for some reason or other. To readers and collectors it will surely matter to know that recent illustrated catalogues from Jarndyce and Sumner & Stillman contain valuable old editions. Jarndyce offer four three-deckers – *Demos* at £400, *The Emancipated* at £850, *The Nether World* (John Quinn's copy) at £850, and a second edition of *New Grub Street* at £320, all in original cloth and in good to very good condition. Sumner & Stillman also have a first edition of *Demos*, priced at \$2,750.00, which they describe as "an unusually fine set" by an author who is "to-day regarded as the supreme master of late Victorian realism." Less expensive items are a first American edition of *In the Year of Jubilee* (Appleton, 1895; with 8 pp. undated ads), the more common variant in green cloth decorated in red and gilt (\$85.00) and a first American edition of *The Crown of Life* (Stokes, 1899), again the commoner variant in green cloth decorated in dark green, at the same price.

Dr. Minervino's edition of a selection of Gissing short stories, retitled *Cinque racconti vittoriani* (Abramo Editore), is not yet available. The translator reports that he read a paper on "Narrativa e vissuto: La scrittura di viaggio di argomento mediterraneo da George Gissing a

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Paul Bowles" at a colloquium on popular literatures at Ravello, near Amalfi, on 23 November 1997. Is this paper to be published? In the articles devoted to his work that are listed under "Recent Publications" Dr. Badolato is said to have published some 120 articles and book reviews over thirty years, let alone several volumes which were duly mentioned in this journal.

He is currently preparing an edition of the letters written by Gissing in Italy and Greece, to be entitled *La terra del sole*. His publisher has asked him to translate one of Gissing's shorter novels. It is to be *Passione sopite* (*Sleeping Fires*). Also, a selection from *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* that he is editing is to be published under the title *Il gusta della vita*. The quest for information about the grandly named Coriolano Paparazzo goes on Italy, but occasional footnotes to the paparazzi literature continue to be offered to the authors of the articles published in the *Journal* last October and January. In an untitled paragraph the *Evening Standard* for 11 September 1997 successfully traced the word paparazzi to its true origin, repeating the substance of a certain letter to the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, dated 12 September, but actually available the day before. Shigeru Koike's article in *Tosho* is the latest contribution to the subject.

Gissing's *Collected Letters* (Volume 9) were praised as "magisterial" by D. J. Taylor in the "Books of the Year" selection offered by the *Spectator*, 22 November 1997, p. 42. In the same journal ("A rich Christmas plum pudding," 20-27 December, pp. 60 and 62) Bevis Hillier reviewed Peter Kemp's *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Quotations*. Hillier objected to the number of Gissing quotations in Kemp's fat tome. He was annoyed by the fact that he found no fewer than 27 entries for Gissing against 23 for Pope and 17 for Dickens. "A tactful editor should have told Kemp when the Gissing Had to stop." Perhaps a tactless editor could also have asked Hillier how many Gissing novels he had read before so cleverly parodying Browning.

Peter Morton, of the Flinders University of South Australia, who has drawn our attention to the last named piece, recently added to his Website a digitized version of Morley Roberts's *Private Life of Henry Maitland* (second edition) with the pseudonyms replaced by the true names and titles. This is a useful attempt at making the text less of a puzzle for the uninitiated, but can't one go further? Roberts quoted from Gissing's letters – not very accurately, for reasons best known to himself. Perhaps his deliberate misquotations could now be corrected.

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Only by subscribing to a press-cutting agency could one be sure not to miss too many of the allusions to a writer that crop up regularly in the dailies and weeklies. Of all his works, the most frequently quoted or alluded to is undoubtedly *New Grub Street*. As a rule Reardon, Biffen, Milvain and Alfred Yule turn up when some image of the literary world has been offered in a novel, a biography or a book of cultural interest. A recent example was offered in an article on Auberon Waugh by Rex Fontaine, "Sorting the bores from the chaps" (*Independent on Sunday*, 21 December 1997, p. 22).

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#### Recent Publications

##### Volumes

Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (eds.), *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Volume Three, 1886-1888, and Volume Four, 1889-1891*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998. Off-white paper-covered boards with a grey tape binding and, on the spine, gilt titling on dark green panel. Dark green dust-jacket with pattern in light green. Respectively xxxiv + 355 pp. and xxxii + 363 pp. \$70.00. ISBN 0-8214-1014-8 and 0-8214-1054-7. These are revised impressions. The few misprints have been corrected and some additional information given in footnotes.

George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, with an introduction by Elaine Showalter. London: Penguin Books, [1997]. Third impression in the Penguin Classics. Pictorial paperback. xxvi + 388 pp. £6.99. ISBN 0-14-043379-1.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Maria Teresa Chialant, "L'intellettuale come coscienza dell'epoca," pp. 121-33 in *L'imperio di carta: La letteratura inglese del secondo Ottocento*, edited by Carlo Pagetti, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1994. Professor Chialant's contribution to this volume is entitled "La grande tradizione del romanzo" (pp. 87-149). It is divided into sections, each treating a single author.

Anon: "AB Trade Reviews," *AB Bookman's Weekly*, 1 December 1997, pp. 1441-42. Review of *The Romance of the Book*, ed. Marshall Brooks, Birch Book Press, Delhi, NY. The author

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quotes the passage on Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* in the *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.

Francesco Badolato, "In libreria," *Calabria Sconosciuta*, Anno XX, no. 76, October-December 1997, p. 71. Review of the French translation of *By the Ionian Sea*.

Jacob Korg, "Reviews," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 52, no. 3, December 1997, pp. 388-93. Review of Vols. 7-9 of the *Collected Letters*. Under "Books Briefly Noted," p. 398, the Austrian edition of Gissing's *Memorandum Book* is noticed.

Jim Burns, "The Pity of it: Hubert Crackanthorpe," *London Magazine*, December/ January 1998, pp. 52-57. Contains allusions to Gissing, as tutor and novelist.

Roberto Marchi, "Da Francesco Badolato su George Gissing," *La Nuova Brianza*, 9 February 1998, P. 7. An interview with portraits. Another illustrated article by Franco Rizzi on Dott. Badolato and his work on Gissing appeared in *Il cittadino della domenica* (Settimanale della Brianza), "Badolato presidente onorario del Pickwick," on 28 February, p. 33.

Stephen McClarence, "Travel: Rhubarb rhubarb rhubarb," *The Times*, 28 February 1998, p. 32. Wakefield is described as a rhubarb world power. Would Gissing have cared to be associated with rhubarb? The end of the article is about him and the Gissing Centre and, rhubarb notwithstanding, it is the only thing that matters.

Shigeru Koike, "Proper Names Turned into Common Names," *Tosho* (Books), February 1998, pp. 2-5. An article on the origin of the word "paparazzi." *Tosho* is a monthly published by the Iwanami Shoten Company, which has published a number of Gissing titles over the years.

Mark Storey, "Reviews." *Review of English Studies*, February 1998, Pp. 109-10. Review of Vol. 8 of the *Collected Letters*.

John Sloan, "Comptes rendus," *Etudes Anglaises*, January-March 1998, pp. 105-07. Review of the last three volumes of the *Collected Letters*.

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### Information for Contributors

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

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