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"More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me."
Commonplace Book

"A Hell Constructed by Man": Depictions of the Poor in *The Nether World*

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In Dickens's 1837-39 novel, *Oliver Twist*'s mother dies in utter poverty in a workhouse immediately after the birth of what the narrator describes on the first page of the novel as "the item of mortality whose name is prefixed to the head of this chapter" (17)--to wit, *Oliver Twist*. Gruesome circumstances surround the birth of the screaming baby: Oliver's mother--a good-looking girl with no wedding ring, her shoes worn to pieces--is found lying in the street about to give birth. But despite the fact that such circumstances must have been none too uncommon in the 1830s, these first pages of the novel are full of Dickensian humour and wit and some of the liveliest of Dickens's prose. Dickens sanitizes the death of this pauper through his humour; his sardonic but lively tone intervenes between the reader and the scene itself, helping us to feel fairly comfortable about this death scene while appreciating its pathos. After all, our friend the narrator is closer than we are to the ghastly scene, and he can still feel quite jolly!

The teleological format of *Oliver Twist*, a convention of the traditional Victorian realistic novel, is anticipated by the reader. We know, despite all the ups and downs, that Oliver will triumph in the end, that he is a fine little gentleman no matter how ragged he may appear. And the anticipated happy ending enables us to face the squalor and poverty along the way. Dickens was able to present disturbing material in a way which, one can only assume from the popularity of his novels, made his middle-class readers feel indignant that there were such injustices in the world, while at the same time feeling reassured that the system worked for most people *they* knew, and that the world they knew--including the social class system--was ordered and stable. George Gissing later identified part of the key to Dickens's successful

negotiation of the fine line between presenting unpleasant material, and remaining popular:

Dickens, for all his sympathy, could not look with entire approval on the poor grown articulate about their wrongs. He would not have used the phrase, but he thought the thought, that humble folk must know their "station." He was a member of the middle class, and as far from preaching "equality" in its social sense as any man that ever wrote. Essentially a member of the great middle class, and on that very account able to do such work, to strike such blows, for the cause of humanity, in his day and generation. (*Charles Dickens, a Critical Study*, 215)

Despite the fact that Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* protesting the effects of the Poor Laws, he was writing from a middle-class world-view which helped render the poor either worthy of middle-class pity and help, or deserving of poverty because of their criminal behaviour.

"The poor" and working classes were a presence in the literature of the nineteenth century, especially in condition-of-England and other social protest novels, from the days of *Oliver Twist* to the "slum" novels of the 1890s. As P. J. Keating points out, the working classes became topical in novels during times of social unrest, when "class fears compelled people to look afresh at the basic social, economic and political structure of society" (2). But Victorian novels about the poor and working classes "are usually written by authors who are not working class, for an audience which is not working class"(2). Images of "the poor" in nineteenth-century novels are therefore middle-class creations used for middle-class political purposes; "[t]he constant presence of social purpose in the working-class novel leads to a manipulation of the characters' actions, motives and speech, in order that they may be used finally to justify a class theory held by the author" (4). These class theories usually involve either protesting a social wrong, or soothing away fears of uprising and class change. And as Dickens demonstrates, while many novelists were critical of the overwhelmingly middle-class society in which they lived, their protests were spoken from a middle-class stance to a middle-class audience; in other words, their protests stem from a middle-class world-view.

It is this idea of a world-view dominating fiction's depictions of class, that I intend to address here. But first, I would like to differentiate this concept of world-view from that of "ideology"; although clearly one's world-view is affected by prevailing ideologies, the notion of "ideology" smacks of Marxist concepts of the power structure and ideas of insidious propaganda causing a false consciousness. And while the concept of world-view is related to power structures, that is, it too

helps to reinforce and is reinforced by these structures, it more specifically addresses issues of epistemology: in other words, what it is possible to know in a specified historical moment, and what, therefore, it is possible to see in viewing the world.¹ I feel somewhat skeptical about John Goode's contention, in *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*, that "the most important institutional function of literature is its making ideology" (1979, 200). I have to agree with T. B. Tomlinson who writes that "in the last century as in this there has been such a large number of people so slightly touched by any literary influence [...] that any notion of literature as either controlling or even reflecting the whole of English 'society' must be idealistic almost to vanishing point" (7). In his recent book Patrick Brantlinger's focus on the perception in the nineteenth century of the dangers of mass literacy and of fiction itself, also questions the notion "that the novel was a primary instrument in the construction, gendering, and policing of bourgeois subjectivity" (18). While I am not convinced of fiction's ability to *make* ideology, I would assert that fiction by definition must be written from a specific world-view born of the historical moment, and necessarily partaking of, reflecting and perhaps in some cases bolstering, current ideologies.

A world-view can be expressed in fiction intentionally or not because it stems from both conscious and unconscious attitudes. It is especially relevant, therefore, to perceptions of social class, which are themselves partly conscious and partly unconscious. We see this at work in the fiction of the nineteenth century, for as Arlene Young points out, "[t]he class placing of characters in Victorian novels is generally something the *reader absorbs*, rather than overtly takes note of. The narrator does not announce a character's class but instead reveals it through his or her dress and general appearance, language and attitudes" and above all, his or her way of relating to other characters (47, my emphasis). So that while the writer can himself be expressing unconscious attitudes towards class in his writing, the reader, too, is often reading class codes unconsciously.

My contention is that in the last decades of the nineteenth century, due to political and ideological shifts (as I will outline below), a new kind of fiction was possible, a fiction which was able to take a new view of the social class system not being centered in that stable, confident middle-class ethos that had developed during the century, and which Dickens exemplifies despite his sympathy for the poor. In *The Nether World* (1889), George Gissing is manifesting a new world-view that is far more ambivalent about social class than had been that

of Dickens and other novelists earlier in the century. Noticing this ambivalence, Jacob Korg describes Gissing as approaching the poor with “a curious blend of guilt and indignation” (68), while Fredric Jameson sees his approach as “a unique combination of revulsion and fascination” (189). The point is that this novel is not just part of a new wave of social protest, it expresses a new way of experiencing the class system that sees it as far less the “natural” order of things.

“A Different Kind of Novel”

Many critics have noted the middle-class ethos that had dominated the literary field for much of the nineteenth century.² For the most part the working classes--lacking time, money and education--were excluded from the reading and writing of mainstream novels. It was mainly the middle classes who could afford the time to write and the money to buy books or borrow them from the circulating libraries. Thus the Victorian novel was a decidedly middle-class genre with middle-class concerns and attitudes.

Towards the end of the century, this situation began to change. The Forster Act in 1870 extended state education at the primary level, encouraging a continuation of the already increasing literacy rates even amongst those who were hardest to reach such as the urban poor. This, along with increased suburbanization and train commuting, caused an unprecedented increase in the need for reading materials not only for the working classes, but for the growing number of lower-middle-class readers (all included in what Gissing calls “the quarter-educated”). The number of periodicals and newspapers produced for these readers increased and a new outlet for fiction appeared in the form of newspaper syndication; this enabled an expansion of the pool of writers, allowing especially the lower middle classes to join the profession. At the same time, a definite trend towards democratization³ had become apparent in England,⁴ nurtured and spurred on by increasing literacy and the commercialization of publishing.

Although the above thumbnail sketch of changes taking place in England at the end of the nineteenth century is necessarily incomplete, it gives some idea of the conditions which influenced novelists at this time, and began to affect the way fiction was written. T. B. Tomlinson notices in the Victorian novel “a sort of Achilles’ heel in the developing middle-class confidence and solidity on which...the quality of the great nineteenth-century novels largely rests” (121). But it is far more a case of Ichabod⁵ than Achilles, for in the last decades of the

century, the middle-class world-view which had pervaded not only the Victorian novel, but many newspapers and journals also, starts to lose prominence. John Goode argues, in his essay on *The Nether World*, that Gissing “recognised in the changing historical situation the need for a different kind of novel: one in which the social world appears not as the creation of human beings but as a nightmare world peopled with desperate egoists in anarchic conflict with one another” (1966, 239). And Korg insists that “[t]he poverty [Gissing] saw around him seemed to be an integral part of an entrenched social system which was the creation of an omnipotent power” (116). He says: “Gissing’s conviction that class differences were too deep-seated for change” relied upon “the importance he attributed to inheritance” (89). David Grylls, by contrast, in *The Paradox of Gissing*, writes: “Gissing repeatedly makes it plain that this nether world is economic, a hell constructed by man” (19). I agree with Grylls; rather than seeing the social system as the creation of an omnipotent power, and as due to heredity, as Korg asserts, or “not a creation of human beings,” as Goode suggests, Gissing attempts to expose it as a dehumanizing system ordered and maintained by those in power, even if it may be “too deep-seated to change.” And it is fortuitous that Korg uses the word “inheritance” here rather than heredity, since it is largely through inheritance--monetary inheritance--that the system is kept in place.

In the traditional Victorian novel, then, the class stance of the writer and of the expected reader had been a predictable entity: at century’s end, everything had changed. Mary Eagleton and David Pierce claim, in *Attitudes to Class in the English Novel*, that the changes led to “oppositional” writers who exposed class inequality, though “the middle class were still the audience [...] to which the working class were now being offered as a sharp rebuke” (70). These novelists, according to Eagleton and Pierce, identified themselves with the working class and saw them as victimized and deterministically condemned to their fate. I would argue that Gissing, one of these so-called oppositional writers, had a far more complicated reaction to issues of class: though he sympathized, he did not identify himself with the working class, and did not aim his protest at a solidly middle-class audience, because he saw them as complicit in the problem. Jameson describes Gissing as “oscillating between an implacable denunciation of the reformist-philanthropists and an equally single-minded indictment of the ‘poor’ who cannot thus be rescued or elevated” (192); Gissing, in other words, can see (and blame) both sides.

My contention is that because of the changes taking place in late-

Victorian society, not only did George Gissing recognize the need for a new kind of novel, as Goode has suggested, but he wrote from a new world-view at century's end, one which was not limited by the middle-class ethos, and one which expressed therefore a less stable view of the social class system.

“The Streets of our Jerusalem”

In the late 1880s, in the decade at the close of which Gissing wrote *The Nether World*, the London poor became topical once again and the focus of much literary (and political) activity, partly due to the investigations that were going on into the slums of London, especially the East End. Charles Booth's monumental study of the conditions of the London poor, for example, which began as a study of the East End and Hackney, took seventeen years and eventually filled seventeen volumes. His series on poverty, which began publication in 1889, the same year in which *The Nether World* appeared, found that thirty-seven per cent of the population of East London and Hackney lived below what he had designated as the line of poverty, while over fourteen per cent of these were “very poor” (Booth, 156). Booth's study, along with many other studies of the problem of poverty in London at this time, made it clear to the middle classes that despite reforms, and despite the apparent prosperity of the country as a whole, a great many Londoners lived in want.

But while Booth's instinct is to classify and catalogue, seeing “the poor” as an object of study, Gissing's is to oppose this classification and flesh out the statistics.⁶ As Adrian Poole points out in *Gissing in Context*, Gissing “is engaged in the struggle to reduce the abstract to the human, as he tries to see beyond the numbing generalities of the mass, the mob, the working class, and penetrate to the living and human” (91). By using a specific London location with real street names, Gissing evokes the scientific, sociological, investigative impulse which was active at this time, but in doing so he subverts it. In Gissing's depiction of the streets of London, statistics cannot elide the extent and diversity of the poverty and hardship suffered by the people. The nether world as depicted by Gissing is not an area at the other end of London, seen from the comfort of middle-class homes in the West End; for its inhabitants, it is the whole world. While East Enders were classified by Booth as “Higher Class Labour,” “the poor” or “the Lowest Class,” the denizens of Gissing's Clerkenwell claim another designation: Sidney Kirkwood in *The Nether World* insists, on

several occasions, “We are the working classes.” There is an important distinction. For while the nether world of this novel is shown as almost a closed one, it is shown to be just as full of “ordinary human beings who experience the range of feelings and emotions, social aspirations and physical relationships that it is the special province of the novelist to explore” (Keating, 2), and as full of minute class distinctions based on very little actual difference as the middle-class world had been that was portrayed in novels earlier in the century. The middle classes may see whatever is beyond the boundaries of their world as alien, Gissing suggests, but then so do the nether world folk. It may be a world of slums and poverty, but it is still a world full of people for whom it sets the boundaries of their thinking.

And it is significant that Gissing does *not* set his novel in the East End, for in the last decades of the century, as Raymond Williams points out:

A social division between East End and West End, which had been noted by some observers from early in the century [and even before], deepened and became more inescapably visible. Conditions in the East End were being described as ‘unknown’ and ‘unexplored’ [...] and by the 1880s and 1890s ‘Darkest London’ was a conventional epithet [...] A predominant image of the darkness and poverty of the city, with East London as its symbolic example, became quite central in literature and social thought. (*Country*, 221)

The East End became a strong symbol of all that was poor, dirty, immoral and marginalized in London, a stigma from which it has never been able to recover. Instead of the East End, Gissing sets his novel in Clerkenwell, an area shown on Booth’s map to be fairly heavily populated with the “Very Poor” and the “Poor.”⁷ In choosing Clerkenwell as the location of his working-class world, Gissing is disrupting the East End/West End binary, and because they are not in a metonymic relationship with the East End, his working-class characters escape being lumped together as the lumpenproletariat.

As is now well known to his readers, Gissing appears to have been spurred on to write about the London poor in *The Nether World* by the death of his estranged first wife, Nell. After seeing her dead body laid out on a bed in what he describes in his diary as “a wretched, wretched place” (*Diary*, 22), he writes the next day: “as I stood beside that bed, I felt that my life henceforth had a firmer purpose. Henceforth I never cease to bear testimony against the accursed social order that brings about things of this kind” (23). Rather than taking the traditional Victorian novelistic approach to a depiction of “the poor” in order to

protest “the accursed social order,” an approach that would have involved using stock characters as outlined by Keating,⁸ Gissing’s *The Nether World* takes a far more Boothian approach, attempting to depict the working classes objectively, while at the same time using this carefully drawn world to symbolize far more. As Goode writes:

The Nether World is [...] an accurately documented picture of London in the years after 1879, but it is also a novel about the historical process. Its strength is in the fact that the specific and the universal so closely coincide: what is local is sharply plotted, but in order to make possible an extrapolation into infinity. (1966, 237)

Critics have noted that *The Nether World* is unusual among Victorian novels in portraying *only* the working classes; there is no middle-class or upper world visible. This novel is the culmination of Gissing’s series of novels portraying the working classes, and in each of the others--*Workers in the Dawn* (1880), *The Unclassed* (1884), *Demos* (1886), *Thyrza* (1887)--there is a middle-class world with which the working-class world can be contrasted. With *The Nether World*, however, Gissing seems to have finally come to the realization that in order “to bear testimony against the accursed social order,” the middle-class world had to be eliminated; the nether world had to be depicted on its own terms.

But Keating sees Gissing’s attempt as a failure. He writes:

Gissing continually pressed home the argument that the slums corrupt humanity and are therefore evil, but at the same time he was unwilling to face the necessary implications of his belief--that if the novel is to deal with working-class life then it must place at the centre working-class men and women who are *representative of* and *not superior to* their social environment. (*Working Classes*, 69, emphasis added)

Keating criticizes Gissing for not moving away from the traditional approach to working-class life, an approach which, because written entirely from a middle-class world-view, had middle-class values firmly in mind when viewing that other world, and therefore invented characters who were simply middle-class people in working-class clothes (*Oliver Twist* being an extreme example). Keating’s assumption is that in portraying Sidney Kirkwood and even Jane Snowdon as “superior to their social environment,” he is assigning middle-class values to working-class characters. Maria Teresa Chialant meanwhile argues that Gissing sees these “superior” working people as “the real victims of society” because, they are “endowed with an awareness that is

unknown to the majority of those who belong to the lower orders” (6). Consequently, according to Chialant, it is they “for whom the author feels respect and admiration [...] Gissing could not sympathize with the working class but only with its exceptional representatives” (6). While Sidney and Jane *are* superior to their neighbors, they are also in some ways representative of their class. They remain within their class and do not become *déraciné*, as Chialant suspects. There is no miracle transformation where Jane is concerned; she does not turn into a wealthy, well-educated lady once her rich grandfather appears. And Sidney *is* different from John Hewett, but his employment situation is stable and he is simply not married with a family to provide for; what a difference these two factors can make! Sidney and Jane merely represent the top end of the spectrum of individuals depicted in the nether world. For as Booth’s investigation proved, even in the nether world there is a spectrum of classes, and as I will show, these “superior” characters are necessary, not to display middle-class values, or simply because they are characters with whom the author can sympathize, but to make it possible to narrate “the poor.”

For in writing a novel which rejects the middle-class world-view and places working-class men and women at its center, Gissing faces a problem: whose viewpoint is to be depicted? As Keating says, Gissing firmly believes that “slums corrupt humanity.” In *The Nether World* this process is explained in relation to Clara Hewett:

The disease inherent in her being, that deadly outcome of social tyranny which perverts the generous elements of youth into mere seeds of destruction, developed day by day, blighting her heart, corrupting her moral sense, even setting marks upon the beauty of her countenance. (86)

The results of this process of corruption are the Hewetts and the Peckovers, the Candy family and the other inhabitants of Clerkenwell. Is it possible for Gissing to write a novel which will “bear testimony against the accursed social order,” if the point of view is entirely that of characters such as these, victims of the accursed social order who have already been corrupted? Is it possible to imagine a novel written from Clem Peckover’s point of view, one which sees violence and cruelty as the norm? Or even John Hewett’s--a viewpoint which would see frustration and defeat as the norm? Would these viewpoints, in the end, “expose” the evils of the social order? Or would they represent a kind of Biffenlike⁹ realism, a realism which is ultimately unreadable? With no terms of reference other than the corrupted viewpoint, it must surely be difficult to perceive what this humanity

might be if *un*corrupted. Other examples of stories “told from the inside” as it were, such as American slave narratives, are told from the point of view of someone who sees him or herself in relation to the larger picture, as a victim with constant reference to the victimizers. Even Faulkner in writing *The Sound and the Fury* needed other versions of Benjy’s story in order to give it a frame of reference.

Gissing has already realized the impossibility of achieving complete objectivity, a goal he would gently mock when he wrote *New Grub Street* (1891):

‘I want to take no side at all [says Biffen]; simply to say, Look, this is the kind of thing that happens.’

‘I admire your honesty, Biffen,’ said Reardon, sighing. ‘You will never sell work of this kind, yet you have the courage to go on with it because you believe in it.’
(*New Grub Street*, 175)

In order to depict the process of corruption caused by the environment, then, with no recourse to a middle-class frame of reference, no middle-class yardstick against which to make value judgements, he must create some characters who can be seen to represent at least the *potential* for good, for imagination, embedded in those who have been corrupted. Sidney Kirkwood and Jane Snowdon play this role; Clara Hewett shows the process of corruption in action.

In *The Nether World*, Gissing is able to depict the poor, working-class inhabitants of Clerkenwell as though from the “inside,” while at the same time his narrator remains aloof and passes judgement. It is a rhetorical balancing act which enables a kind of double vision for the reader which refuses to privilege either sympathy for the working classes (“Poor, poor creature!” the narrator says of the battered, alcoholic Mrs. Candy [761), or judgements against them (“they came to love vileness” [74]). In creating this double vision, Gissing destabilizes the middle-class ethos prevalent in the traditional Victorian novel earlier in the century.

As has been noted, Gissing’s new world-view is an ambivalent one, and his narrator therefore has an ambivalent attitude towards issues of class, a variance from the traditional omniscient narrator’s normative bourgeois stance. While sympathetic to the working-class subjects he describes, the narrator of *The Nether World* clearly sees himself as more educated and therefore on a different intellectual plane. His use of French phrases is evidence of this, as well as the fact that he labels one chapter “Io Saturnalia!” with reference to a Roman festival. Ambivalence is inherent in the very title of this chapter, because the

knowledge of the Saturnalia, and therefore Roman customs, suggests that the narrator is an educated intellectual, while the concept of the Saturnalia itself is a holiday for which schools and courts were closed and the population indulged in unbridled merrymaking of much the sort engaged in by the merry-makers from Clerkenwell who make an excursion to the Crystal Palace for the August Bank Holiday. As a concept, it therefore represents the very opposite of intellectual. In fact, the Saturnalia was a festival at which slaves and masters ate at the same table, and as the narrator points out, when Bob Hewett and his new bride, Pennyloaf, board the train at Holborn Viaduct for the 'Paliss,' there is "[n]o distinction between 'classes' to-day" (105). The Saturnalia, then, has been precisely chosen by Gissing for its double-edged implications.

"The Growing Good of the World"

One of the factors that help to create the new world-view displayed by Gissing is the lack of faith he has in "the growing good of the world," a faith that had been strong in earlier novelists. It was a faith which had been based in both the middle-class philanthropy, which abounded in the Victorian era, and in political solutions giving impetus to social protest novels. If fiction is to be an *exposé* of social evils, any exposing that is to be done must be done not only *of* something, but *to* someone. Clearly for Dickens and other novelists of the Victorian era, the *to whom?* question was easily answered: they wanted to influence their middle-class friends and neighbors, the philanthropists, and the voters who could change things. (Although in the case of Dickens, who did not seem to have much faith in the political system as a force for good, "[h]is saviour of society was a man of heavy purse and large heart, who did the utmost possible good in his own particular sphere" [Gissing, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, 209]). But Gissing does not believe in political solutions. His narrator is ironically scathing of the forces of "Law and Society," and when Stephen Candy is surprised that it is the law that his landlord can take away his furniture even down to his mother's bed things, the narrator says: "Yes: they can take everything. How foolish of Stephen Candy and his tribe not to be born of the class of landlords!" (341). Neither does he put faith in middle-class philanthropy--a point which is clear from his depiction of the mishandling of the soup-kitchen in *The Nether World*. When Miss Lant and her fellow do-gooders are indignant because the recipients of their philanthropy show no gratitude, the narrator, ad-

dressing the philanthropic ladies, says: "Have you still to learn what this nether world has been made by those who belong to the sphere above it?--Gratitude, quotha? Nay, do *you* be grateful that these hapless, half-starved women do not turn and rend you" (252).

For Gissing, then, what is the point of exposing evil to philanthropists and voters? Because he does not suggest solutions to society's ills and therefore appears not to hope for change, he is free to ignore the *to whom?* question, or at least to posit a new kind of audience. Is Gissing's fictionalized reader, to use Walter Ong's phrase,¹⁰ someone in his own circumstances--educated, lower middle-class, but constrained to live amongst the poor? P. J. Keating claims that Gissing's novels were "almost entirely ignored by the general reading public," but "were praised by a small group of London intellectuals" (4). Yet though *The Nether World* was first issued by Smith, Elder in 1889 in three volumes, and only five hundred copies were printed, it was quickly reissued in cheap editions. The following year, a one-volume 6s. edition came out, and in the same year, two reissues appeared, being sold at 2s.6d and 2s. (Collie, 48). While a fairly small audience was expected for the three-decker edition, a wider, more varied audience must have been envisioned for the cheaper editions. For as Richard Altick points out in *The English Common Reader*, not only was there a growing number of readers at century's end among "the ever expanding bourgeoisie" (6), but the group below this, the lower-middle class, was expanding, too, and it was this group which benefited most from board schools, mechanics institutes, public libraries and above all, cheap books. Although we do not know the makeup of the readership for this novel, we do know that it would have been harder for writers, towards the end of the century, to envisage their readers; they were no longer what Altick describes as "the relatively small, intellectually and socially superior audience for which most of the great nineteenth-century authors wrote--the readers of the quarterly reviews, the people whom writers like Macaulay, the Brontës, Meredith, George Eliot, and John Stuart Mill had in mind" (6). Gissing, therefore, would have imagined, and even appealed to, a different audience from Dickens's. Anne Pilgrim, in an article entitled "Gissing's Imagined Audience: A Note on Style," argues that because he sensed that he had "little in common with most members of the vast middle-class reading public," Gissing simply imagined "a fit audience for his work" (18). Envisioning a more socially diverse group of readers must surely have given Gissing the freedom to express a different stance *vis à vis* social class from that which novelists earlier in the century had taken. For example, the nar-

rator addresses the reader concerning Clara, saying: “Yes; but you must try to understand this girl of the people” (79). While describing Clara as a “girl of the people” suggests a distancing from the girl and the people, at the same time, the narrator’s attempt to draw the reader in through direct address and get him to focus on and think more about the working-class Clara, who is a sort of anti-heroine in Victorian novels terms, demonstrates--in this one line--the double vision Gissing accomplishes for the reader in this novel with regard to class.

“Born in Exile”

It is part of the Gissing legend that he was “born in exile,” and this is another factor which contributes to the possibility of Gissing’s new world-view. Born into the lower middle class, yet educated to a level far above that class, Gissing was unable to live, for many of his early years in London, in any but modest lodgings. While social class is always relational, the solidly middle and the decidedly working class are seen by others as having their identity partly formed by their class and they self-identify with their class. But the lower middle class is different; Rita Felski has written recently that “lower middle classness is a negative rather than a positive identity. It is a category usually applied from the outside, by those of high social status, or retrospectively, by those who once belonged to the lower middle class and have since moved beyond it” (41). Those who have “moved beyond” their class, especially in the last years of the nineteenth century, have frequently done so through education--as was the case with Gissing. And they have (perhaps guiltily) left behind their parents and families. In view of the importance of class relations to identities (both subjective and objective), those who have changed class for this and other reasons hold a somewhat tenuous and precarious class position and therefore an ambivalent subject position. This was the case with Gissing, for he had risen “above his station” through education, but had then married apparently beneath his new class position. While I feel that critics have relied too easily on the legend of Gissing’s “fall,”¹¹ or what Jameson describes as “that incurable wound of social and class humiliation” (203), to explain his dislike of the lower classes, I would argue that Gissing’s own ambivalent class position and therefore lack of class identity helps to create the new attitude towards class relations which is in evidence in *The Nether World*, one which suggests the dehumanizing effects of the social class system--including the problem of inveterate poverty--and questions whether this system is a “natural”

one. We see this when the narrator refers to Mrs. Candy's visits to the beer shop on Rosoman Street: "For many years," we are told, "that house, licensed for the sale of non-spirituous liquors, had been working Mrs. Candy's ruin [...] under the approving smile of civilisation." He goes on: "The struggle was too unequal between Mrs. Candy with her appeal to Providence, and Mrs. Green [the beer shop owner] with the forces of civilisation at her back" (76). It is clear to Gissing here that this system is a man-made one; it is "civilisation"--that great middle-class, capitalist one--that supports Mrs. Green in her undertaking. The narrator shows his sympathy for Mrs. Candy, unsympathetic character though she is: "Poor, poor creature!" he calls her. Gissing was a great reader, and it is clear from his writing on Dickens, for example, that he, like Henry James, had thought long and hard about the theory of the realistic novel and saw himself not only as part of a new generation of realist novelists, but as an innovative writer of what Gissing called "our school of strict veracity," creating a fiction "to be judged by the standard of actual experience" (*A Critical Study*, 64). While he recognized the implausibility of a Biffenlike absolute realism, one "without one single impertinent suggestion of any point of view save that of honest reporting" (*New Grub Street*, 174), Gissing was heroic in a Biffenlike way in that he was unwilling to compromise his art even though he knew his novels did not sell well.

The Nether World is, in many ways, ambivalent about the social class system and its ultimate manifestation in this novel--poverty. Gissing's ability to perceive Clerkenwell as inhabited by numerous social strata within the working class, and as entrenched in a complicated set of class relations which do not necessarily depend on money (the relations between Clem Peckover and Clara Hewett, for example) reveals his view of the poor to be different from the one previously expressed by Victorian novelists. Gissing's viewing position was affected by his own ambivalent class status (Goode calls him "the lower middle-class *arriviste* who never makes it to the elite" [1979, 202]): he had an unlooked-for close-up view of the poor, along with glimpses of that upper, richer world where some other authors bathed in the sunlight of popular success and financial stability. But it is not *only* Gissing's personal world-view that is at stake here. At century's end, the democracy movement, expansion of education, and changes in publishing and reading practices were destabilizing the attitudes and value system which had previously dominated. The world-view of both readers and writers was gradually shifting, allowing for new depictions of the social class system.

¹For a fuller explanation of how world-view differs from ideology, and hegemony, see *Keywords* by Raymond Williams.

²See for example P. J. Keating and T. B. Tomlinson, and Marxist critics such as Mary Eagleton and David Pierce among others.

³Use of the word “democracy” here is itself significant since for much of the nineteenth century the idea of democracy meant “rule by the mob,” except to the new school of Marxist thinkers who saw the idea of rule by the people as a positive rather than a negative. It is not until this period that the idea of democratic government as we understand it to-day—that is a representative democracy—began to be popularized in England (see Raymond Williams’s *Keywords*).

⁴While the total population of England and Wales had grown during the century from about 8.8 million in 1801 to about 32.5 million in 1901, in 1900 only about 2,000 persons in Britain held a title of any kind and there were only 522 British peers. Thus the Reform Acts of 1832, 1867 and 1884 were gradually affecting more people and a larger percentage of the population. Yet, paradoxically, economic historians see the last three decades of the century as “marking the zenith of income inequalities” despite government reform. (W. D. Rubinstein, *Britain’s Century: A Political and Social History, 1815-1905*, New York: Oxford U.P., 1998). While democratization was occurring (trade unions, for example, gained power during this period) “politicians and social observers spoke and behaved as though they believed that the British political system was much more broadly democratic than it actually was.” Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1993). See also notes 3 and 7.

⁵Eli’s daughter named her son Ichabod, meaning “the glory has departed,” because he was born at the moment that the Ark was captured by the Philistines. For the English bourgeoisie, this is what has happened at the end of the century. See I Samuel 4:21.

⁶For a lengthier discussion of Gissing’s work in relation to Booth’s, see John Goode’s *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*, 93-98. Goode points out many areas in which the two intersect, noting that “although Gissing’s most important writings on working-class London precede the first appearance of Booth, he shares the same intellectual climate and confronts the same city” (93).

⁷Interestingly, it was near Clerkenwell Green that Mr. Brownlow had his pockets picked by the Artful Dodger, and where Oliver was subsequently arrested. Perhaps Gissing is evoking Dickens in order to point up their differences.

⁸See *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*.

⁹Biffen, in *New Grub Street*, is devoted to a new kind of realism, “an absolute realism in the sphere of the ignobly decent” (173). “The result,” he says, “will be something unutterably tedious [...]. That is the stamp of the ignobly decent life. If it were anything *but* tedious it would be untrue” (174). His *magnum opus* is a book called *Mr. Bailey, Grocer*.

¹⁰Walter J. Ong, “The Writer’s Audience is Always a Fiction,” *Interfaces of the Word* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U.P., 1977).

¹¹As most Gissing readers will know, Gissing had been caught stealing from students

at Owens College for Nell, a prostitute whom he eventually married. This episode, since it had ended his promising academic career, causing him to live by his pen and thus in poverty for his first years in London, is seen as pivotal and critics have been quick to paint Gissing as a reactionary novelist who was obsessed with writing about class relations because, as Raymond Williams claims, he had “fallen foul of [...] the social standards of his own class” (*Culture and Society* 176), and therefore despised the “lower-classes” with whom he was forced to live.

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The Dispossessed A Consideration of George Gissing

by WALTER ALLEN, produced by DOUGLAS CLEVERDON

Introduction by ANTHONY CURTIS

Walter Allen's first encounter with the work of Gissing came, he tells us (in *As I Walked down New Grub Street: Memories of a Writing Life*, 1981) when he was a schoolboy in the 1920s at King Edward's Grammar School, Aston, a district of Birmingham. He was there on a scholarship. The English teacher "who had the gift of making books come alive" read out to his class from an anthology of modern short stories:

I remember the volume particularly [Allen writes] because it was my first introduction to George Gissing. It contained his "A Poor Gentleman," the story of a man of good family who falls in the social scale until he is living in an East End slum; but throughout he manages to keep his status as a gentleman by never ever pawning his dress suit. Frank [the English master] characterised the story as "morbid". I cannot pretend I liked it but I found it oddly disturbing, and it was the beginning of a life-long fascination, in which there is a streak of aversion, with Gissing.

The fascination and the aversion come through strongly in Allen's radio play, *The Dispossessed: A Consideration of George Gissing*, broadcast in the BBC's Third Programme on 3 July 1950. It was produced by Douglas Cleverdon, one of the literati who worked for the

BBC's Features Department in its then golden age. Cleverdon was a great inspirer of scripts that transcended the limits of radio, the most famous being Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*.

The script of *The Dispossessed* came to me for reference when I compiled a subsequent radio feature about Gissing in 1957 to mark the centenary of his birth. It re-surfaced the other day when I was clearing out a cupboard. Surprised at how well it read, I showed it to the editor of this *Journal*. Now thanks to Mrs. Peggy Allen, Walter Allen's widow, and the executors of his estate, the work sees the light of day in printed form for the first time.

Allen was one of several twentieth-century English writers who before the second world war held a belief that Gissing as a novelist had never had the attention he deserved. Their efforts to remedy this situation came to a head in the 1950s. They wrote appraisals of his work; they enabled some of it to be reprinted and they tried to get a biography of him written. This band of Gissingites included, besides Walter Allen, Rupert Hart-Davis, Hamish Miles, William Plomer, Myfanwy Piper, Herbert Van Thal, J. Middleton Murry, George Orwell, and William Haley (editor of *The Times* wearing his "Oliver Edwards" hat).

One of Gissing's constant themes, the struggle undergone by an individual to inherit the literary culture, to become an accepted member of the republic of letters, resulting in a life of ceaseless reading and literary work, had particular relevance for Allen. He went through what one might call a Gissing experience (no private income, no Oxbridge degree, no well-born connections to open doors, no steady job until late in life) two or three generations after Gissing. He was the son of a Birmingham silversmith's engraver and designer who, like Thomas Waller Gissing, was a man of general culture outside his trade. Allen *père* had Plato and Ruskin on his shelves, played the violin, and climbed Snowdon for recreation. He inspired the working-class hero of his son's finest work of fiction, *All in a Lifetime*, an outstanding example of a regional novel where politics and social issues combine with personal relations from the end of the Victorian period to the mid-twentieth century.

Unlike Gissing's, Allen's student career at Birmingham University, so charmingly evoked at the start of the play, did not end untimely. He graduated and went on to conquer London as a novelist (dubbed a member of the Birmingham School) and critic. Several of his books on English fiction are still in use. He was for a time literary editor of the *New Statesman* and from 1968-1973 the first professor of English

literature at the new University of Northern Ireland at Coleraine, and at various times visiting professor at several universities in the United States and Canada.

Allen treats Gissing's pessimistic outlook--what he calls "the literature of the Trap"--with a combination of scepticism and respect for its sincerity. The radio format allows him to alternate these negative and positive reactions through the observations made by Allen speaking in his own person with those of the Hostile Critic, Allen's *alter ego*. Their dialectic is the central thread of the piece. Neither advocate has the benefit of the extensive scholarship on the work and life of Gissing during the past fifty years that has cleared away so much confusion and ignorance. *The Dispossessed* has the air of being of its time and rehearses some of the conventional wisdom of the time about Gissing. However, it remains a penetrating, challenging and perceptive consideration by someone who had read all of Gissing that was then in print. Its voices ask questions about Gissing that still require answering.

Cast

Very Young Man I	Michael McGrath
Very Young Man II	Norman Painting
Very Young Man III	Peter Wilde
George Gissing and Reardon	Charles E. Stidwill
Henry James	Eric Phillips
Seccombe	Norman Painting
H. G. Wells	
Hostile Critic	Robert Farquharson
Biffen	Eric Phillips
Milvain	
Godwin Peak	Peter Wilde
Earwaker	Norman Painting
Sidwell Warricombe	Jill Balcon

Rehearsals:

2.30 - 5.30 p.m. June 30th	Studio 3E, B.H.
10.00 a.m. onwards July 3rd	Studio 6A, B.H.

Transmission: July 3rd, 1950 7.30 - 8.15 p.m.

Recorded Repeats: July 7th, 1950 10.00 - 10.45 p.m.
 July 29th, 1950 8.05 - 8.50 p.m.

1. ANNOUNCER: We present "The Dispossessed": A Consideration of George Gissing, by Walter Allen...

2. ALLEN: For me, this programme really begins almost twenty years ago, for I've only to pick up a Gissing novel to see in my mind's eye the image of a young man--a very young man--sitting in a library, reading. It is, in fact, the library in the Edmund Street building, the old Mason College, of Birmingham University. The young man at his table is reading with great concentration and evident excitement, so much so, indeed, that suddenly he can restrain himself no longer. He jumps up, with the book in his hand, his index finger between the pages to mark his place, and dashes out of the library, along the corridor, into the common room, and flings himself into a group of other very young men...

(*Fade in undergraduate conversation*)

3. 1st V.Y.M.: I say, you chaps.

4. 2nd V.Y.M.: What's the matter with Walter?

5/6. 1st V.Y.M.: Shut up for a minute and listen to this. (*Reads*) "'This', he said, when they reached the centre of things, 'is the Acropolis of Birmingham. Here are our great buildings, of which we boast to the world. They signify the triumph of Democracy--and of money. In front of you stands the Town Hall. Here, to the left, is the Midland Institute, where a great deal of lecturing goes on; and the big free library, where you can either read or go to sleep. I have done both in my time. Beyond, yonder, you catch a glimpse of the fountain that plays to the glory of Joseph Chamberlain--did you ever hear of him? And further back still is Mason College, where young men are taught a variety of things, including discontent with a small income. To the right there, that's the Council House--splendid, isn't it? We bring our little boys to look at it, and tell them if they make money enough they may someday go in and out as if it were their own house. Behind it we see the Art Gallery. We don't really care for pictures--a great big machine is our genuine delight, but it wouldn't be nice to tell everybody that'. Well, what do you think of that, eh?

7. 2nd V.Y.M.: Who wrote it?

8. 3rd V.Y.M.: What's the book?

9. 1st V.Y.M.: Gissing, George Gissing. It's from his novel *Eve's Ransom*; he wrote it in 1895.

10. 3rd V.Y.M.: Who was Gissing, anyway?

11. 1st V.Y.M.: He was born in 1857. He went to Owens College before it became Manchester University. (*Excitedly*) You know, Gissing must have been about the first writer to come out of the

provincial universities....

12. ALLEN: That, of course, was the point of the young man's excitement; indeed, Gissing and *Eve's Ransom* fairly bristled with points for him, because he intended to take his chance of becoming one of those whom Gissing described in "Henry Ryecroft".

13. GISSING: Innumerable are the men and women now writing for bread, who have not the least chance of finding in such work a permanent livelihood. They took to writing because they knew not what else to do, or because the literary calling tempted them by its independence and its dazzling prizes. They will hang on to the squalid profession, their earnings eked out by begging and borrowing, until it is too late for them to do anything else--and then? With a lifetime of dread experience behind me, I say that he who encourages any young man or woman to look for his living to 'literature', commits no less than a crime. If my voice had any authority, I would cry this truth aloud wherever men could hear. Hateful as is the struggle for life in every form, this rough-and-tumble of the literary arena seems to me sordid and degrading beyond all others.

14. ALLEN: Not that Gissing's warning would have stopped the young man even if he'd read it then. As for Gissing himself, and *Eve's Ransom*, which is certainly not one of his best novels, they came as an encouragement to the young man's ambitions. It was natural enough. For think of him--a young man of working class family,--acutely conscious of class; an undergraduate in a provincial university which, perhaps unworthily, he regards as a poor second best to Oxford. Above everything else he wants to write, and wants to write of the life about him, which means Birmingham. He's quite without influence or contacts; he's never met a writer, has never heard of anyone in his surroundings becoming a writer. What *could* he do, coming across Gissing and his novel about Birmingham and the Black Country, discovering that he'd been a product of a provincial university and that in some sense his main subject was class--what could he do, but add Gissing to D. H. Lawrence and adopt him as a literary ancestor?

The young man who read *Eve's Ransom* with such excitement was, of course, myself. At the time, I knew next to nothing of Gissing's life. It was not until years later that I came across Henry James's comment.

15. JAMES: Poor Gissing struck me as quite particularly marked out for what is called in his and my profession an unhappy ending.

16. ALLEN: Nor did I know Thomas Seccombe's anecdote:

17. SECCOMBE: In his later years it was customary for Gissing to inquire of a new author, 'Has he starved?'

18. ALLEN: And if H. G. Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography* had then been published, I've no doubt I'd have violently repudiated Wells's conclusion:

19. WELLS: Gissing spent his big fine brain depreciating life, because he would not and perhaps could not look life squarely in the eyes--neither his circumstances nor the conventions about him nor the adverse things about him nor the limitations of his personal character.

20. ALLEN: Now, I must admit that Wells's judgment seems to me at any rate partly true; as long as it's remembered that it's the judgment of a man who, both as a psychological type and in his opinions, was at the extreme opposite to Gissing. And when Wells says that some of Gissing's books will be read for many generations but will find fewer lovers than readers, then I'm bound to agree. To read Gissing, to respect him, is one thing; to love him, quite another, which I wouldn't pretend to myself. I admit I find his work often repellent; but also I always find it fascinating. I think a hostile, unsympathetic critic would put the case against Gissing rather like this.

21. H.C.: Might I speak for myself? Thank you. Of course Wells was right. Granted his great gifts, the truth surely is that Gissing was a ferocious egoist whose works nag at one remorselessly by the very intensity of their self-pity. Gissing was the man with the chip on his shoulder, the man with the permanent grouse, and his novels are a long wail of anguish at what life has done to him. Which means that he is a wholly subjective writer and that his books tell us far more about their author than about life. The major novelists you can read with delight without reference to the personal lives of their creators at all; with Gissing, you are continually thrown back on the man, so that his novels are merely part of the case-history of Gissing himself.

22. ALLEN: Most of that may be admitted, and it prevents Gissing from being a major novelist. But you hostile critics are very brave fellows. To listen to you, one would think that no one else had ever been in Gissing's position. Our interest in his work, it seems to me, springs out of our recognition that many people have been in that position, or something like it, still are, and one can only assume will be in the future. Gissing's writings, one might say, are the literature of the trap.

23. H. C.: Yes; but what kind of trap?

24. ALLEN: You remember Gissing's second novel, *The Unclassed*, in which the heroine is for part of the time a prostitute.

25. H.C.: *The Unclassed*... Yes.

26. ALLEN: Do you remember the preface Gissing wrote to the second edition?

27. GISSING: With regard to the title, which has sometimes been misunderstood, I should like to say that by “unclassed” I meant, not, of course, déclassé, nor yet a condition technically represented by the heroine. Male and female, all the prominent persons of the story, dwell in a limbo external to society. They refuse the statistic badge--will not, like Bishop Blougram’s respectabilities, be “classed and done with.”

28. ALLEN: They dwell in a limbo external to society. They refuse the statistic badge. This is true of the characters in all Gissing’s major novels. It was true of Gissing himself. And it enabled him to explore certain kinds of men and women, certain conditions in which one type of human being must live, as they’ve never been explored in English before or since.

29. H.C.: But can you define the nature of the trap?

30. ALLEN: In general terms H. G. Wells sums it excellently.

31. WELLS: Gissing’s sensitiveness to reactions made every relationship a pose, and he had no natural customary *persona* for miscellaneous use.

32. H.C.: But how did this come about?

33. ALLEN: Well, we very much lack a biography of Gissing. That’s something which ought to be remedied. As it is, we have the Gissing legend, which is compounded of anecdotes by his friends, a little solid information, and the impression of the man and his career that we get from his novels and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, a book plainly autobiographical in origin--in its detail it seems faithful enough where one can check it with his letters and with passages in his early novels. He was, I’d say, a man who was agonisingly conscious throughout his life that he had been dispossessed of what he considered his heritage, that he had been cast out of paradise.

34. H.C.: If the paradise he’d been cast out of was merely the one he described in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* I can’t say I think much of it: a literary gent’s cottage in the country, a life devoted to desultory reading in the classics, with no obligations to society or to other people at all.

35. ALLEN: I agree: *Ryecroft* is a tired, defeated book, which has commonly been grossly overpraised. No, the paradise he’d lost is much more adequately rendered in *New Grub Street*. Do you remember the dialogue between Reardon, who is one version of Gissing himself, and Biffen, the realistic novelist. It’s after the failure of Reardon’s marriage. Biffen is giving Reardon some sensible advice....

36. BIFFEN: You are depressed and anaemic. Get yourself in flesh,

and view things like a man of this world.

37. REARDON: But don't you think it the best thing that can happen to a man if he outgrows passion?

38. BIFFEN: In certain circumstances, no doubt.

39. REARDON: In all and any. The best moments of life are those when we contemplate beauty in the purely artistic spirit--objectively. I have had such moments in Greece and Italy; times when I was a free spirit, utterly remote from the temptations and harassings of sexual emotion. What we call love is mere turmoil. Who wouldn't release himself from it for ever, if the possibility offered?

40. BIFFEN: Oh, there's a good deal to be said for that, of course.

41. REARDON: Haven't I told you of that marvellous sunset at Athens? I was on the Pnyx; had been rambling about there the whole afternoon. For I dare say a couple of hours I had noticed a growing rift of light in the clouds to the west; it looked as if the dull day might have a rich ending. That rift grew broader and brighter--the only bit of light in the sky. On Parnes there were strips of ragged mist, hanging very low; the same on Hymettus, and even the peak of Lycabettus was just hidden. Of a sudden, the sun's rays broke out. They showed themselves first in a strangely beautiful way, striking from behind the seaward hills through the pass that leads to Eleusis, and so gloaming on the nearer slopes of Aigaleos, making the clefts black and the rounded parts of the mountain wonderfully brilliant with golden colour. All the rest of the landscape, remember, was untouched with ray of light. This lasted only a minute or two, then the sun itself sank into the open patch of sky and shot glory in every direction; broadening beams smote upwards over the dark clouds, and made them a lurid yellow. To the left of the sun, the gulf of Aegina was all golden mist, the islands floating in it vaguely. To the right, over black Salamis, lay delicate strips of pale blue--indescribably pale and delicate.

42. BIFFEN: You remember it very clearly.

43. REARDON: As if I saw it now! But wait. I turned eastward, and there to my astonishment was a magnificent rainbow, a perfect semicircle, stretching from the foot of Parnes to that of Hymettus, framing Athens and its hills, which grew brighter and brighter--the brightness for which there is no name among colours. Hymettus was of a soft misty warmth, a something tending to purple, its ridges marked by exquisitely soft and indefinite shadows, the rainbow coming right down in front. The Acropolis simply glowed and blazed. As the sun descended all these colours grew richer and warmer; for a moment the landscape was nearly crimson. Then suddenly the sun passed into the low-

er stratum of cloud, and the splendour died almost at once, except that there remained the northern half of the rainbow, which had become double. In the west, the clouds were still glorious for a time; there were two shaped like great expanded wings, edged with refulgence.

44. BIFFEN: Stop! or I shall clutch you by the throat. I warned you before that I can't stand those reminiscences.

45. REARDON: What does a man care for any woman on earth when he is absorbed in contemplation of that kind?

46. BIFFEN: But it is only one of life's satisfactions.

47. REARDON: I am only maintaining that it is the best, and infinitely preferable to sexual emotion. It leaves no doubt, no bitterness, of any kind. Poverty can't rob me of those memories. I have lived in an ideal world that was not deceitful, a world which seems to me, when I recall it, beyond the human sphere, bathed in diviner light.

48. ALLEN: We may take that as a symbol of the paradise that Gissing lost, the paradise dispossession of which made life in late nineteenth-century England so dark for him. For look at him in the year 1876. He's on the edge, you'd say, of taking possession of paradise. He's eighteen, the son of solid middle-class parents of considerable culture. Three years before he's come out first in England in the Oxford local examinations. He's won a scholarship to Owens College, Manchester, where he's sweeping everything before him. From Owens he'll go on to one of the older universities. You can prophesy his future: a first and a fellowship, the life of a scholar and a don.

49. H.C.: And one of the dullest of dons, at that, judging from the scholarship he betrays in his books!

50. ALLEN: Perhaps. But it wasn't to be like that. Before the end of 1872 [*sic*] the gates of paradise had been closed against him.

51. SECCOMBE: Amorous propensities led him into serious trouble.

52. ALLEN: Exactly. He'd fallen in love with a young prostitute, been expelled from Owens for pilfering, had served a prison sentence, and been packed off to America, where he taught in a school, written short stories, been a gas-fitter's mate and practically starved. And when he returned to England a year or so later it was practically to starve again. He'd married the prostitute, who by now, or a little later, became a dipsomaniac. And though they lived apart, half his earnings went to her. And so began the life of drudgery, of coaching and writing and reading, and often of semi-starvation, that he describes in *New Grub Street*, that most relentless exposure of the miseries of the literary life, and in *Ryecroft*.

53. GISSING: Some day I will go to London, and spend a day or two

among the dear old horrors. Some of the places, I know, have disappeared. I see the winding way by which I went from Oxford Street, at the foot of Tottenham Court Road, to Leicester Square, and, somewhere in the labyrinth (I think of it as always foggy and gas-lit) was a shop which had pies and puddings in the window, puddings and pies kept hot by steam rising through perforated metal. How many a time have I stood there, raging with hunger, unable to purchase even one pennyworth of food!... I see that alley hidden on the west side of Tottenham Court Road, where, after living in a back bedroom on the top floor, I had to exchange for the front cellar; there was a difference, if I remember rightly, of sixpence a week, and sixpence in those days, was a very great consideration--why, it meant a couple of meals. (I once *found* sixpence in the street, and had an exultation which is vivid to me at this moment.) The front cellar was stone-floored; its furniture was a table, a chair, a wash-stand, and a bed; the window, which of course had never been cleaned since it was put in, received light through a flat grating in the alley above. Here I lived; here *I wrote*...

I recall a tragi-comical incident of life at the British Museum. Once, on going down into the lavatory to wash my hands, I became aware of a notice newly set up above the row of basins. It ran somehow like this: "Readers are requested to bear in mind that these basins are to be used only for casual ablutions". Oh, the significance of that inscription! Had I not myself, more than once, been glad to use this soap and water more largely than the sense of the authorities contemplated?

54. ALLEN: That was written, of course, years later, when he was relatively successful; and it's tainted by the sentimentality, the falsity, that pervades the pages of *Ryecroft*.

55. H.C. I may appear callous and uncharitable, but I must say I suspect these tales of Gissing's extreme poverty. No doubt he was often hard up; no doubt he had to pinch and scrape and live in unsightly and evil-smelling surroundings. Scores of young men who've insisted on trying to write for a living have had to do that before and since Gissing's time. What I want to know--and no one's ever been able to tell me--is how long the period of poverty, of genuine poverty, lasted. We do know, from his letters, that in 1884 he took a three years' lease of what he called a good set of chambers in Marylebone Road and that two months later he wrote to his brother to say he was earning £5.10 a week by coaching. In the eighties £5.10 was quite a sum. I think he was a man who could always make a very presentable and ticklish hair shirt out of the softest and silkiest of silk ones. Take Reardon, in *New Grub Street*. I agree Reardon's a self portrait. Well,

Gissing's down on himself is so great that he isn't satisfied till he's killed Reardon off in circumstances of the most acute misery. Yet by the time Gissing wrote that book, in 1891, he was certainly not in anything like poverty. If his circumstances were harrowing it wasn't for lack of money, it was because, his first wife having died, he had picked up and married a servant girl who turned out to be no better than the other.

56. ALLEN: I have said that Gissing's novels represented the literature of the trap. The trap was himself; his behaviour was fatally repetitive. As to the degree and duration of his poverty, we really don't know. That's one reason why we need a scholarly, well-documented biography. He certainly thought his poverty was real enough, and I'm sure that the sense of it was exacerbated by the contrast, which was always with him, which found a measure of release in *Ryecroft*, with the paradise he had lost, a paradise the enchantment of which he'd doubtless exaggerated in the very process of losing it. He was a novelist by accident; writing novels was a second-best, and a poor one at that. And poverty or not, no man was less fitted to live by his wits, as the young writer without private means must, than Gissing. By the time he wrote *New Grub Street*, he knew this very well. Remember what Milvain, the young journalist who is born for success, has to say about Reardon:

57. MILVAIN: Things are going badly with him. He isn't the kind of man to keep up literary production as a paying business. In favourable circumstances he might write a fairly good book once every two or three years. The failure of his last depressed him, and now he's struggling hopelessly to get another done before the winter season.... It irritates me to see a man making such large demands upon fortune. One must be more modest--as I am. Because one book had a sort of success he imagined his struggles were over. He got a hundred pounds for *On Neutral Ground*, and at once counted on a continuance of payments in geometrical proportion. I hinted to him that he couldn't keep it up, and he smiled with tolerance, no doubt thinking "He judges me by himself." But I didn't do anything of the kind. I'm a stronger man than Reardon; I can keep my eyes open and wait... Ten years hence, if Reardon is still alive, I shall be lending him five pound notes... He's the old type of unpractical artist; I am the literary man of 1882. He won't make concessions, or rather, he can't make them; he can't supply the market.

58. ALLEN: When all allowance has been made for the self-pity, that does point to considerable self-knowledge on Gissing's part. But

his interests were not in what we may call applied writing, apart from his novels where he was a ferocious art-for-art-saker. Where his interests lay--the interests symbolised by the sunset over Athens--comes out almost to the point of comedy in a letter he wrote to his sister in 1885:

59. GISSING: I am working hard at the first chapters of my new book *Demos...* I read a canto of Dante every day and derive vast satisfaction from it. I am also reading Plato. I am more and more determined to keep to the really great men, otherwise life is too short.

Let us think: Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, among the Greeks: Virgil, Catullus, Horace, among the Latins: in Italian, Dante and Boccaccio: in Spanish, Don Quixote: in German, Goethe, Jean Paul, Heine: in French, Molière, George Sand, Balzac, de Musset: in English, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Browning and Scott. These are the indispensables. I rejoice to say I can read them all in the original, except Cervantes, and I hope to take up Spanish next year, just for that purpose. Now you will probably never go in for Greek and Latin, indeed I think you had better not, for the labour would be extreme. But you must read the classics in the best obtainable translations.... Resolutely put aside useless reading: feed on the best quality of food. Let it be understood that you are *studying*, that your life is arranged in a student's fashion and allow no one to pooh-pooh your course or lead you into trivialities. I fail to see why you should not be a student as well as anyone else. It is monstrous to go through the world blind amid such glorious things on every hand. I read *King Lear* last Sunday....

60. H.C. Books. A literary education. It was the curse of Gissing.

61. ALLEN: There were times when he'd have agreed.

62. GISSING: To the relatively poor (who are so much worse off than the poor absolutely) education is in most cases a mocking cruelty.

63. H.C.: His only values were literary values. It vitiates everything he writes. Reading him, you'd think that the sole end of life was that men and women should read. Look with what contempt he dismisses young Oliver Peak, in *Born in Exile*:

64. GISSING: His brother, Oliver, now seventeen, was developing into a type of young man as objectionable as it is easily recognised. The slow, compliant boy had grown more flesh and muscle than once seemed likely, and his wits had begun to display that kind of vivaciousness which is only compatible with a nature moulded in common clay. He saw much company, and all of low intellectual order; he had purchased a bicycle, and regarded it as a source of distinction, a means

of displaying himself before shopkeepers' daughters; he believed himself a modest tenor, and sang verses of sentimental imbecility; he took in several weekly papers of unpromising title, for the chief purpose of deciphering cryptograms, in which pursuit he had singular success. Add to these characteristics a penchant for cheap jewellery, and Oliver Peak stands confessed.

65. H.C. A more harmless young man can't be imagined: Gissing uses the steam hammer of his scorn to kill a fly. And it's the same with his novels of working class life, *Thyrza*, *The Nether World* and the rest. If his poverty forced him to live among the people, he gained precious little of value from the experience. The virtues of the poor are a closed book to him; for all he was concerned, their humour, courage and kindness might not have existed. All he was aware of was brutality, noise and stench. His novels of working class life are largely the expression of a shuddering loathing. There's never been a novelist of more defective sympathies. The only working class characters with whom he can sympathise are those who are fragments or images of himself, men like Grail, in *Thyrza*, sensitive souls struggling to educate themselves.

66. ALLEN: Well, at any rate, that helps to define Gissing's limitations; and it also helps to define just that which he could do that no other English novelist has done. May we have that quotation from his preface to *The Unclassed* again?

67. GISSING: Male and female, all the prominent persons in the story dwell in a limbo external to society. They refuse the statistic badge.

68. ALLEN: The limbo they dwell in is the limbo of loneliness, isolation brought about by the simple fact that they *are* different from their fellows, different, because, if working men like Grail, they are consumed by the desire for learning. Gilbert Grail too, is one of the dispossessed, exiled from a paradise he has never known:

69. GISSING: Taste for literature pure and simple, and disinterested love of historical research are the rarest things among the self-taught; naturally so, seeing how seldom they come of anything but academical tillage of the right soil. The average man of education is fond of literature because the environment of his growth has made such fondness a second nature. Gilbert had conceived his passion by mere grace. It had developed in him slowly. At twenty years he was a young fellow of seemingly rather sluggish character, without social tendencies, without the common ambitions of his class, much given to absence of mind. About that time he came across one of the volumes

of the elder Disraeli, and, behold, he had found himself. Reading of things utterly unknown to him, he was inspired with strange delights; a mysterious fascination drew him on amid names which were only sound; a great desire was born in him, and its object was seen in every volume that met his eye. Had he then been given means and leisure, he would have become at the least a man of noteworthy learning. No such good fortune awaited him. Daily his thirteen hours went to the manufacture of candles, and the evening leisure, with one free day in the week, was all he could ever hope for.... He would eat his meal when he came from work, then take his book to a corner, and be mute, answering any needful question with a gesture or the briefest word. At such times his face had the lines of age; you would have deemed him a man weighed upon by some vast sorrow. And was he not? His life was speeding by; already the best years were gone, the years of youth and force and hope--nay, hope he could not be said to have known, unless it were for a short space when first the purpose of his being dawned upon consciousness; and the end of that had been bitter enough. The purpose he knew was frustrated. The 'Might have been', which is 'also called No More, Too late, Farewell', often stared him in the eyes with those unchanging orbs of ghastliness, chilling the flow of his blood and making life the of mockeries.

70. ALLEN: With a character such as Grail Gissing's sympathies are fully engaged, as they are always with men and women exiled, so to say, from their proper sphere, the sphere to which they naturally belong by their aspirations, talents or even birth. It was this sympathy which led him to explore, in *The Odd Women*, in some ways the best of his novels, the fate of the middle-class woman of his period who failed to marry and had no vocational training and too little money. It made him, too, the first and perhaps still the best delineator in English of a comparatively recent type of man, the proletarian intellectual, the educated man from the working classes who, for all his talents and even his success, is even now often compact of feelings of inferiority, pride and envy of those who possess by right of birth the graces and freedom which he has had laboriously to acquire, if indeed he has acquired them at all.

71. H.C. You are thinking of Godwin Peak, in *Born in Exile*?

72. ALLEN: Yes. Godwin Peak seems to me Gissing's most remarkable creation and one of the finest in our fiction.

73. H.C. A character, and a book too, dripping with class-rancour and resentment.

74. ALLEN: That is part of its merit, though I suspect that Gissing

himself was unconscious of the rancour and resentment. It's significant that what we may call the 'good' working class intellectual, Earwaker, the radical journalist, who feels no resentment and adjusts himself to society and is therefore materially successful, scarcely comes alive. But Peak, in Gissing's own words, is a "militant egoist", conscious of his own intellectual superiority; even as a schoolboy he repudiates his surroundings and his class. Hear him talking to his brother Oliver on the subject of his vulgar cockney uncle:

75. PEAK: What is the brute to us? When I'm a man, let him venture to come near me, and see what sort of reception he'll get! I hate low, uneducated people! I hate them worse than the filthiest vermin--don't you?

76. OLIVER: (*A boy*) Of course I do, Godwin.

77. PEAK: They ought to be swept off the face of the earth! All the grown-up creatures, who can't speak proper English and don't know how to behave themselves, I'd transport them to the (*Pause*) Falkland Islands and let them die off as soon as possible. The children should be sent to school and purified, if possible; if not, they too should be got rid of.

78. OLIVER: You're an aristocrat, Godwin.

79. PEAK: I hope I am. I mean to be, that's certain. There's nothing I hate like vulgarity. That's why I can't stand Roper. When he beat me in mathematics last midsummer, I felt so ashamed I could hardly bear myself. I'm working like a nigger at algebra and Euclid this half, just because I think it would almost kill me to be beaten again by a low cad.

80. ALLEN: An impassioned pride is at the root of Peak's behaviour. He throws up a brilliant career as a student at Whitelaw College--for Whitelaw we may perhaps read Owens, Manchester,--because the same vulgar uncle proposes to open an eating-house outside the College gates and expects the youth to solicit his fellow-students' custom. He goes to London and becomes an industrial chemist, of course with Literary ambitions. An arrogant rationalist, he writes an anonymous article for a review, in which he ridicules the pretensions of a popular book aiming to reconcile science and religion.

81. H.C.: But what is the paradise from which Peak has exiled himself? His renunciation of Whitelaw--and with it, we gather, the probability of a scholar's life afterwards--was, after all, purely voluntary.

82. ALLEN: The symbol of his paradise becomes plain in a discussion between him and Earwaker:

83. PEAK: Forgive me if I ask you a blunt question. Have you ever

associated with women of the highest refinement?

84. EARWAKER: (*Laughing*) I don't know what the phrase means. It sounds rather odd on your lips.

85. PEAK: Well, women of the highest class of commoners. With peeresses we needn't concern ourselves.

86. EARWAKER: You imagine that social precedence makes all that difference in women?

87. PEAK: Yes, I do. The daughter of a county family is a finer being than any girl who can spring from the nomad orders.

88. EARWAKER: Even supposing your nomads produce a Rachel or a Charlotte Brontë?

89. PEAK: We are not talking of genius.

90. EARWAKER: It was irrelevant, I know. Well, yes, I *have* conversed now and then with what you would call well-born women. They are delightful creatures, some of them, in given circumstances. But do you think I ever dreamt of taking a wife drenched in social prejudices? A man's wife may be his superior in whatever you like, *except* social position. That is precisely the distinction that no woman can forget or forgive. If I loved a woman of rank above my own she would make me a renegade; for her sake I should deny my faith. I should write for the *St. James's Gazette*, and at last poison myself in an agony of shame. (*Laughs*)

91. PEAK: (*In a low voice*) There are men whose character would defy that rule.

92. EARWAKER: Yes--to their own disaster. But I ought to have made one exception. There *is* a case in which a woman will marry without much regard to her husband's origin. Let him be a parson, and he may aim as high as he chooses. (*Pause*) But what's all this about? Whose acquaintance have you been making?

93. PEAK: No one's.... It's the natural tendency of my mind. If I ever marry at all, it will be a woman of far higher birth than my own.

94. EARWAKER: Don't malign your parents, old fellow. They gave you a brain inferior to that of few men. You will never meet a woman of higher birth.

95. PEAK: That's a friendly sophism. I can't thank you for it, because it has a bitter side. (*Pause*) I have no other ambition in life--no other! Think the confession as ridiculous as you like; my one supreme desire is to marry a perfectly refined woman. Put it in the correct terms: I am a plebeian, and I aim at marrying a lady.

96. ALLEN: That's the heart of the book: to marry a lady is the symbol of Peak's paradise. And he finds the lady, Sidwell Warricombe,

the sister of a wealthy college friend met by accident at Exeter.

97. H.C.: But don't you find Gissing's attitude towards the Warricombes rather absurd? What are they but wealthy middle-class Victorian manufacturers, of some culture? But Gissing writes of them in such a way that they might almost be Renaissance princes.

98. ALLEN: That's true enough. The Warricombes, a fairly normal middle class family, are romanticised in much the same way as Disraeli romanticised his noblemen. But I don't think that matters greatly: if the romanticising was part of Gissing's illusion it was also part of Peak's. It's Peak who is the real centre of interest. And, attracted towards the Warricombes by the way they live, the graciousness of life they represent, Peak plunges into a career of dissimulation simply to maintain relations with them. He announces his intention of being ordained as an Anglican parson and, to ingratiate himself with Sidwell and her father, remains in Exeter studying theology, solemnly discussing the conflict between science and religion, cynically shoring up Mr. Warricombe's battered faith. He proposes to Sidwell; but he's exposed; that anonymous attack of his on religion has made some stir, and it is brought home to him. In a final interview with Sidwell, he attempts to justify himself to her:

99. PEAK: You don't think of me as irredeemably base?

100. SIDWELL: If I thought you base I should not now be speaking with you. It is because I feel and know that you have erred only--that is what makes it impossible for me to think of your fault as outweighing the good in your nature.

101. PEAK: The good? I wonder how you understand that. What is there *good* in me? You don't mean mere intellect?

102. SIDWELL: (*After hesitation*) No, I don't mean intellect.

103. PEAK: What then? Tell me of one quality in me strong enough to justify a woman's love.

104. SIDWELL: I can't analyse your character--I only know--

(*Pause*)

105. PEAK: To myself, I seem anything but lovable. I don't underrate my powers--rather the opposite, no doubt; but what I always seem to lack is the gift of pleasing--moral grace. My strongest emotions seem to be absorbed in revolt; for once that I feel tenderly, I have a hundred fierce, resentful, tempestuous moods. To be suave and smiling in common intercourse costs me an effort. I have to act the part, and this habit makes me sceptical, whenever I am really tempted to gentleness. I criticise myself ceaselessly; expose without mercy all those characteristics which another man would keep out of sight. Yes,

and for this very reason, just because I think myself unlovable--the gift of love means far more to me than to other men. If you could conceive the passion of gratitude which possessed me for hours after I left you the other day! You cannot! (*Pause*) In comparison with this sincerity, what becomes of the pretence you blame in me? If you knew how paltry it sounds--that accusation of dishonesty! I believed the world round, and pretended to believe it flat: that's what it amounts to! Are you, on such an account as that, to consider worthless the devotion which has grown in me month by month? You--I was persuaded--thought the world flat, and couldn't think kindly of any man who held the other hypothesis. Very well; why not concede the trifle, and so at least give myself a chance....

106. H.C.: That's an extraordinarily revealing speech. "My strongest emotions seem to be absorbed in revolt": here Gissing is surely analysing himself.

107. ALLEN: I believe so too. And the analysis throws light, it seems to me, on Gissing's disastrous marriages. His actual behaviour towards women was the opposite of Peak's; but they complement each other in the most amazing way. In real life, Peak's dissimulation and his restraint were impossible to Gissing; but, imaginatively, they were all too possible; and Peak's way of pursuing Sidwell seems to me a very powerful support of Wells's theory of Gissing's attitude towards women:

108. WELLS: He felt that to make love to any woman he could regard as a social equal would be too elaborate, restrained and tedious for his urgencies, he could not answer questions he supposed he would be asked about his health and means, and so he flung himself at a social inferior whom he expected to be easy and grateful.

109. H.C.: Yes. And hatred was the motive force behind his writing, hatred of the world about him, of the inferior position he thought society had pushed him into.

110. ALLEN: Well, Gissing isn't the only novelist who's been impelled by hate, the only writer who's used fiction as a means of getting his own back on society. His attitude towards his age was one he shared very largely with Flaubert: he wasn't the artist Flaubert was, and consequently his novels are not sufficiently detached from himself to be great works of art. But the hatred was not a blind fury; it was nothing like the nihilism of, say, Céline among our contemporaries. It was rather the index of the difference he found between life as he experienced it and life as he conceived it had been and ought to be. The world as he saw it is being judged all the time in the light of that paradise of which he had been dispossessed. You may criticise the

nature of that paradise. You may say it was purely literary in origin and bore no relation to real life; but it was real for Gissing; it gave him a measuring rod by which to judge life in England in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. It enabled him to give us a unique picture of that period, unique not only because it's so strongly of the period, but also because it was the work of a man who felt himself always in exile. And as long as there are men and women in existence who feel themselves in exile, as long, in other words, as there's a class system--any kind of class system--in which a few men and women feel there is no place, no home, for them, then, it seems to me, the best of his novels, *Thyrza*, *New Grub Street*, *Born in Exile*, *The Odd Women* and *In the Year of Jubilee*--the best of his novels will continue to be read. He was a misfit--and that is precisely his value to us. Had he never been dispossessed of his paradise we might never have heard of him. His misfortunes, whether the result of his own defects of character or of external circumstances, were our gain. His sole attempt to put his paradise, his ideal world down on paper, his historical novel *Veranilda*--his counterpart of Flaubert's *Salammbô* --wasn't finished, and is now as dead as mutton; but, as H. G. Wells, his good friend, who was at his death-bed, reports, glimpses of paradise were with him to the end:

111. WELLS: Gissing aflame with fever had dropped all anxieties out of his mind.... This gaunt, dishevelled, unshaven, flushed, bright-eyed being who sat up in bed and gestured weakly with his lean hand, was exalted. He had passed over altogether into that fantastic pseudo-Roman world of which Wakefield Grammar School had laid the foundations. "What are these magnificent beings!" he would say. "Who are these magnificent beings advancing upon us?" Or again, "What is all this splendour? What does it portend?" He babbled in Latin; he chanted fragments of Gregorian music. All the accumulation of material that he had made for *Veranilda* and more also, was hurrying faster and brighter across the mirrors of his brain before the lights went out for ever.

112. ANNOUNCER: That ends "The Dispossessed". This consideration of George Gissing was written and spoken by Walter Allen. Gissing was played by Charles E. Stidwill, *The Hostile Critic* by

Others taking part were

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Book Review

George Gissing, *Of Human Odds and Ends/Was so alles geschieht*. Selection and translation by Richard Fenzl. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag (dtv zweisprachig -Edition Langewiesche-Brandt), 2000.

Readers of titles published in this bilingual series--people with a good knowledge of a certain foreign language who wish to improve it by reading literary texts or people with a restricted knowledge of a language who wish to read literary texts in the original but depend on a translator's assistance--may have come across the name of George Gissing in two other volumes, *Victorian Stories* (1990) and *Love and Marriage* (1996), in which Richard Fenzl included "The Firebrand" and "The Prize Lodger" respectively, two stories taken from *Human Odds and Ends*. This new volume is devoted exclusively to Gissing, containing seven stories ("Our Mr Jupp," "The Tout of Yarmouth Bridge," "A Profitable Weakness," "The Little Woman from Lancashire," "The Justice and the Vagabond," "The Poet's Portmanteau" and "In Honour Bound") from the same collection, some explanatory notes and a brief biographical note.

In an introductory note, the publisher describes Gissing as a "tireless hunter and gatherer of odd characters, strange settings and perplexing points," and Fenzl's choice of stories, most of them humorous satires, certainly offers the reader a mixed collection of curios. They range from the selfish and conceited town-traveller, Mr. Jupp, on the look-out for a rich wife, who ends up begging for a little money from the woman he once believed he had hooked, and Serena, the young tout assisting her aunt in "keeping the [lodging]-house dirty," as well as trying to make a little extra money by blackmailing her, to Lambert Wellaway, the middle-aged boarding-school master who gets away from his hateful job by constant flattery of an amateur artist, in return for which he receives full board and lodging as it were; from the "little woman" from the country who develops into a member of fashionable London society, and Mr. Rutland, a lawyer and henpecked husband, who dies of a heart attack before he is able to escape with an old friend of his, now a vagabond, to the mysterious young woman who returns to a poet the manuscript she had disappeared with when she stole his portmanteau years before. Her story is the only one that is not markedly satirical, whereas that of Filmer, the philologist, assuredly is. Feeling obliged to propose to his former charwoman, without whose help he would have been incapable of producing his "great

book,” he hears with relief that she is about to marry someone else.

Those readers who do not merely glance at the right-hand pages of the book whenever they get stuck with the original text on the left, but who are interested in translation technique, will soon realize that translating does not mean rendering individual words from the source language into corresponding words of the target language. If such were the case, the translation of the first sentence of the opening story (“You knew the man at once by his likeness to a thousand others”) would not read “Der Mann kam einem sofort bekannt vor, denn er sah aus wie tausend andere.” In the German version “the man” is no longer the object, but the subject of the sentence, followed by a passive construction (“seemed familiar to you”), and as a prepositional phrase (“by his likeness to”) would sound very awkward and stiff in German, it was replaced by a subordinate clause (“for he looked like a thousand others”). The next sentence (“His clothes were always in good condition; the gloss of his linen declared a daily renewal...”) may look rather simple, but Fenzl’s translation (“Seine Kleidung war stets gut in Schuss; dem Glanz seines Hemdes merkte man an, dass es täglich gewechselt wurde”) gives proof of the skills and creativity needed to translate it satisfactorily. By finding the idiomatic phrase “gut in Schuss sein” for “to be in good condition” instead of using the more literal equivalent “in gutem Zustand sein,” the sentence no longer reads like a translation (reminiscent of an ad for a second-hand article), but like an original. The subject of the English sentence (“the gloss”) is the indirect object of the German sentence, and the substantival construction--“declared a daily renewal”--has again been replaced by a passive construction and a subordinate clause without a noun. The sentence would otherwise have recalled the style of some political manifesto.

One might go on analysing the various techniques applied when translating English participles, participial clauses, verbal constructions or infinitives; how, for stylistic reasons, the translator finds negative antonyms for verbs like “dislike” or “fail”. One might point out the differences in word order (much more strict in English than in German), and show how, in the German translation, an abstract noun becomes the subject of a sentence and many other linguistic differences a translator is confronted with in modern and older texts. One of Gissing’s “specialities” is his fondness for phrases like: “took a taint of vulgarity; made frequent protest; the business stood in need of; a face which made suggestion of fresh assaults; listened with appearance of concern,” or even “Oh! his note was joyful.” A translator imitating

this style would be accused of suffering from “Substantivitis,” of writing “Papierdeutsch” or “Amtdeutsch” (officialese). Consequently, in order to make his translation a pleasant rather than a wooden read, Fenzl converted dozens of such phrases to verbs or other, more natural, constructions. Another characteristic of Gissing’s style is abstract descriptions like: “he tossed in the misery of sleeplessness; a laugh of the most undeniable mirthfulness; London had welcomed him with so sudden a glimpse of her infinite romance,” or “Man and wife were searching within the room. He heard feminine exclamations and a masculine oath.” Had Fenzl not used various tricks, for example discreetly breathing some life into the last mentioned sentence by letting the exclamations and the oath “be heard from her” and “from him” respectively, the German reader might have been amused, although Gissing probably did not intend this scene to be amusing. Confronted with a sentence like “He had a vein of studious inclination, a faculty for the lucid exposition of his knowledge, a pleasant manner, an alluring sportiveness of intellect,” a translator may begin to wonder whether he is translating a short story or an abstract of the qualities that distinguish a good teacher. Fenzl, who used to be a teacher himself before he began translating English and French for this bilingual series, found a lucid way of translating this passage by shedding a bit of ballast, for example by granting Wellaway just a “vein” and not an “inclination” as well, and by replacing the noun “exposition” by a more figurative verbal phrase.

On the other hand one comes across sentences like “He wandered extensively...”, where the German translator does not feel obliged to shed, but rather to accumulate some ballast, otherwise the sentence would suggest that the man made just one long walking tour instead of walking regularly. Consequently Fenzl’s translation reads (retranslated) “He used to make extensive walking-tours.” The adjective in the sentence “His wandering steps brought him to...” is illogical in German and would, translated literally, convey the impression that the man’s steps “act” independently of his body; consequently the retranslation reads “His steps brought the wanderer to” (which sounds strange in English, but not in German). Neither can Germans have a *barefoot* childhood (as this would suggest that their childhood might also wear shoes), and while the English can obviously face the mart of men “strong in the *sanguine* courage of two-and-twenty,” the German equivalent can only do so (retranslated) “with the confidence and courage of his 22 years.” While Mrs. Rutland takes a holiday abroad “merely for the sake of its *retrospective advantages*,” her German alter

ego's holiday must be taken "merely for the sake of the advantages resulting from it on looking back after her return" (so Germans had perhaps better have no retrospective advantages in mind when going on holiday, or at least not talk about them).

While the publisher's note describes Gissing as a "tireless hunter and gatherer of odd characters," Richard Fenzl might be described as a tireless hunter and gatherer of original renderings of English words and phrases into German, of collective terms for English phrases like "the world that amuses itself" ("Amusiergesellschaft"), "a stay-at-home life" ("Stubenhockerdasein"), or of idiomatic phrases like "bis auf die Knochen konservativ" (for "intensely conservative"), "unter dem Pantoffel" (for "under female tyranny"), "kleine Ölfunzel" (for "wretched little oil-lamp," a "Funzel" *being* a wretched lamp). Hundreds of other examples can be found in the twenty or so bilingual volumes Fenzl has published. As Eduard Bertz, who so sensitively translated "Phoebe" into German, would have agreed, much creativity is needed to make the translation of a Gissing text a good read. (It is to be regretted that instead of writing a book on bicycling he did not content himself with riding his own bicycle and translating more of his friend's work.) But for all the abstractness of his style and his terse narrative art, Gissing never fails to give his readers a vivid picture of his characters, and, as the publisher's note rightly states, not all of his male and female characters are nice types, but all of them "move" us: to frown, to shake our heads or to smile, but never to yawn.

Karma Of

Notes and News

Mrs. Elizabeth Mary Everson, née Shortridge, informs us that her mother, Olive Mary Shortridge, née Gifford, born in 1902, widow of Rolf Shortridge (1894-1976), who was the eighth child of Gissing's friend, John Wood Shortridge (1852-1921) and of Carmela Esposito (1855-1941), died on 25 August 2000. Olive was the last member of the family to bear the name of Shortridge.

With much regret we must also announce the death of Rosario Rubbettino, the founder and managing director of the publishing company to which he gave his name. He died at the early age of fifty-nine on 7 October, twenty-eight years after founding his firm in the small Calabrian town of Soveria Mannelli. In the *Corriere della Sera* for

8 October 2000, p. 35, Giuliano Vigni gave a substantial account of Rubbettino's achievement. Among the 800 titles in his catalogue are many books on Calabria past and present, including *La terra del sole*, Gissing's letters from Italy and Greece, edited by Francesco Badolato.

In his review of Arlene Young's critical edition of *The Odd Women* (Broadview) in the *Journal* for October 1998, Peter Morton mentioned Gissing's allusion to the story of the lady and the glove as a cultural allusion which remained obscure. Not obscure to all readers, however. Karina Of, the German translator of the novel, tells us that the phrase is explained in the *Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (entry on "glove"): "In the days of chivalry it was customary for knights to wear a lady's glove in their helmets and to defend it with their life." See Edward Hall's chronicle glorifying the House of Tudor, *The Union of the Two Noble and illustre Famelies of Lancastre and York* (1542).

Robin Woolven, who is currently writing a history of Willersey, the Worcestershire village near Broadway, to which Algernon Gissing's name is attached, reports that a single-session seminar on George was held on 15 March 2000 at the Institute of Historical Research, Senate House. It was the final seminar of the "Metropolitan History" series of seminars, the theme of which was marginality and the city. The speaker on Gissing was Dr. William Greenslade, of the University of the West of England, who discussed "The resources of the marginal: George Gissing, fiction, and late nineteenth-century London."

Dennis Shrubbsall, the W. H. Hudson specialist, informs us that on 7 November, while listening to the BBC Points West TV local weather forecast, he was surprised to hear the weather-man, Richard Angwin, pronounce the words "George Gissing." On the weather map were displayed some words of Gissing's which he read aloud: "For the man who is sound in body and serene in mind, there is no such thing as bad weather!" This quotation from the Ryecroft Papers was evidently intended as a comforting maxim during the very bad weather that prevailed in South-West England at the time, torrents of rain and widespread flooding.

The attractively produced Greek translation of *Sleeping Fires* described under "Recent Publications" is a volume of which we know no artistic equivalent. The translation is illustrated by the translator. There are as many colour illustrations as chapters, and they are

reproduced on glossy paper from page 209 to page 222. If anything, they somewhat remind us of those on the covers of the Romanian and Chinese translations of *New Grub Street* which appeared in the late 1970s and mid-1980s respectively.

With the financial support of the European Union, earnest efforts are being made in Southern Italy to encourage the development of sightseeing through cultural means. A number of articles have appeared in the Italian press on the forthcoming creation of “literary circuits” or *parchi letterari*, as the Italian authorities put it. The literary figure who has been chosen for the promotion of this worthy venture is Norman Douglas, whose *Old Calabria* is well-known to cultured minds south of Naples, but Edward Lear, Lenormant and Gissing are not being forgotten by the organizers, in the front row of whom stands Mirella Stampa Barracco, the President of the Fondazione Napoli Noventanove, Via G. Martucci, 69, 80121 Napoli. A book on the cultural riches of Calabria by Giuseppe Merlino, of the University of Naples, has been published. We have in hand the Italian and the French versions, *Old Calabria: Invito al viaggio, l'itinerario del grand tour* and *Old Calabria: Invitation au voyage, l'itinéraire du Grand Tour*. The six-page bibliography offers a wealth of titles to read in various languages. A map with comments in Italian and English has also been issued. At the Italian Cultural Centre in Paris, the promoters of the project held a meeting on 22 November which was attended by the editor of the *Journal*, who was pleased to hear Professor Merlino mention Gissing before he himself did.

The foundation of another “literary circuit” is being contemplated in Crotona, where Signora Teresa Liguori is agitating, through her articles in *La Provincia KR* and *La Gazzetta del Sud*, for the setting up of a natural park along the Esaro in Crotona and of a “Parco letterario George Gissing e Riccardo Sculco.”

Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed. John Goode, Oxford University Press (World's Classics). Second impression of the edition in the new

format, first published in 1998, with these words on the copyright page: "Updated Bibliography copyright David Grylls 1999."

George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, Penguin Books [2000]. Sixth impression. The misprints in the bibliography (pp. 387-88) are still uncorrected.

George Gissing, *Il sale della terra*. Translation and afterword by Emanuela Ettorre, introduction by Pierre Coustillas. Pescara: Edizioni Tracce (Armorica Series), 2000. The cover illustration reproduces John O'Connor's painting "St. Pancras Hotel and Station from Pentonville Road" (Museum of London). The back cover shows a facsimile of the first page of Gissing's letter to C. F. Keary dated 18 January 1903. 120 pages. Lire 20,000. ISBN 88-36676-49-2. Contents: Introduction, "The Salt of the Earth," "The Pessimist of Plato Road," "Spellbound," Afterword and Selected Bibliography.

George Gissing, *Sleeping Fires* (in Greek), Athens: Tipothito (publisher: George E. Dardanos), 2000. Translation, comment and illustrations by Maria Dimitriadou. Pictorial card covers. 224 pages. Greek drachmas 4,000. ISBN 960-8041-43-0. With a photograph of the translator on the front flap.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Christopher Innes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, Cambridge University Press, 1998 (reprinted 2000). Chapter IV of Part I, "New Women, new plays and Shaw in the 1890s," by Kerry Powell, contains some comment on *The Odd Women* in context.

Emanuela Ettorre, "Sensational Gissing? *Denzil Quarrier* and the 'Politics' of Dissimulation," *Rivista di Studi Vittoriani*, no. 8, July 1999, pp. 47-62. The same number, under the title "Recensioni: La scrittura della memoria," pp. 174-78, contains a review of *With Gissing in Italy* also by Emanuela Ettorre. A review of Patrick Brantlinger's *The Reading Lesson*, by Jacob Korg, appears on pp. 171-73.

G. Rulli, "Recensioni," *La Civiltà cattolica*, 2 September 2000, pp. 442-43. Review of *La terra del sole*. Another review, by Andrea Caz-

- zaniga, appeared in *Brianze*, September-October 2000, p. 63.
- Francesco Badolato, "Il romanziere vittoriano e i 'paparazzi,'" *Calabria Sconosciuta*, July-September 2000, pp. 25-27.
- Michael Cronin, "Gloria e declino sulle rive dello Ionio," *Rnotes: Appunti della Rubbetino Editore* (Soveria Mannelli), November 2000, p. 53. Review of *La terra del sole*, followed by "Letto da Giuseppe Guzzo," also on Gissing (p. 54), and by "Nacque così il nome 'paparazzo'" (Francesco Badolato).
- John Greenfield, "Book Reviews," *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Winter 2000, pp. 414-15. Review of *With Gissing in Italy*.
- David Kramer, "George Gissing and Women's Work: Contextualizing the Female Professional," *English Fiction in Transition 1880-1920*, Vol. 43, no. 3 (2000), pp. 316-30. The same writer reviewed *With Gissing in Italy* in no. 4, pp. 488-91.
- Ed Glinert, *A Literary Guide to London*, London: Penguin Books, 2000. Passages from *The Nether World* and *New Grub Street* are commented upon.
- Margaret Drabble (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Oxford University Press, 2000. Sixth edition. Besides the biographical entry, there are now entries on *Demos*, *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*, and *In the Year of Jubilee*. Some corrections will have to be made in the next printing. Edith can hardly dispense with a surname. It is only half true that the American short stories were collected in *Brownie*. The order of publication of the three 1895 novels is given wrongly, and the date of *Human Odds and Ends* should be that on the title page of the first edition. Gissing did not meet Gabrielle Fleury in 1897, nor did *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* appear in volume form in 1902, nor did he die in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, but in Ispoure.
- Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography*, London: Chatto and Windus, 2000. Contains a dozen passages about Gissing and his early novels.
- Nick Dennison, *The London Blue Plaque Guide*, Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 2000. The entry on the Gissing plaque, which was put up in

1975 on the wall of 33 Oakley Crescent, Chelsea, is on pp. 76-77.

J. R. Hammond, *A George Orwell Chronology*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000. Contains six Gissing entries.

Alice Jenkins and Juliet John (eds.), *Rereading Victorian Fiction*, London: Macmillan Press, 2000. Chapter 9, by Ralph Pite, is devoted to "Place, Identity and *Born in Exile*."

David Trotter, *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction*, Oxford University Press, 2000. Chapter 7, which is entitled "Gissing's Fry-Ups: Mess, Waste and Definition of Working-Class Culture," is largely devoted to Gissing's work.

L. R. Leavis, "Guilt, Love and Extinction: *Born in Exile* and *Under Western Eyes*," *Neophilologus*, January 2001, pp. 153-62.

Tailpiece

[The following is an extract from *Typhoon And Other Stories* (1903), pencil-marked by Gissing in the copy presented to him by Joseph Conrad (pp. 217-18).]

This was my first knowledge of Falk. This desire of respectability, of being like everybody else, was the only recognition he vouchsafed to the organisation of mankind. For the rest he might have been the member of a herd, not of a society. Self-preservation was his only concern [corrected to "concern" by Gissing]. Not selfishness, but mere self-preservation. Selfishness presupposes consciousness, choice, the presence of other men; but his instinct acted as though he were the last of mankind nursing that law like the only spark of sacred fire. I don't mean to say that living naked in a cavern would have satisfied him. Obviously he was the creature of the conditions to which he was born. No doubt self-preservation meant also the preservation of these conditions. But essentially it meant something much more simple, natural, and powerful. How shall I express it? It meant the preservation of the five senses of his body--let us say--taking it in its narrowest as well as in its widest meaning. I think you will admit before long the justice of this judgment. However, as we stood there together in the dark verandah I had judged nothing as yet--and I had no desire to judge--which is an idle practice anyhow. The light was long in coming.