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

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## **Keeping One’s Own Counsel: Authorship, Literary Advice and *New Grub Street***

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In George Gissing’s 1891 novel *New Grub Street*, Whelpdale is a failed novelist who, in order to earn some money, begins giving advice to novice writers in London. His advertisement runs in *The Study* each week and reads, “To Young Authors and Literary Aspirants [...] Advice given on choice of subjects, MSS. read, corrected, and recommended to publishers. Moderate terms” (152). Later on, after he discovers that literary advice pays well, Whelpdale decides to write an Author’s Guide and to offer a course entitled “Novel writing taught in ten lessons!” (201-02). He is quite serious about it and explains to his friends, “I am capable of giving the ordinary man or woman ten very useful lessons” (202). The creation of Whelpdale’s character is just one of the ways that Gissing signals the importance of literary advice on the late Victorian literary scene. In fact, the meaning of such advice in the life of any struggling author is one of the central themes in Gissing’s realistic novel--a theme illustrated by radically different approaches to authorship that were widely discussed in the late nineteenth century, notably in works by such writers as critic George Lewes, novelist Anthony Trollope and journalist Wilfrid Meynell. By applying these real-life theories to the aspirants of his novel, Gissing explores the effect literary advice can have on a writer’s career. He also shows just how efficient literary advice manuals really are in leading aspirants to success.

Ever since writers have been writing, they have discussed their craft with fellow writers. No doubt advice on style and tone was exchanged in the coffee houses of eighteenth-century London just as the Brontë sisters gathered in the evenings to read and critique each other’s manuscripts. However, in the 1880s, literary advice was no longer exclu-

sively shared between authors. Literary advice with a practical tone directed at a general audience began to appear. This advice protested the idea of literature as a divine gift and the image of the author as a genius, and was based on the belief that literature is a business and authorship an employment. As the Victorian era was nearing its end, literary advice shifted from treatises on the art of literature to practical how-to manuals for developing a skill.

*New Grub Street* has always been praised for its realistic depiction of the growing struggle between the artist and the tradesman--and thus between high and low culture--on the late Victorian literary scene. Gissing depicts a world where for every success there are many failures, a world where knowing the right people seems more important than knowing how to write. He populates his novel with a variety of literary aspirants struggling to succeed in London. Edwin Reardon is the idealistic novelist who has sampled success but does not know whether he will enjoy it again. Jasper Milvain is the opportunistic literary man who is developing his trade by writing clever pieces for various papers. Harold Biffen is the artist toiling away in poverty while trying to produce a work of significance. Alfred Yule is the battered man of letters who subsists by reviewing literature for stuffy periodicals. Marian Yule and the Miss Milvains are female drudges who write because their economic situations demand it. Each of these characters is struggling to succeed in his or her own way, whether for money, recognition or inspiration, and there is no shortage of advice on how to achieve it.

Although Gissing wrote *New Grub Street* in 1891, he explicitly sets the novel in 1882, perhaps because it was a year when ruptures in the seemingly unified world of literature were beginning to appear. Nigel Cross outlines some of these developments in *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street*, notably those concerned with the pricing and distribution of books. There occurred a shift in power from the lending libraries and the three-volume novel to direct sales of single volumes. This meant that libraries were no longer acting as a discriminating eye, choosing to circulate books they considered suitable for readers. Instead readers were able to decide for themselves what was appropriate reading material, which arguably led to a more relaxed public taste (216). Another new factor in this literary landscape which features prominently in *New Grub Street* is the development of a whole new set of readers. In 1870, an education bill was passed that opened up schools for children of all classes. These readers are described in the novel as the quarter-educated,

the great new generation that is being turned out by the Board schools, the young men and women who can just read, but are incapable of sustained attention [...] what they want is the lightest and frothiest of chit-chatty information—bits of stories, bits of description, bits of scandal, bits of jokes, bits of statistics, bits of foolery. (428-29)

By the mid-1880s, changes in the publishing industry and the reading public resulted in an irrevocable schism between middlebrow and highbrow literature (Cross, 216). New readers, new formats and new publishers all led to new ideas about literature and authorship.

The literary advice of the day also reflects these new ideas. This essay will look at the advice given by three very different writers and then look at the way Gissing echoes such advice in *New Grub Street*. First, George Lewes, the preeminent critic of the Victorian period, who expounded his principles in 1865, at a time when ideas on what constituted good literature were more homogenous. Lewes has the interest of literature at heart and his views can best be described as lofty and idealistic. Then, the popular and prolific novelist Anthony Trollope, whose autobiography, in which he describes authorship as a trade, surprised the literary world. One of Trollope's reasons for writing his autobiography was to promote authorship as a profession, his desire that it should be seen as a job worthy of remuneration and respect. Finally, journalist Wilfrid Meynell, who produced a very practical guide on the trade of journalism in which the sole message is how to make money as a writer. These are just three examples of the literary advice that was offered at the time: the artistic high-mindedness of George Lewes, the bourgeois artisanship of Anthony Trollope and the no-nonsense, step-by-step manual for success of Wilfrid Meynell. Their advice ranges from art to trade and from idealism to practicality. Lewes cares most about the product, Trollope is interested in the producer and Meynell is most concerned with the payment. For the literary aspirants flocking to London, like the characters in *New Grub Street*, these literary advisors provide three very different models of success.

George Lewes was one of the chief intellectual figures of his day and arguably the last general *littérateur*. Throughout his career, he contributed to all the major reviews and was a fairly successful journalist, novelist, critic, biographer and essayist who wrote upon subjects as diverse as chemistry, biology, language, sociology, physiology and philosophy (10-11). He was also a very influential literary critic and one of the first to promote realism in the Victorian period

(Gross, 72). For years, using the watchwords of truthfulness, coherence and plausibility (Gross, 73), he determined what constituted good literature. Therefore it seems appropriate that he would eventually undertake to explain how good literature is written. This is what he set out to do in a series of essays he wrote for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1865 under the title *Principles of Success in Literature*.

Lewes begins by describing the pursuit of Literature as a noble ambition and by asserting that success in literature is the blue ribbon of nobility (21). He never defines exactly what he means by literature, but the fact that he always spells it with a capital “L” is noteworthy. It signals that he is taking an unwavering look at the very highest of human expression in writing (Scott, 13). The underlying assumption at work in his essays is that Literature is an artistic pursuit that aims at discovering some divine or essential truth about humanity. Lewes’s goal is not to provide a recipe for success or to furnish power and talent where nature has withheld them. Instead, it is to assume talent, and then “assign the conditions under which that talent can alone achieve real success” (22). For Lewes there are three major laws of Literature based upon the intellectual, the moral and the aesthetic aspects of human nature. The corresponding laws are the Principle of Vision, the Principle of Sincerity and the Principle of Beauty. Lewes spends pages explicating what he means by these terms but in the simplest way, he describes it as follows:

Unless a writer has [...] Vision, enabling him to see clearly the facts or ideas, the objects or relations, which he places before us for our own instruction, his work must obviously be defective. He must see clearly if we are to see clearly. Unless a writer has Sincerity, urging him to place before us what he sees and believes *as* he sees and believes, the defective earnestness of his presentation will cause an imperfect sympathy in us. He must believe what he says, or we shall not believe it [...] Finally, unless the writer has grace--the principle of Beauty--enabling him to give some aesthetic charm to his presentation, [...] a charm sensible through all the intricacies of *composition* and of *style*, he will not do justice to his powers, and will either fail to make his work acceptable, or will very seriously limit its success. (35-36)

Only when these three principles are met can success be possible; in fact, Lewes believes true success in literature cannot be obtained in any other way (Scott, 14). When Lewes is discussing success in literature, he is talking about the production of Art. The creation of literature is a meaningful pursuit requiring talent and the exertion of an individual’s highest qualities.

Lewes acknowledges that the creation of art does not always result in immediate success. When writers are unrecognized they often complain that luck is denied them or that the public taste is degraded and only prefers trash (26). Lewes criticizes both of these ideas. Ultimately he explains that success “temporary or enduring, is the measure of the relation, temporary or enduring, which exists between a work and the public mind” (27). He admits that inferior works sometimes achieve immediate success because they anticipate some kind of public need; however, posterity is the only real test of success because only posterity can reveal whether or not the relation now existing between the work and the public mind is liable to fluctuation. He realizes that many people undertake literature as a profession and believes it can be a serious and elevating one. He is also aware of the growing tendency for people to view literature as a trade, but in his opinion, such tradesmen with their “miserable trade-aims and trade-tricks” (21) can never be truly successful. For him, words like popularity and practicality have no bearing upon literature. As for people who pursue literature in hopes of achieving fame and fortune, that is the vulgarest provocation to write because “such people think there is no difficulty in art” (34).

Lewes set high artistic standards for the writing of Literature, which seems natural from the leading high art critic of the day. For him, Literature is about the pursuit of Art. The only hope for success lies in aiming for vision, sincerity and beauty. He recognizes that success is not easy to attain, that lesser, ephemeral works might garner attention while artistic works are ignored. However, Lewes believes that true Literature, which touches the spirit of all people at all times, will eventually be acknowledged by posterity. Success itself can never be the goal. By the early 1880s, this literary advice seemed a bit old-fashioned. However, as Gissing shows, Lewes’s idealism about literature still existed in the business-like hurly-burly world of modern Grub Street. In fact, it is a theory of literature and a vision of authorship that Gissing himself endorsed.

As the tools for successful authorship were examined more and more, it became natural for successful novelists to offer up their “trade” secrets. One of the most striking arrays of such information is found in George Bainton’s book entitled *The Art of Authorship: Literary Reminiscences, Methods of Work, and Advice to Young Beginners* (1890). The work is a collection of responses by a number of authors on such topics as how to develop style and what books to read. Gissing, who had originally been requested by Bainton to give him

hints as to his methods of work for a lecture, was led somewhat reluctantly to let his piece be printed in the volume. Bainton's compilation may have started Gissing thinking afresh about the value of literary advice. Indeed, parallels can be drawn between *The Art of Authorship* and *New Grub Street*. Each offers a gathering of various authors airing their ideas on literature, authorship and how to succeed as a writer.

Certainly Gissing had Anthony Trollope's *Autobiography* in mind when he wrote *New Grub Street*. The references to Trollope's ideas on authorship and the advice he gives literary aspirants in his life story are unmistakable, especially in Gissing's drawing of Edwin Reardon. Published in 1883, Trollope's *Autobiography* shocked the literary world at large and his readers in particular by drawing back the veil on the artist's life to reveal a simple tradesman at work. As Nigel Cross describes it, Trollope's autobiography was "a blow to the legend of literary creativity" (204). In the telling of his life story, he advocates the establishment of author as a professional trade like that of doctor or lawyer or candlestick maker. The statement is a surprising one coming from a novelist whose work had often been revered as artistic. Trollope wants aspiring novelists to follow in his footsteps, working in an established profession where they have set workdays and proper payment for their work. He discourages the ideal of the starving artist who writes at the bidding of the Muse.

In his autobiography, Trollope does not spell literature with a capital letter and he does not credit divine inspiration for his success. In fact, he demystifies the art of novel writing to the point of comparing it to shoemaking and he believes that with hard work, not talent, anyone can develop the skills necessary for successful writing. His advice is solely addressed to would-be novelists. He believes the only valid reason for commencing a novel is because one "has a story to tell" (197). In order to tell a good story, a would-be writer must develop his power of observation, learn to create human characters, develop a pleasing and clear style and re-read his or her work to create harmony and rhythm (202-3). One other necessity in Trollope's view is the need for proportion. His discussion of proportion is really a defence of the dying art of the three-volume novel, what is described in *New Grub Street* as "a triple-headed monster, sucking the blood of English novelists" (189). Trollope says, "Critics often complain of the ordinary length of novels,--of the three volumes to which they are subjected; but few novels which have attained great success in England have been told in fewer pages" (204). He believes that a writer, by

studying proportion in his work, can learn to teach himself to tell his story so that it falls within a certain length (205). This is exactly what Edwin Reardon tries to do; however, he quickly falls into the trap of using episodes and dialogue to fill up the pages, a no-no in Trollope's opinion.

Trollope also includes a detailed description of his daily writing regimen which shows literature is the result of dogged diligence, not creative invention. He explains how he keeps a diary in which he records, day by day, the number of pages he has written. He aims to write an average of forty pages, but sometimes writes as few as twenty or as many as 112. He declares: "I have been told such appliances are beneath the notice of a man of genius" (103), but reminds the reader, "I have never fancied myself to be a man of genius" (103). In his *Commonplace Book*, Gissing is candid about Trollope's autobiography. "Even the crowd seems to have been offended (consciously or not) by revelation of mechanism. Of course all artistic work is done, to a great extent, mechanically, Trollope merely talked about it in a wrong and vulgar tone" (67). Gissing expresses this contempt for Trollope's ideas in *New Grub Street* by having Reardon enact his advice only to fail miserably.

Although Trollope identifies himself as a tradesman and wants to approach writing in a practical manner, his vision becomes problematic when he raises the issue of morality. He still believes that there is a moral duty accompanying novel writing: "The writer of stories must please, or he will be nothing. And he must teach whether he wish to teach or no" (190). Trollope goes on to compare the novelist with the clergyman: "the novelist, if he have a conscience, must preach his sermons with the same purpose as the clergyman, and must have his own system of ethics" (190). Writing must be taken seriously because writing can have serious consequences. Unfortunately for Trollope, his ideas on authorship were not taken very seriously. His bid to win respect for the profession of author only resulted in a loss of respect for himself. The reaction to his autobiography shows that critics and readers alike preferred a writing process that appeared more mysterious. As a piece of literary advice, his trade talk was too vulgar for the artists, and for the tradesmen his morality was too old-fashioned. Regardless of its reception, it is an interesting statement on authorship. It aimed at some kind of compromise between trade and art, but proved unsatisfactory on both fronts.

Literary advice was not limited to would-be novelists. By the 1880s, there was another market for writers that promised easier success

than that of fiction. Journalism was becoming the most lucrative career for writers. According to popular novelist Walter Besant, in his 1891 essay entitled "Literature as a Career," "those who live by writing have of late years received an immense enlargement of independence by the development of journalism" (324). Besant claims that writing for the weekly penny papers offers "a means of subsistence, not a mere pittance, but a handsome income to hundreds of writers" (326). Besant includes journalism within his definition of literature (310) and sees it as a boon for writers. However, for many of them, journalism was a trade that had nothing to do with literature. In *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* John Gross explains that most writers viewed the growth of the press as a mixed blessing. It gave them a powerful new platform and at the same time drowned out what they were trying to say with triviality and claptrap. Gross argues that although it is misleading to talk of a "'dignified phase of English journalism which reigned unchallenged' until the 1880s [...] the quality of the best Victorian journalism was exceptionally high, especially as far as the periodical press is concerned. In the 1850s and 1860s an unprecedented number of serious journals of opinion managed to strike root and prosper" (Gross, 62-63). The fact that George Lewes, the purveyor of high culture himself, would have been categorized as an intellectual journalist gives credence to the overall quality of mid-Victorian journalism. However, by the late Victorian period, a journalist who wrote for the penny daily press penned everything from gossip columns to bookish anecdotes to jokes and snippets (Cross, 210). In late Victorian Grub Street, journalism was no longer a higher calling but a job.

The best work of literary advice written solely for aspiring journalists demonstrates how little journalism was connected with literary art and how much it was a moneymaking trade. *Journals and Journalism: With a Guide for Literary Beginners* (1880) was written by Wilfrid Meynell under the nom de plume of John Oldcastle. This manual is a savvy and useful guide for anyone hoping to make money by his or her pen. It contains no discussion of style or inspiration or morality. In fact, it has nothing to say about producing good work; from beginning to end it is concerned with how to succeed in the new literary market. There are chapters that explain what payment to expect, how to correct proofs as well as an extensive directory of the periodical press. It also has a list of ten commandments for the literary beginner. The first commandment is "Copy must be written on only one side of the page" (101) and the eighth commandment is "Write your name and address in a corner of the first page" (103). This work



is unabashedly directed at the literary beginner who knows very little about writing.

Throughout the work, Wilfrid Meynell distinguishes journalism from literature and reminds his readers that one is not better than the other is, they are merely different. Money is one area where these two branches of writing diverge. Meynell bluntly addresses literature's poor pay:

Perhaps hardly a single writer on any of the weekly papers has an article inserted every week throughout the year; yet, if he had, his total earnings would only amount to a sum which it would be a mockery to speak of, in the ordinary sense, as an income. (41-42)

The same is not true of journalism where one can work hard and earn a decent living. Meynell also differentiates literary writing and journalistic writing as the difference between creation and good performance. The journalist's work "must be not so much original as interpretive, both of public opinion and of the collected literary opinions of the world" (44). To further promote journalism's virtues, Meynell reminds his readers of the many writers, such as Charles Dickens, who made their start as reporters (25). He also points out that there is no reason why someone, if they have their heart set on writing novels, cannot practice both journalism and literature simultaneously (47). In spite of these connections, Meynell is ultimately a tradesman and he has only contempt for Trollope's description of his literary work as trade labour. In his opinion Trollope's novel writing would be more properly labeled as a part-profession or an auxiliary (55), because it is through a trade that a person earns his or her living.

Lewes's *Principles of Success in Literature* advises the aspirant how to attempt to produce Art. Anthony Trollope's *Autobiography* advises how to approach writing in a professional manner. Wilfrid Meynell's *Journals and Journalism* tells readers how to make money by meeting the demands of the reading market. These three men offer three very different theories of literary advice and their ideas reflect the issues that were brewing in literary London in the 1880s. Is authorship a vocation or a profession or a trade? Does journalism qualify as literature? Can anybody learn how to write? These are exactly the sorts of questions Gissing tries to explore in *New Grub Street*.

Of all the characters of *New Grub Street*, no one is in greater need of advice than Edwin Reardon. Having achieved moderate success as a novelist in the past, Reardon is now struggling to produce another work in order to support his family. Unfortunately his sensitive nature

does not flourish under pressure and he can neither pen a good novel nor whip off a piece of sensationalist trash. His friend Jasper Milvain believes that Reardon's real problem is that he is "absurd enough to be conscientious" (5) and that he "likes to be called an 'artist'" (5). Both Reardon's wife Amy and Milvain try to advise Reardon on what to write, what publisher to approach and what would be a good title for a story. They constantly reiterate the need for him to be more practical. He does not agree with their ideas and explains that he shrinks "from conscious insincerity of workmanship" (48). In spite of his protests, he does try to buckle down and adopt a practical approach to his task of novel writing. Gissing obviously pokes fun at Trollope's regimented writing routine by having Reardon mimic it.

Edwin Reardon found himself regularly at work once more, ticking off his stipulated quantum of manuscript each four-and-twenty hours. He wrote a very small hand; sixty written slips of the kind of paper he habitually used would represent [...] a passable three-hundred-page volume. On an average he could write four such slips a day; so here we have fifteen days for the volume, and forty-five for the completed book. (110).

Unfortunately in Reardon's case, this practical method does not help to produce good literature. He compares it unfavorably with the way he wrote his former books when "he had waited quietly until some suggestive 'situation', some group of congenial characters, came with sudden delightfulness before his mind and urged him to write" (62). Undoubtedly Trollope would applaud Reardon's eventual decision to return to his job as a clerk and to work at literature in his leisure hours.

What becomes apparent is that Reardon is not even really suited to be a writer of fiction. When he first came to London to lead a literary life, he wrote essays and scholarly pieces. But that course was changed when, as a young literary aspirant, he approached a well-known novelist for help in procuring a reader's ticket for the British Museum. When this nameless author learns that Reardon has been writing an essay on Tibullus, he informs him that "such work is indifferently paid and in very small demand" (53). He recommends that Reardon try his hand at fiction. This might be the first piece of literary advice that Reardon follows and it could be responsible for leading him astray. By trying his hand at fiction, he is making the mistake that Lewes believes so many writers make; he is misdirecting his talent (34). For Lewes, the product of misdirected writing will inevitably always be insincere and mediocre. Even though Reardon enjoyed moderate success with

two novels, he is unsure he can produce another of equal quality. Lewes points out in the *Principles of Success* that “the novel may be more popular or more lucrative, when successful, than the history or the essay; but to make it popular and lucrative the writer needs a special talent, and this [...] seems frequently forgotten by those who take to novel writing” (32). Looking back upon his decision to begin writing fiction, Reardon himself thinks it “significant [...] that no native impulse had directed him to novel-writing” (54). He is much happier when he pursues his scholarly work. After completing the novel *Margaret Home*, he is “sick of imaginative writing” (144) and turns “to the studies which had always been most congenial” (144). Despite Amy’s lament about her husband’s return “to those musty old times” (145), Reardon writes a paper on Diogenes Laertius and publishes it in the aptly named periodical *The Wayside*. Although the remuneration for the essay is small, the work fills Reardon with pleasure and pride. Some literary advisors would argue that his greatest mistake as a writer lies in not being more practical, but for George Lewes, Reardon’s gravest error would rather lie in funneling his writing talents in the wrong direction.

In spite of all the advice Reardon receives, none of it really helps him or his career. After his single volume novel is rejected, he abandons the literary life to return to a clerkship and reading the classics in the evening. Perhaps, if he had continued to write scholarly pieces and had never ventured down the path of fiction writing, he would have enjoyed fulfillment and maybe even moderate success. Despite everyone’s ideas on how to be “practical,” in the end Reardon is literally unable to survive in late Victorian Grub Street. After his death, Milvain publishes a posthumous critique of his friend’s novels. It is a kind gesture but does not erase the impression that Reardon dies a literary failure pursuing a dying vision of authorship.

Reardon is not the only character in *New Grub Street* who is ill suited to the conditions of modern literary society. Alfred Yule, “a battered man of letters” (16), has been working tirelessly at producing literature for years with few rewards. Yule blames his own lack of success on a number of factors including his lower-class wife, but it seems more likely that his indifferent career meets his moderate ability. His writing is described as “learned, copious, occasionally mordant in style, but grace had been denied to him” (73). In Lewes’s assessment, Yule would be someone who has “failed to discriminate between aspiration and inspiration, between the desire for greatness and the consciousness of power” (21). Marian, who diligently helps her

father, would probably agree with Lewes. When she ruminates on her father's career, she cannot help but feel that he chose the wrong line of work. To write is for one who has an urgent message for the world. As Marian knows all too well, her father has "no such message" (98). Late in his career, Yule has abandoned all thought of original production and only writes about writing (98). He can only complain and bemoan the state of literary affairs. Of all the characters toiling in *New Grub Street*, he seems the most out of place, and it is impossible to imagine any advice that he would heed or that would help him to succeed. In fact, both Yule and Reardon have modeled their careers on literary men who are a dying breed in late Victorian Grub Street. Reardon with his three-volume genteel, "psychologically realistic" novels looks like an Anthony Trollope figure and Yule, taking "his efforts *au grand sérieux*" (88), an all-round *littérateur* like George Lewes. Gissing purposefully draws a parallel between the fictional failures in *New Grub Street* and the real-life literary successes of the mid-Victorian period. In doing so he shows that in the literary landscape of the 1880s, it was impossible to be both artistic and popular. In *New Grub Street*, an author must be committed to Art or to money because the livelihoods of the genteel journalist and the didactic novelist are gone.

Unlike Edwin Reardon and Alfred Yule, there are two characters in *New Grub Street* who achieve success, although two very different kinds of success. Harold Biffen, often referred to as the realist, has a very clear vision of what his literary work is to be and exemplifies Lewes's ideal of true literary success. Biffen, the poor starved writer who lives in a ramshackle rooming house, has obviously thought a great deal about authorship. He explains his vision of literature to his friend Reardon in the following manner: "What I really aim at is an absolute realism in the sphere of the ignobly decent. The field, as I understand it, is a new one; I don't know any writer who has treated ordinary vulgar life with fidelity and seriousness" (132). Biffen channels this vision into a novel, which he entitles *Mr. Bailey, Grocer*. In a striking contrast to Reardon who struggles to meet a quota of words a day, Biffen lovingly writes his novel and actually limits his output so that it is not completed too soon. His novel meets all of Lewes's criteria for successful literature. It is a creation of vision, an attempt to tell a story in a sincere manner and it is written in a style to further the meaning of the book.

There is little expectation that *Mr. Bailey, Grocer* will bring riches or fame, but that does not deter its author from pursuing it. As Edwin

Reardon tells Biffen with admiration, “you will never sell work of this kind, yet you have the courage to go on with it because you believe in it” (134). Biffen is an artist, and only an artist can produce successful literature. For the artist, it is the product that matters most, not the profession. This absolute commitment to his Art is shown when Biffen almost sacrifices life and limb to rescue his manuscript from a burning building. He is the unappreciated artist of *New Grub Street* and his true success may only come with posterity. He commits suicide at the end of the novel, but his work lives on.

At the other end of the spectrum from Biffen is Jasper Milvain. He is the most successful literary man in *New Grub Street* and arguably the hero of the novel. Like Biffen, Milvain is in no need of literary advice because he too has a clear vision of how to achieve literary success. His sole aim is to make money by writing down to the public’s taste and being the best extempore writer. He is full of advice about how to succeed in London’s literary world. Everything Lewes exalts as necessary for success in literature Milvain would describe as ridiculous and impractical. Lewes would not even believe Milvain capable of writing literature and would only hold him in contempt. Below tradesmen in the pecking order of Lewes’s literary world are men who “make Literature a plaything for display [...] To play at Literature is altogether inexcusable: the motive is vanity, the object notoriety, the end contempt” (21). Even the adjective “clever” that is so often applied to Jasper’s work, would be, for Lewes, proof that his writing is contemptible. “In Life, as in Literature, our admiration for mere cleverness has a touch of contempt in it, and is very unlike the respect paid to character” (23). By Lewes’s standards, Jasper Milvain is a talentless hack who might produce “literary fireworks” (24), but will never really produce literature. Of course, as Jasper himself observes on numerous occasions, he nurses no such aim but only wishes to be “a modern literary man” (8). In other words, he is a man who pursues literature in order to earn money, not to produce art.

Throughout the course of his rise to success, Milvain not only continuously doles out advice to his friends but also often pontificates about his own writing career. One of his most revealing statements is when he says: “I shall never write for writing’s sake, only to make money” (110). The way that he set out to accomplish this end is by becoming a journalist. Reading *New Grub Street* and *Journals and Journalism* together, it seems plausible that Gissing modeled Jasper Milvain upon the Meynell text. As Nigel Cross points out, the manual on journalistic success is full of “Milvainisms” (226). When Jasper states,

“I am not speaking of genius, I mean marketable literary work” (25), it sounds very similar to Wilfrid Meynell’s admonition to “let it always be remembered that the tact which produces *marketable* work is sometimes more useful than the talent which produces *good* work” (33). Jasper also explains that he needs a social life to succeed in Grub Street because “my business [is] to know something about every subject—or to know where to get the knowledge” (31). He repeats the same sentiment when he says: “a man who has to live by miscellaneous writing couldn’t get on without a vast variety of acquaintances. One’s own brain would soon run dry; a clever fellow knows how to use the brains of other people” (151). These explanations reiterate Meynell’s description of the journalist as the man of the world “who develops a capacity for representing the era, for letting the general opinion speak through him even while he helps guide it. He produces work which is eminently marketable; and the more of this quality appears in his writings, the more successful he will be” (39-40). Jasper is indeed successful in *New Grub Street*. By the end of the novel, he has used journalism as a “stepping stone [...] to more lucrative things” (Meynell, 61) and has moved up to an editorship. Gissing makes him a somewhat contemptible character and yet Jasper is not completely unsympathetic. He merely achieves the goals that he sets for himself. He embodies practical literary advice to the tee and is its successful outcome. For Gissing, there is almost a morbid fascination with this vision of authorship, that one can pursue literature in such a calculating way and succeed. The ending of *New Grub Street* is Gissing’s harsh recognition that individuals like Jasper really do reach the top.

*New Grub Street* is not solely populated by male authors. There are some female literary aspirants struggling there too. Margaret Stetz has criticized Gissing’s *New Grub Street* for its exclusion of female authors, especially since in the Victorian age a number of women authors found acceptance and success. However, Gissing’s depiction of female authorship may be more realistic than it seems initially. Certainly there were successful female novelists in the Victorian period, but considering the overall number of women who were writing, the success stories are few and far between. For women authorship was an acceptable way of earning money. It was usually a practical rather than an artistic pursuit as it offered the only respectable means for women to support themselves besides teaching. Even if women did undertake it for reasons other than monetary ones, most of them were very self-deprecating about their literary work and claimed they wrote for money or as a hobby. To write for laurels was a bold admission for any

woman to make (Cross, 166). This practical line of female authorship is what Gissing depicts in *New Grub Street*. Marian Yule and the Miss Milvains are engaged in literary work in order to support themselves. What is also interesting about Gissing's depiction of female authorship is the important role their male relatives play in their careers. Unlike women who may have written in spite of their husbands or fathers, Marian Yule and the Miss Milvains are helped by their father and brother respectively. The aid of family relations no doubt could help a woman become a literary success.

To Jasper Milvain, Marian Yule represents "a good example of the modern literary girl" (13). Marian has grown up in a house where literature is the family business and, since the age of twelve, she has been helping her father as an amanuensis. Each day she travels to the masculine realm of the Museum Reading Room, where she diligently researches and writes essays on obscure topics like 17th Century French Authoresses and James Harrington, author of "Oceana." There is never a creative force at work in Marian. She is always toiling upon her father's instruction and yet she is not without literary ability. Her father recognizes her talent, and admits that passages written "just as they came from her pen had merit of a kind quite distinct from anything of which he himself was capable" (73). However, he fails to commend or encourage her and continues to take credit for her work until it is in his own interest to do otherwise. While it is obvious that Marian has the talent to write, it is uncertain whether or not she has the drive. She is rather embittered against the whole literary world, dreaming of the day when a literary automaton will be designed to crank out more books to add to their ever-growing number in library stacks. For Marian, who differs in this from other literary aspirants in *New Grub Street*, the "Republic of Letters" holds no romance. She cannot even compare it favorably to governessing as Dora and Maud Milvain do. For her, literary work is the worst kind of drudgery.

When Marian's father begins to lose his sight and her inheritance falls short of her expectations, it appears Marian will have to become the breadwinner, supporting her family by her pen. At this time, both her father and her lover advise her to try her hand at novel writing. Her father tells her: "You would probably do something rather good if you tried" (371). She is surprised that both her father and her betrothed make this suggestion. Jasper sees in it a better way of earning money: "With very moderate success in fiction you might make three times as much as you ever will by magazine potboilers" (390). He also believes that Marian is rather sentimental about their

romance and therefore should have no problem writing love scenes. He is purely practical in encouraging her to try fiction, but the motive behind her father's advice is less clear. It could be rooted in professional jealousy. It might also stem from the common belief propagated by critics, George Lewes included, that women "as repositories of creative potential were naturally suited to novel-writing as opposed to more analytical literary work" (Frawley, 32). Although Marian has worked competently for years as his assistant, Alfred Yule does not seem to think she is capable of continuing independently as a "woman of letters."

In the end, Marian does not make her living as either an essayist or a novelist. She accepts a position as a librarian outside of London. Although her life continues to be centered in the valley of the shadow of books, she does not contribute to the contents of those books. If she had wanted to, she might have written great works. Gissing allows her to remain a single professional woman, but she does not become a literary force. Jasper's final thoughts on Marian, expressed to his new wife Amy, are particularly telling about the life of the independent female author. Jasper says, "I never could help imagining that she had ink-stains on her fingers" (478). This comment seems especially cruel, coming as it does from her former fiancé, but perhaps Marian was aware of the prejudice against the modern literary woman and it fed her own distaste for the profession.

The literary careers of the Miss Milvains provide a more typical tale of female authorship. Upon their brother's advice, Maud and Dora turn to literature as their only alternative to governessing. In a chapter entitled "The Female Drudge," Nigel Cross looks at the average female writer in nineteenth-century England. As Cross points out, Jasper Milvain is right when he advises his sisters to try writing for children and Sunday School prizes. Women by far dominated the field of children's literature because writing for children was considered a minor literary activity (168). Children's literature seemed like the natural choice for many women because to write children's books required only a modest literacy and an experience of childhood (Cross 199). Jasper encourages his sisters to try writing as a means to earn money even though he doubts "they have any marked faculty for such work" (25). To Jasper, it is all about learning a business. So he assigns his sisters a project which requires little creativity or artistry, something they can patch together. That project is to write "A Child's History of the English Parliament" for the publishers Jolly & Monk (68). To make the job easier, Jasper writes them a specimen chapter



that they can imitate. The sisters prove to be as capable as Jasper hoped and their first children's book is completed successfully. Later on in the novel, the sisters move to London. While Maud begins to turn her attention to marrying, Dora continues to focus on writing and carves out a niche for herself as a writer of stories for young women. She publishes in a magazine entitled *The English Girl*. There is a wholesomeness and moral suitability to this sort of writing which makes it appropriate for a woman. Dora even reads Whelpdale's manual and finds his advice useful. In the end, Dora Milvain is one of the success stories of *New Grub Street*.

Gissing's depiction of female authorship is a case of trade work triumphing over talent. Marian, who presumably is a talented writer, does not pursue a life in literature because she believes it to be too futile. Meanwhile, the practical-minded Dora follows her brother's instruction and the advice of Whelpdale's manual eventually to earn a decent living. Gissing makes it clear that there is even less room in Grub Street for female genius than there is for male artistry. On the other hand, for the female literary aspirant who writes in the appropriate moral manner for the appropriate market of children and adolescent literature, success is very attainable.

Gissing gives voice to all manner of current literary advice. Practical and idealistic ideas are swapped and disputed between the characters of *New Grub Street*. Sometimes the advice is followed, sometimes it is ignored. Obviously Gissing was interested in the literary advice that was circulating at the time, and he clearly makes his characters expound it variously, but in so doing, what literary advice is Gissing offering to his readers? Does Gissing really believe that Whelpdale can teach anybody to write a novel in only ten lessons? Does the death of Harold Biffen suggest that Gissing thought principles such as Lewes's *Principles of Success* were impractical? Does the triumph of Jasper Milvain mean that Gissing agreed with the trade-like approach to writing? How do we know what Gissing really thought on the topic of literary advice?

In his own life, Gissing did dole out pieces of literary advice. The main recipient of his counsel was his brother Algernon, an aspiring novelist, who was told, in many letters, what sort of books to read, how to improve a paragraph and how to choose a good title for a novel. In fact, the advice Gissing gives his brother is not unlike that which Jasper Milvain gives to Edwin Reardon. However, throughout these letters to his brother, Gissing maintains that to be a successful writer there is something more important than following advice. As he put it

in 1896 in a letter to his friend Bertz, who also needed guidance: “I believe that success comes, and comes only, of writing from one’s own mind” (Korg, 83). In other words, a writer must have some kind of vision and purpose of authorship in order to become a successful writer. As is shown in *New Grub Street*, that vision and purpose can vary. In Jasper Milvain’s case, it is the vision of popularity and fortune as a journalist. For Harold Biffen, it is the vision of Art. Although they define success in very different ways, Biffen and Milvain have clear goals in mind which they pursue and eventually attain. Meanwhile, it is unclear whether or not there is any force driving Edwin Reardon or Alfred Yule beyond some romantic notions of the literary life. Without a clear purpose for their writing, it becomes inevitable that they will fail. Literary advice, whether it comes from a philosophical treatise, a professional writer or a how-to manual, may help some writers, but it will never determine whether or not a writer succeeds. In the last analysis, Gissing is offering his readers the same literary advice that he gave his brother and Bertz. If you are ever to enjoy success as a writer, it is vital that you should know why you are writing.

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## An Upstart Odd Woman: “A Daughter of the Lodge”

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In “A Daughter of the Lodge” (1901),<sup>1</sup> Gissing’s condescending tone toward its feminist protagonist, May Rockett, contrasts with his far more positive view of Rhoda Nunn--an advocate of female independence in *The Odd Women* (1893). The difference springs from his own ambivalence about social hierarchies. Both characters of his serve as secretaries or assistants to a women’s movement leader (“Daughter,” 176), but Gissing distinguishes between an aspiring person from the lower-middle-class--his own point of origin--and someone who attempts to rise from below it: in “A Daughter of the Lodge,” from a servant family. We can deduce that Rhoda Nunn herself has an essentially lower-middle-class background. Her presumably widowed mother leaves her daughter a small inheritance, although Rhoda spends it all on a commercial education.<sup>2</sup> May Rockett, on the other hand, has domestics for parents, a sister who helps their mother maintain a lodge in a big estate, and a high-school education that she owes primarily to her parents’ now-dead employers--the baronet Sir Henry Shale and his wife (175). If Gissing depicts Rhoda as a courageous woman with a challenging mind,<sup>3</sup> he treats May as a brash young upstart. Yet even though social status trumps women’s rights here, in the end “A Daughter of the Lodge” achieves a nuanced form of sympathy for the rebellious young May in spite of the narrator’s critical attitude towards her. The story arrives at eventual compassion by showing May Rockett’s so-called superiors--the ill-tempered family of the new baronet--as themselves sadistically vindictive towards those within their power.

At the beginning, the narrator presents the emancipated May as nevertheless superficial in her ideas. She arrives carrying books (we can assume popular novels) from Mudie’s lending library (178)--not a sign in Gissing’s universe of the highest intellectual and cultural interests. Sure enough, the narrator later dismisses her talk about women’s emancipation: “it glanced at innumerable topics of the ‘advanced’ sort, was much concerned with personalities, and avoided all tiresome precision of argument” (181). Still more significantly, May quickly shows a basic insensitivity towards the feelings of others. She needlessly upsets both her parents by speaking disdainfully of the new baronet and his family. She addresses her mother and sister with a

most condescending “well, good people” and pooh-poohs, to her father’s face, his crippling arthritis. She even suggests that his problems arise mainly from the ineptitude of his country doctor (177, 178-81). In sum, these pages provide an unsympathetic first impression of a woman who seems unforgivably bumptious.

Nevertheless, the story quickly opposes the low-born May’s brashness to the high-born disagreeableness of her family’s new employers. This balancing out of faults anticipates a later sympathy towards the overmatched May. If the dead baronet and also his wife showed remarkable kindness towards the whole Rockett family by allowing them to stay at the baronet’s lodge in spite of the father’s virtual incapacity for work, the present baronet, his wife, and especially his daughter entirely reject noblesse oblige. The narrator describes the new baronet as weakly subservient to his bad-tempered family. Even the most obsequious of the Rocketts, the anxiety-driven mother, does not much care for Sir Edwin or his wife and actively dislikes their daughter. Most tellingly, the almost feudally loyal Mr. Rockett agrees with his other daughter that “May was more of a real lady than either the baronet’s hard-tongued wife or the disdainful Hilda Shale” (175-77, 181). In what first seems a story skewed far to the right politically, an unexpected turn eventually occurs.

The clash between May and the Shales centers around a safety bicycle--in the last decade of the nineteenth century, a means of freedom of movement for emancipated women.<sup>4</sup> Early on, while the Rocketts sit at tea after May’s upsetting arrival, they fail to hear Hilda Shale’s bicycle bell and, as a result, fail to open the gate for her. Miss Shale has to get off and let herself in. But she bangs on a lodge window and angrily complains. Beyond her hearing, May ironically declares that “a little anger” will improve the “health” of the physically very fit Miss Shale--a woman who needs instead some improvement in her manners (179, 182).

Although May justifiably dislikes Miss Shale, the daughter of the lodge also feels the jealousy of a have-not “new woman” for her aristocratic counterpart. Not only does Miss Shale shake hands like a man, with a vigorous “downward jerk,” but she also has both the status and money to enjoy her emancipated role. May’s own lack of cash for such things as bicycles severely limits her freedom of movement. For example, she wants a London paper but can get one only by taking a train for some three miles into the town and, as a result, has to justify the trip by concocting a plan for spending the whole day there. Once in town she visits a progressive-minded aristocratic woman, a Mrs.

Lindley, and chats with her about the feminist movement. When upper-class women guests arrive, May dominates them all, but she also conceals her lowly social background. Yet her pleasure in her own performance disappears when Hilda Shale unexpectedly shows up in “a short skirt, easy jacket, and brown shoes”—a costume revealing that she has ridden all the way on her bicycle. When Mrs. Lindley introduces them, Miss Shale with contempt refuses to look May in the face. May herself gamely tries to imitate this insult, but the contest remains highly unequal (180-82).

When Mrs. Lindley asks if May also cycles, she misleadingly answers that “she never had time to learn.” But Miss Shale sarcastically comments that some persons lack the money for bicycles. Absolutely sure that the baronet’s daughter intends to expose her, May slinks away quickly but silently admits that she “would have long ago bought a bicycle had she been able to afford it.” Already humiliated, May misses the last train and has to hike all the way, “tired, perspiring” and “irritated.” When she finally reaches the baronet’s grounds and clutches at the gate, Miss Shale arrives, riding on her bicycle. She rings her bell and orders May to open up the gate for her. Instead May quickly enters and shuts it again. For a second time, Miss Shale must climb off her bicycle to let herself in. She angrily rebukes May, but the daughter of the lodge ironically replies that she had thought Hilda Shale was addressing “some servant” (182-84). Yet although a baronet’s daughter can talk as sarcastically as she pleases, a daughter of lodge-keepers cannot afford any luxury of sarcasm towards her so-called superiors.

From this point on, the premeditated malice of the high-and-mighty Shales weighs down in the balance scales the lowly May’s own spontaneous impertinence. Granted that she has failed to open a gate and also has talked back to Miss Shale, yet as May herself sardonically implies, the baronet’s family can hardly fire someone who simply does not work for them. Instead they decide to avenge an essentially trivial act by punishing May’s father, mother, and sister, who have committed no discourtesy. The imperious Shales decree that the Rockett family must vacate the lodge and find some other means of survival after decades of service on this estate. The baronet himself denies responsibility for his wife’s and daughter’s cruelty and refuses to rescind their order even when old Mr. Rockett hobbles in to plead. In contrast to May’s thoughtlessness, the Shales behave with carefully planned cruelty (175-77, 185-87).

When the humbled May arrives, as they expect, to plead for her family’s future, the two Shale women take sadistic advantage of her

anguished sense of guilt. Lady Shale herself refuses even to listen to May's choked apology. Instead the baronet's wife insists that May must address it to the disdainful Miss Shale. She, in turn, stares triumphantly at May but refuses to reply to her begging apology. Hilda Shale declares that "It's really nothing to me"--a bare-faced lie--and then proceeds to refer contemptuously to May as simply "this person." Lady Shale draws out this malicious game of torture by refusing to tell May if the exalted house of Shale will now accept her plea for mercy on her parents (189-90). Lady Shale merely proclaims that May must immediately leave the lodge and must never again enter the Shales' own mansion. Throughout May's humiliating ordeal, the servants of the Shales have imitated their masters by treating May with malicious disdain, but when the footman lords it over her in an especially sneering way, all of her defenses finally collapse (185-90):

May, to whom this was the last blow, rushed past him, lost herself in corridors, ran wildly hither and thither, tears streaming from her eyes, and was at length guided by a maid-servant into the outer air. Fleeing she cared not whither, she came at length into a still corner of the park, and there, hidden amid trees, watched only by birds and rabbits, she wept out the bitterness of her soul. (190)

This extremely effective passage shows the mortified Miss Rockett lost in the labyrinth of the baronet's huge mansion, an emblem of his high and aristocratic power. Having endured scorn from Sir Edwin's family and even from his servants, the weeping May at last escapes to indifferent stares from birds and rabbits--an improvement over human contempt. Even outside, though, she remains enclosed in the baronet's estate and also within his power. The humiliation of her subservient act prevents her from telling her parents that she tried to intervene for them. Even when she learns from them--and, significantly, not from the Shales themselves--that the baronet's family has rescinded its decree and allowed them to remain, May still cannot confess how she herself saved them. She simply cannot talk about the mortifying scene of her abject apology and plea (191).

By the close of this amusing yet also serious story, we find ourselves rethinking our original impressions. We can now perceive clearly the unjust power of class behind the bullying Shales, while May Rockett herself stands clearly revealed as yet another alienated Gissing character, even if a bumptious one. And even that bumptiousness turns out to serve an essentially defensive purpose: to hide her as an offspring of domestics in a status-conscious world. If the story itself does not actually subvert traditional social rank, it at least

raises questions about oppression by those on top of the heap. In spite of all her brashness and all her insensitivity, May Rockett becomes, in the end, not just someone born in social exile but the humiliated victim of a capricious ruling class.

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<sup>1</sup>Gissing wrote this short story from 10 to 12 May 1900, and published it first in the *Illustrated London News* (17 August 1901, 119). See Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: the Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1978), 524; hereafter referred to as *Diary*. “A Daughter of the Lodge” was reprinted in *The House of Cobwebs* (London: Constable, 1906); the first reference to the story will appear in the text as “Daughter”; for subsequent references and quotations only page numbers will be given. They will refer to Constable’s 1931 reprint of *The House of Cobwebs*. Gissing at first called his story “The Rash Miss Tomalin” (*Diary*, 524), but when the *Universal Magazine*, which was to publish it, ceased publication, he used the name of the heroine in *Our Friend the Charlatan* (written from 29 September to 15 November 1899, and from 28 May to 29 August 1900—*Diary*, 519-21, 524-30; first published 1901). Gissing changed Tomalin to Rockett and “The Rash Miss Tomalin” to “A Daughter of the Lodge” when his agent Pinker found a home for the story in the *Illustrated London News*. Interestingly, Miss Rockett and Miss Tomalin both wear men’s ties. May Tomalin, though, ranks quite a bit above May Rockett in education, culture and social status (*Our Friend the Charlatan* [New York: Henry Holt, 1901], 109-11, 133, 137; “Daughter,” 176, 178).

<sup>2</sup>*The Odd Women* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 3, 22.

<sup>3</sup>For an especially illuminating essay on *The Odd Women*, see Wendy Lesser, “Gissing’s Even-Handed Oddness,” *His Other Half: Men Looking at Women through Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 81-94. See also Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978, 141-57); Deirdre David, “Ideologies of Patriarchy, Feminism, and Fiction in *The Odd Women*,” *Feminist Studies* 10 (Spring 1984), 117-39; and Sally Ledger, “Gissing, the Shopgirl and the New Woman,” *Women: A Cultural Review*, 6.3 (Winter 1998), 263-74.

<sup>4</sup>In addition, because of the difficulty of riding a bicycle in petticoats, women’s fashions had changed to short skirts—another emblem of freedom for the sex. On this point, see R. C. K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 338. Gissing himself dealt with bicycles, short skirts, and emancipated women in another fine short story, “The Schoolmaster’s Vision” (written 1895; first published in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, September 1896, 487-95; collected in *A Victim of Circumstances and Other Stories* [London: Constable, 1927], 127-44).

**Of Ethics and Mess:  
Two Contributions to Gissing Studies**

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It is more common than it used to be for general studies of Victorian fiction to include Gissing's novels, especially those less prominent than *New Grub Street* and *The Odd Women*. Gissing enthusiasts welcome this development, of course, and will be interested in two recent studies of this kind, *Fictional Structure and Ethics: the Turn-of-the-Century English Novel* by William J. Scheick (University of Georgia Press, 1990) and *Cooking with Mud: the Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* by David Trotter (Oxford University Press, 2000).

Professor Scheick seeks to show how plot structure participates in expressing the ethical or moral view of novels by Wells, Hardy, Bennett, Conrad and Gissing. The framework he has chosen is a contrast between the "Christian-humanist" and Schopenhauerian ideas of compassion, and he devotes a chapter to a comparison between Gissing's *The Unclassed* and Arnold Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns*.

It is of course, no surprise to learn that *The Unclassed* is saturated with Schopenhauer. Scheick summarizes Gissing's "The Hope of Pessimism," with its bleak view that human beings are doomed to abide by instinctive egotism within the framework of a meaningless life, and the somewhat less pessimistic idea that art is the only escape from the hopelessness of existence. The philosopher can do nothing for humanity but observe its condition with "detached compassion." Waymark expresses and illustrates this view, and the two female figures, Ida and Maud, enact the contrast between the two kinds of compassion that form Scheick's theme. Maud's compassion is tainted with the moral constraints alien to Schopenhauerian ideas, so that she acts in accordance with will, turns to self-pity and pious isolation. Ida, on the other hand, is unselfishly motivated by genuine sympathy based on her own suffering, and offers charity without any moral purpose or hope of reform. This "detached compassion" is superior to Maud's self-interested compassion, and that makes her a better partner for Waymark. Still, Scheick is not sure that they do become united. He speculates that the letter from Waymark which Ida reads on the novel's last page may not be a marriage proposal, but a disappointment, marking a downward movement in the rise-and-fall cycle of the plot.



This cycle is central to Scheick's general thesis--that the movements of the plot reflect the futile repetitions of the Schopenhauerian plight. He argues that "[...] Gissing, in accord with Schopenhauer's ideal, expresses through the narrative-structure of *The Unclassed* an overarching design composed of a single event [...] that at once encompasses, reflects in large, and *reflects on* the rise-and-fall pattern of the plot-structural rhythms governing the protagonist's life." This "protagonist," surprisingly, is Ida, and the single event is her childhood attack on Harriet Smales. Scheick perceives this rise-and-fall pattern in the episodes of the struggle between Ida and Harriet: Ida's attack on Harriet Smales in the opening classroom scene, her subsequent support of Harriet, and Harriet's vindictive false accusation which sends Ida to prison. "In their struggle for dominance," observes Scheick, "Ida and Harriet express the will to live, as Gissing and Schopenhauer understood the life force." This link, it seems to me, is especially weak, and it fails to support Scheick's claim that there is an "overarching design," in *The Unclassed*, since the struggle between the two women is only a sub-plot, and ignores the larger plot-structures.

The second half of Scheick's chapter brings the novels of Gissing and Bennett together, showing that while both express compassion, *Anna of the Five Towns* implies a "Christian-humanist" variety of it, in contrast to the resigned detachment of *The Unclassed*. There is a contrast, he finds, in the design of the two novels. The echoes of the defining event of Gissing's novel form three loops, while the shifts in Bennett's story form a triangle. Scheick succeeds in defining the significant difference in the ethical outlooks of the two novels, but whether this geometrical contrast supports it remains a question.

David Trotter's ugly title and the word "mess" in his subtitle hardly do justice to the subject of *Cooking with Mud*. It is an excellent scholarly study of a theme which unexpectedly opens up some fascinating aspects of familiar works. He deals with untidiness in dress, furnishings, personal hygiene, domestic arrangements and culinary matters as painters, novelists and essayists treated them. But he also offers illuminating analyses of larger topics such as sanitary arrangements, psychological disorders, and social dislocations. There are chapters on Turner and Degas. Writers from Melville to Maupassant are seriously treated. And there is a chapter called "Gissing's Fry-ups; Mess, Waste and the Definition of Working-Class Culture."

This chapter deals mainly with culinary "messes," and certainly demonstrates that Gissing's concern with his diet, whether it was a

matter of his early poverty, or the Continental table offered in Mme Fleury's household, is reflected in his novels. It touches on a number of other writers, including Joyce and Chekhov, before turning to the food offered in the powerful description of Whitecross Street in *Workers in the Dawn*. Trotter begins with the detail of the fried-fish eating house. He comments: "The sizzling and steaming, the greasiness of this food repels, not because it tastes bad, but because it permeates; those who ingest it take it into their hair and clothes as well as into their stomachs..." This is a physical rendering of a principle that governs much of what Trotter has to say. He finds that in his material, "metonymy becomes metaphor," that the disorders people tolerate in their environments--including awful food--are embodied in the people themselves.

Trotter sees in Gissing's Whitecross Street a summation of fifty years of demand for sanitary reform. But it also reflects Gissing's view that the improvement of material conditions alone would not solve the problem of poverty; in Whitecross Street he also saw the need for education. His novels of the mid-1880s consider the efforts educated people might make to uplift the poor, and Trotter accurately notes his loss of faith in this. His next position was the compassionate detachment he adopts in *Thyrza* with the experience of Walter Egremont, whose lectures on literature are so ineffective. Scheick, as we have seen, perceives this attitude earlier, in the Schopenhauerian approach to *The Unclassed*.

Trotter shows how Egremont's venture into the slums of Lambeth is accompanied by noxious "exhalations" of all kinds, especially the smell of frying onions that accompanies Bower's efforts to learn whether any scandal is attached to the relation between Egremont and Thyrza. "In his most Zolaesque moment," observes Trotter, "Gissing associates gossip with frying, with seepage and saturation with waste-matter. Gossip is, literally, a smear." When Grail, after his appointment to the library, seeks fresh air, his inability to escape the slum environment is shown by the odors of the soap factory that follow him. But Trotter finds that mere disgust at the refuse surrounding slum life is not a viable attitude.

And he finds that Gissing retreated from that view in *The Nether World*. He examines the descriptions in the novel, finding in them a debate between things that are dirty or black and those that gleam, such as Kirkwood's tools and other bits of metal mentioned from time to time. The presence of the latter, he argues, suggests that there is hope within the slum community, and that Gissing was now willing to

accept the possibility that the poor might be willing to accept conditions others might find intolerable, for the sake of keeping their independence and the freedom to choose their own ways rather than middle-class respectability. He caps this argument with an analysis of Clem Peckover. She is introduced cooking her repulsive meal of fried sausages, a device that, following Trotter's rule that metonymy becomes metaphor, would make her equally repulsive. But Trotter seeks to demonstrate Gissing's development by arguing that his description of Clem divorces her from her sausages, recognizes her vigorous independence, and acknowledges that she is entitled to her tastes, however depraved they might be.

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**“The most delicately sensitive face I have ever seen”:  
Coulson Kernahan's Reminiscences of Gissing**

PIERRE COUSTILLAS

Who still reads the novels of Coulson Kernahan (1858-1943)? Very likely nobody. His books ceased to live when he himself ceased to enjoy life, which he found so fascinating a game, and everything alive so wonderful that he said he needed no so-called recreation. To this--adapted from the entry on himself which he contributed to *Who's Who*--he added: “May take up cards, golf, billiards, theatres when he is dead and finds things monotonous--not before.” One of his first novels was *A Book of Strange Sins* (1893), which Gissing, who was then writing his short story “The Tyrant's Apology,” borrowed from James Andrews's Library in Epsom, with Agnes Repplier's *Essays in Idleness*, and dismissed with the word “Rubbish” in his diary on 12 October 1894. Kernahan eventually made his way in the English literary world, as is shown by an article about him in the *Hastings and St. Leonards Observer* for 21 July 1923. The article described Kernahan as a literary pundit, the fifth in a series devoted to “Literary Celebrities Who Reside in Our Midst.” Under a large portrait taken by a St. Leonards photographer we read that for many years he was literary adviser to Messrs. Ward, Lock and Co. and that “Mr. Kernahan devoted most of his time during the eight years previous to the War in support of Lord Roberts. A staunch patriot, he volunteered for active service on the outbreak of the war, though well over the age limit [and] wrote a book on his experiences as a recruiting officer.” Kernahan, to borrow again

from the same source, had by 1923 published over twenty volumes and his essays were reckoned among the finest literary efforts of the age. John Sutherland reports in his *Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (1988) that *The Child, the Wise Man and the Devil* (1896) was immensely successful and is estimated to have sold upward of a quarter of a million copies. The story takes as its premiss the discovery of Christ's body, and the subsequent disproof of his divinity.

This was the man who was asked by William Robertson Nicoll, the editor of the London *Bookman*, to contribute a short piece to the January 1915 special number on Gissing. Kernahan did not attempt to puff his subject; yet his reminiscences, though in a low key, add a few touches to the picture that the other contributors (Edward Clodd, A. C. Benson, and G. B. Burgin among others) built up as best they could. The circumstances of the two episodes described by Kernahan cannot be dated with absolute certainty. Since *The Book of the Omar Khayyám Club 1892-1910* lists Kernahan as a member of the Club from 1896, Shorter cannot have introduced him to Gissing until 20 June 1896, when the Club met at Great Marlow, Buckinghamshire and Gissing was photographed by Harold Frederic at the window of a railway carriage in the company of George Whale. But the only meeting of the two men might just as well have occurred on either of the last two occasions when Gissing attended Omar dinners--on 20 November of the same year at the Burford Bridge Hotel, when H. G. Wells entered into his life, or at Frascati's on 16 December 1898, when Gissing had a fresh opportunity of seeing George Whale. Kernahan's impressions are well worth reprinting, and one can understand that on reading them the editor of the *Hastings and St. Leonards Observer* decided to draw his readers' attention to them (16 January 1915, p. 4, col. 8).

The other occasion when Kernahan chanced to catch sight of him is not more readily datable. Somehow the late spring or early summer of 1901, when Gissing stayed for a few weeks with H. G. Wells and his wife at Sandgate prior to being admitted to the East Anglian Sanatorium at Nayland, seems a more likely period than the month of April 1900. For one thing his health had deteriorated during the interval of thirteen or fourteen months, and the photographs we have of him in 1901 are easier to associate with the painful image of a man who had such difficulty in crossing an admittedly busy and potentially dangerous London street. The spot described by Kernahan--Groome's Coffee House--is as accurate as could be, and Gissing, that particular day, may have been attending to some business in the Chancery Lane area before he left Wells's home for the Sanatorium. The presence of

David Williamson (1868-1955) by Kernahan's side is of intrinsic rather than circumstantial interest. Williamson very likely met Gissing in the office of C. K. Shorter in the previous decade about the time he was assistant editor of the *Illustrated London News*. Shorter described Williamson genially in his unfinished autobiography, edited by J. M. Bullock and privately printed in 1927: "A year before the *Sketch* was founded [1893] I had engaged as my assistant on the literary side of the *Illustrated* a bright youth who had been the editor of *Hazell's Annual*, one David Williamson. He had been brought up as a strenuous Nonconformist, and still hugged his chains. It must have been with mingled feelings that he was asked to paste up 'dummies' of a paper in which ballet-girls scantily clothed and Dudley Hardy damsels of the leggy variety played a considerable part. He bore up manfully, however, although I doubt not he was pleased when, before the paper appeared, he was transferred back to the more sober pages of the *Illustrated*. A year or so later it was my privilege to recommend him for the editorship of the *Windsor Magazine*" (p. 76). So when Kernahan and Williamson caught sight of Gissing's figure outside Groome's Coffee House, they must have had some recollections to exchange that dated from the time, not so far back, when Gissing's short stories appeared in the *Illustrated London News*, the *English Illustrated Magazine* and the *Sketch*, and when his novels were reviewed in the first of these periodicals so characteristic of the 1890s. By the time he was requested to write down his reminiscences of Gissing, Kernahan's approach had become markedly historical and nostalgic.

"When one says one 'knew' a man, I take it, that one has fore-gathered and exchanged views with him on several occasions.

My acquaintance with Gissing was so slight that I prefer to say I have 'met' rather than that I knew him. It was my friend Mr. Clement Shorter who made the two of us first known to each other, the occasion being a dinner of the Omar Khayyám Club, of which all three of us were members, and outside which I do not remember meeting Gissing. His was, I think, with the single exception of that of Meredith, the most delicately sensitive face I have ever seen, the face of a man so exquisitely highly strung, that one felt instinctively his sympathy meant a sorrow shared as well as a sorrow felt. Susceptibility to the sorrows of others, indeed, inevitably implies susceptibility to sorrow in oneself; and without knowing anything of George Gissing, I should have marked him, on sight, as a man who felt everything--pain as well as sorrow, sorrow as well as pain--keenly, even poignantly.

His was a beautiful face, too beautiful almost for a man, fair in colouring, with soft silky hair, brushed back straight from a high forehead, and with a profile so fine and even so faultless as to suggest a cameo.

The eyes were bright and eager, but with not a little of care and anxiety, and (so it seemed to me) of sad foreboding in their eagerness. And in the eye was a light and on the cheek a flush that struck me as hectic, as that of a man who was feverishly anxious to grasp at Life's goblet and lift it to his lips, lest it be snatched away too soon.

The last time I saw Gissing--it was not long before his death--I was sitting at the window of Groome's famous Coffee House, facing Chancery Lane. He was on the other side of the road, and wished to cross, but--possibly he was already failing in health and nerve-- essayed to do so, not once but five, six, or seven times, and then faltered and turned incontinently back. Mr. David Williamson, then the editor of the *Windsor Magazine*, was my companion, and we agreed sadly, for, notwithstanding his pessimistic outlook on life, we are both admirers of Gissing's somewhat gloomy genius, that all was not well with him if crossing a road (and that, remember, before the coming of the motor) meant so serious and so anxious an undertaking. The next news I had of him was that he had crossed and threaded a darker and wider highway, and that George Gissing, but for his work, must be to us no more than a memory and a great and honoured name."

[The assistance of C. C. Kohler, the Dorking bookseller, and of Brian K. C. Scott, Team Librarian, of Hastings Central Library, Hastings, is gratefully acknowledged.]

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### **MLA special session on Gissing**

CHRISTINE DEVINE  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

The Modern Language Association 2000 Convention took place in Washington, D.C. from 27 to 30 December. Eight hundred and twenty-five sessions--involving over 2,500 presenters--were held in three days including those with such provocative titles as "Hip-Hop and Transnationalism," "What's New about the New?," "Academic Conferences as Sites of Folklore," "The Vicissitudes of Narcissism," "The Myth of Europe" and "Theoretical Cruelty."

The Gissing session--the first one at the MLA in ten years--entitled "Classy Writing: George Gissing and the Complexities of the Late-Victorian English Class System," took place at noon on Thursday, 28 December, and despite the fact that a session on Victorian life and writing and the luncheon arranged by the Division on the Victorian Period were held at the same time, the Gissing session had an audience of about thirty attendees.

The first speaker was Constance Harsh, Associate Professor of English at Colgate University and author of the 1994 book: *Subversive Heroines: Feminist Resolutions of Social Crisis in the condition-of-England Novel*. Professor Harsh's paper, entitled "*The Nether World: Social Stasis and Unsystematic Thinking*," argued that in most of his books Gissing shows a consistent interest in ideation: the process by which people form and hold ideas. According to Harsh, in novels such as *The Unclassed*, *Thyrza*, *The Odd Women*, and *In the Year of Jubilee*, he devotes considerable attention to the ways in which the human propensity for systematic thinking leads both to admirable ideals and lamentable delusions. *The Nether World*, however, demonstrates little engagement with these characteristic concerns. It offers signs of fragmentary or decayed systematic thought. Its most sustained idea, Michael Snowdon's plan of philanthropy, has little intellectual force. What hope the novel offers comes in the form of pity for others, which Gissing's early essay "The Hope of Pessimism" also enjoins upon humanity. But this novel withdraws the subsidiary consolations of art and the metaphysical instinct that appear in "The Hope of Pessimism." The result of Gissing's methods here is the creation of a form of Schopenhauerian aestheticism, in which social stasis guarantees the beautiful effects created by the heroes' nobility. Harsh concluded that *The Nether World* is a work that bears testimony against social injustice; it is also a work that creates striking effects by denying that the human mind might be a means of challenging that injustice.

The second speaker, Arlene Young, is Associate Professor of English at the University of Manitoba and author of the recent *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel: Gentlemen, Gents and Working Women*. In "Money and Manhood: Gissing's Redefinition of Lower-Middle-Class Man," Professor Young analyzed Gissing's manipulation of the conventional economic and gender constructions of lower-middle-class man in the characterizations of Edmund Widdowson (in *The Odd Women*) and Maurice Hilliard (in *Eve's Ransom*). The conventions for representing the lower-middle-class male that evolved during the second half of the nineteenth century constructed

him as both comic and domestic, as a figure that did not have to be taken seriously and that was unthreatening. In the novels of the period, this figure was typically a minor character, as marginalized in the literature as he was in the culture. At the base of this stereotypical nineteenth-century characterization of lower-middle-class man are economics and masculinity. Whatever conventions had developed for defining the lower middle class, Young argued, it is economic marginality that prevents its members from escaping the stereotype. Economic impotence is paralleled by other kinds of impotence--intellectual, physical and sexual. Lower-middle-class man never gets the girl, unless she is an equally asexual Miss Skiffins. In his representations of Widdowson and Hilliard, Gissing manipulates the conventions, successfully producing characters who are recognizably lower-middle-class and yet who escape at least some of the limitations that would otherwise be imposed upon them by the conventions that define them. Widdowson's and Hilliard's ability to influence both the fictional worlds they inhabit and the lives of the characters they come in contact with, whether for good or ill, is accordingly far greater than that of their literary predecessors. In other words, they acquire potency, although neither one acquires potency in all the relevant categories--economic, intellectual, physical and sexual. Young's conclusion was that Gissing's successful manipulation of these conventions of representation makes significant shifts in the ways in which such characters could be constructed and perceived.

Third to speak was Christine DeVine, proposer of this special session and a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. DeVine's paper, entitled "Two Classes of Story: Literature and Class in Gissing's *Demos*," argues that Gissing sees earlier, more traditional novel paradigms as dangerous because they purvey an idealized view of the social class system. DeVine contends that in his proletarian novels, Gissing is attempting to avoid the middle-class myths about the poor which pervaded the traditional Victorian novel, and by using the storytelling scene in *Demos* in which Emma Vine tells stories to her niece and nephew while she sews, Gissing points to and comments on the ideological work of narrative, both the traditional nineteenth-century narrative and the new naturalist narrative that he himself creates. "Emma had two classes of story," according to the narrator, "the one concerned itself with rich children, the other with the poor; the one highly fanciful, the other full of a touching actuality" (395). If we read Emma's stories as analogous to novels, then the "highly fanciful" story, the one concerned with the rich, represents the traditional



Victorian novel, while the one which is full of “a touching actuality” concerning itself with the poor, stands for Gissing’s work. The narrator created by Gissing appears, then, to be pointing out the difference between Gissing’s work and the work of other Victorian novelists. Like Emma Vine, Gissing does believe in the power of storytelling, according to DeVine. Despite Gissing’s lack of hope for religious, political or philanthropic help for the poor, or other solutions to class problems, the very act of telling his stories, writing his novels is an act of hope. Like his creation, Emma, he believes, if nothing else, in the ideological work of narrative.

Responding to the three panelists was John Halperin, Centennial Professor of English at Vanderbilt University known to Gissing scholars for his *Gissing: A Life in Books*. Professor Halperin began his response on an amusing note by claiming that all biographers of Gissing end up on Prozac. “Writing his life,” noted Halperin, “one is forced to face an unending series of calamities, disappointments, and disasters. The mere act of reading his Diary can lead to suicide,” claimed Halperin. He went on to note that his life of Gissing appeared in 1982, and he is still depressed! Noting that “Widdowson in *The Odd Women* speaks sometimes with Gissing’s voice--that is the voice of a man whose insecurities must be fed by a relationship with an *inferior* woman,” Halperin pointed out that “living with Gissing, if it was even remotely like living with Widdowson, could easily drive a woman or two mad.”

“Almost exclusively the novels and stories are about exogamy,” explained Professor Halperin on a more serious note. “Under this single umbrella may be gathered those three obsessive concerns with sex, money, and class.” Halperin attributed much of Gissing’s obsession with these matters to his own class ambiguity, an ambiguity with which readers of the *Gissing Journal* will already be familiar. Gissing was born into what Halperin calls “that twilight zone between middle and working [class]--a guarantee in itself,” he explained, “that one’s life will be devoted at least in part to sorting the problem out.”

The session drew to a close with one or two questions from the audience. Many critics have seen Gissing as a reactionary novelist who was obsessed with writing about class because he had, as Raymond Williams puts it, “fallen foul of the social standards of his own class,” causing him to despise the so-called lower-class people with whom he was forced to live (176). This panel, on the whole, took a less biographical view of Gissing, considering the nuanced, multi-faceted discussions of the complexities of the late-Victorian class system

implicit in Gissing's novels, discussions which posit no easy answer to his society's ills. These papers made it clear that Gissing's novels *are* worth teaching; they belong on the university curriculum for the insights they provide into problems of social class.

#### Works Cited

Gissing, George, *Demos: A Story of English Socialism*, 1886. Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1982.

Williams, Raymond, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1958.



No. 13, rue de Siam, Paris,  
where Gissing wrote "A Daughter of the Lodge" in 1900  
(photograph taken by Françoise Coustillas in 1993)

## Notes and News

John Keahey, the author of *A Sweet and Glorious Land* (2000), which he wrote after two trips in Gissing's footsteps in Calabria, has sent us at our request the following report of a lecture he gave earlier this year:

"It was a lively, friendly evening on 2 February 2001, in Washington, D.C. My presentation was entitled: 'Calabria--A Sweet and Glorious Land,' although my talk covered portions of Campagna, Basilicata, and Puglia as well.

The Smithsonian Associates lecture hall was filled, standing-room only. The count was approximately 175 tickets sold, but not a single seat in the 185-seat theater was empty and a half dozen or so lined the aisles on the side. The audience, which was a balance of young adults to our older citizens, entered to a room with low light and a giant image of George Gissing, perhaps 15 feet high, projected by one of my slides onto the screen. I commented before I started my prepared remarks that GG would likely be astonished that one day he would be bigger than life in Washington, D.C.

I quickly recapped his and my journeys, in sequence, and told various stories, lingering over the visits to the Galeso near Taranto, Hera's temple at Metaponto and George's sick days in Cotrone (today's Crotona) on the site of ancient Kroton. The story that drew the greatest audience reaction was the one about Coriolano Paparazzo, Fellini, etc., and Pierre Coustillas's and Francesco Badolato's efforts to get the plaque placed on the doorway of what used to be the Hotel Centrale in Catanzaro, Calabria. I used a slide from a photograph of that plaque that I took while visiting Francesco in the South in early 2000. The talk lasted about 55 minutes, followed by a Calabrian wine and cheese tasting and book signing.

Many, many books were sold that evening, and many in the audience entered the lecture hall carrying books they had purchased elsewhere. I had several inquiries about GG's other books and recommended titles to those who asked for suggestions. Some attendees also carried copies of *Our Hero's* book, and one woman of Calabrian descent sent me an e-mail a few days later in which she talked of her Italian-language edition of Gissing's book, which her mother (born in Reggio di Calabria in 1897 before GG's visit!) had given to her in the 1960s. My correspondent's husband had given her my book for Valentine's Day and she, who also had been born in Reggio, said she

immediately read and enjoyed George's and my descriptions of her birth home."

Coriolano Paparazzo, the Catanzaro hotel keeper who has become far more famous posthumously than he ever was in his lifetime, continues to be the object of a good deal of attention, local and international. Dr. Renato Santoro, whose interest in Gissing and local history is an asset, has been in touch with a distant relative of the man whose notice inside his guests' rooms has so often been transcribed and commented upon. Coriolano departed this life locally and his remains were laid in a mortuary chapel situated in the town cemetery. Regrettably the old registers of death are not available for consultation. Another relative, we are told, may hold useful information.--The booklet on the proceedings of the symposium organized by the local authorities on the occasion of the unveiling of the plaque on the façade of the Albergo Centrale is more likely to be published by the Biblioteca Comunale than by Abramo Editore.-- In modern Italy as in ancient Rome, commemoration is an important cultural activity; the tablet commemorating Gissing and his doctor friend Riccardo Sculco is to be unveiled in Crotona before long, largely thanks to Teresa Liguori, a local teacher of English. The ceremony should be seen in the light of the current efforts, financially sponsored by the European Union, to make Southern Italy more conscious of its cultural past and to promote sightseeing south of Naples. Easier availability in the local bookshops of foreign travel narratives in translations as well as in the original languages, essentially English, French and German, might be a means of attracting further tourists. In this connection the accessibility of a travel book that Gissing apparently never read, but which he might have liked to place beside Lenormant's *La Grande-Grèce*, is well worth noting, *The Nooks and Byways of Italy* (1868) by Craufurd Tait Ramage. The abridged edition, edited by Edith Clay with an introduction by Harold Acton for Academy Chicago Publishers (1987) under the title *Ramage in South Italy*, can still be bought new. It has an appendix consisting of letters from Ramage to his mother during his long stay in the South as well as an excellent bibliography which duly lists Gissing's and Norman Douglas's contributions to a better knowledge of Southern Italy. It is stimulating to read Ramage's impressions of the places Gissing visited, Paola, Cosenza, Taranto, Metaponto, Cotrone, Catanzaro, Squillace and Reggio. (A reliable index facilitates consultation.) H. V. Morton had read Ramage profitably, but Douglas apparently had not.

Perhaps unexpectedly in the eyes of readers who are not familiar with Douglas's origins on the maternal side, he was commemorated in a beautiful exhibition in Bregenz, Austria, a town with a name reminiscent of an episode in *The Whirlpool*. Thanks to the kindness of Karma Of, the translator of *The Odd Women* and a number of more exotic books, we have visited the exhibition (in the Vorarlberger Landesmuseum) by proxy, richly equipped with a 24-page catalogue of his books and a big illustrated exhibition catalogue in three languages (German, English and Italian) containing twelve essays by as many authors, including the French Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts at Yale University, Vincent Giroud (364 pages). Anyone who still has to discover Douglas might well start his or her exploration with this big volume. Had they known earlier, some Gissing scholars might have liked to have a peep at chapter 36 ("Memories of Gissing") in a set of first proofs of *Old Calabria* corrected by the author from 20 July to 31 August 1914 (322 pages, 24 cm). The Italians can hardly mention Douglas without bracketing him with Gissing. The Austrians still have to discover Gissing; they will have a chance of doing so in the present year.

The Autograph Edition of *David Copperfield* introduced by Gissing which George Sproul published in New York in 1903 has always been regarded as a curiosity. Its extreme scarcity is doubtless due to the very small number of copies printed (250), but also to the fact that Sproul went bankrupt after publishing this stupendous three-decker which in respect of garb and weight leaves far behind the most splendid bindings devised for Bentley in the mid-Victorian period. Two binding variants of the Autograph Edition were known to a handful of Gissing collectors. But lo and behold, a third variant has come to light, lavishly described on the Internet. Copies of the even scarcer St. Dunstan Edition and Bibliophiles' Edition of the same work still have to make an appearance on the market.

The list of novels, short stories and travel books in which Gissing and his books are mentioned is getting ever longer every decade. Our attention has been drawn to *Land Girls*, by Angela Huth, a picture of the West Country in war time. The land girls gather on the farm of John and Faith Lawrence: Prue is a man-eating hairdresser from Manchester, Ag a cerebral Cambridge undergraduate, and Stella a dreamy Surrey girl stunted by love. Thus the blurb defines the three major characters. On p. 229, we read that, just before Christmas, "Joe

and Ag spent a long time searching the shelves of a small bookshop. Joe was keen to buy the entire works of Gissing. Ag persuaded him that to start Balzac would be more rewarding: the compromise was *Eugénie Grandet* and *Born in Exile*. Joe began to enjoy himself.” We submit that the copy of *Born in Exile* was one of the small Nelson edition in red cloth, published at 7d in November 1910, which was then common enough on the second-hand market, the edition that Orwell could undoubtedly have found if he had tried harder! So, perhaps unwittingly, Angela Huth has placed herself in the company of Wells, Hugh Walpole, Orwell, Gail Godwin, Francis King, Peter Ackroyd and many others. Her novel, originally published by Sinclair-Stevenson in 1994, is currently available in paperback from Abacus.

Professor Fumio Hojoh has published a substantial account of a trip to Italy she took last year with a Japanese friend of hers whom she calls K. and who teaches at Brown University. Her narrative is studded with allusions to Gissing’s culture and experiences and with quotations from his letters. Her compatriots will find it in the July, August and September 2000 numbers of a monthly journal entitled *Misuzu* (pp. 29-37, 44-50 and 36-45 respectively). It is a pleasantly personal account of a journey which would have been still more interesting if the author, who traces her motivation to her reading of Shigeru Koike’s translation of *By the Ionian Sea*, had ventured south of Naples. A cultural journey indeed, during which the two friends were accompanied by--no less a person than George Gissing. All sorts of subjects he dealt with in his letters and diary as well as in *By the Ionian Sea* are discussed, from the remains of ancient civilizations to wine and food, from Gissing’s love of Southern Italy to his use of the Italian setting in *The Emancipated*, with an aside on his determination to educate his wives, with whom Mrs. Hojoh, a radical feminist, sympathizes. Often enough she was in Gissing’s footsteps, visiting for instance the Protestant cemetery in Rome. Like Professor Koike, who was another invisible presence by the side of the two ladies, Mrs. Hojoh cannot think of *The Emancipated* without calling forth E. M. Forster’s *A Room with a View*. Understandably, when she saw a copy of this book (which she has translated into Japanese) in a Roman bookshop, she could not resist the temptation and purchased it. May we suggest that, although she dislikes Mallard, she should now translate the novel in which he plays a significant role? Meanwhile the three slim volumes of *Misuzu* will find a home beside the latest English and American volumes on Southern Italy which pay homage to Gissing.

## Recent Publications

### Volume

George Gissing, *The Crown of Life*, New York: AMS Press, [1999]. This is the 1969 edition of the novel reprinted on thinner paper and bound in brown buckram. The other titles currently available from the same publishers are: *Demos*, *Denzil Quarrier*, *The Emancipated* (3 vols. in one), *In the Year of Jubilee*, *The Odd Women* (3 vols. in one), *Our Friend the Charlatan*, *The Unclassed*, *The Whirlpool* and *Will Warburton*.

### Articles, reviews, etc.

Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the fin de siècle*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997. This paperback contains part of a chapter about *The Odd Women* and various other passages on Gissing's novels.

James Gibson, *Thomas Hardy, Interviews and Recollections*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1999. Contains references to Gissing, Clodd and Shorter.

Herbert F. Tucker, ed., *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. References to *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street* and *The Odd Women*.

Adeline R. Tintner, *Edith Wharton in Context: Essays in Intertextuality*, Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1999. On pp. 111-15 is a chapter entitled "Two Novels of the 'Relatively Poor': George Gissing's *New Grub Street* and *The House of Mirth*."

Susan Jones, *Conrad and Women*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. Quotation from a Gissing letter on Conrad, p. 21.

Patrick Bridgwater, *Anglo-German Interactions in the Literature of the 1890s*, Oxford: Legenda, European Humanities Research Centre, 1999. Miscellaneous allusions to Gissing.

Francesco Badolato, "Il romanziere vittoriano e i 'paparazzi,'" *Calabria Sconosciuta*, July-September 2000, pp. 25-27.

- Andrea Cazzaniga, "Brianze in libreria: Badolato e le lettere di Gissing," *Brianze*, September-October 2000, p. 63. Review of *La terra del sole*. Another review, by Andrea Sciffo, of the same book, appeared in *Studi Cattolici* (Milan), February 2001, p. 149.
- Teresa Liguori, "Noi e l'ambiente: Proposta per il parco letterario George Gissing e Riccardo Sculco a Crotona," *La Provincia KR*, 22 December 2000, p. 12.
- Bonnie Kime Scott, ed., *Selected Letters of Rebecca West*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000. Contains a few references to Gissing and to the ill-considered introduction to *Workers in the Dawn* that J. R. Wells asked her to write in 1929. The edition was stillborn.
- Graham Law, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000. Gissing appears in various contexts of this book which deals with the syndication of fiction in newspapers as opposed to weekly and monthly periodicals.
- Giulio Grilletta, "Da Norman Douglas a George Gissing un rinnovato interesse culturale: Quei viaggiatori inglesi affascinati dalla Calabria," *La Provincia KR*, 3 February 2001, p. 14.
- Carlo Carlino, "L'Avventura del viaggio in Calabria," *Gazzetta del Sud*, 7 February 2001, p. 16. On the *parco letterario* which is being planned to commemorate Gissing in Crotona.
- Richard D. Altick, "The Curse of the Cliffhanger," *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 February 2001, pp. 5-6. This is a review of *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* by Graham Law. Altick has a whole paragraph on Gissing and quotes him in a significant context.
- Teresa Liguori, "La città che vorrei: Trasporti, Problema irrisolto," *Noi Magazine* (supplement to *La Gazzetta del sud*), 1 March 2001, p. 11. Gissing's references to public means of conveyance are quoted.