

# The Gissing Journal

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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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## **“At Cemetery found a delightful guardian”: The Crotone Gardener Identified**

TERESA LIGUORI AND PIERRE COUSTILLAS

Travel narratives have two essential functions. On the one hand, to record and communicate the traveller's experiences, their novelty and originality, to express the pleasure of discovering a world which has so far been only visualized through previous writers' accounts; on the other hand, to stimulate the reader's curiosity, to whet his appetite for strangeness, exoticism, or adventure. The film of the traveller's impressions unrolls and the reader is content to watch and listen. Such are in the main the attitudes of giver and receiver where contemporary narratives are concerned. With the passing of time, a fresh curiosity may spring into existence. It is tempting to retrace the steps of a traveller who in former times was more concerned with the past than with the present. His own journey comes to assume a biographical dimension which was largely alien to his original plans. So it rests with archeologists of memory, always eager for footnotes, to throw light on the consciously vague recordings of the traveller's impressions.

Foreign travellers who have followed Gissing's footsteps in the deep Italian South in 1897 have been anxious to immerse themselves in the successive atmospheres which he so suggestively recreated in 1899, first in Paris, then in Switzerland, when he prepared his book. He himself had a copy of François Lenormant's *La Grande Grèce* in his luggage. His followers, carrying one of *By the Ionian Sea*, have used it as a guide to his own adventures. One sees them all in a line, Norman Douglas, Henry James Forman, H. V. Morton, not to mention more recent visitors of lesser note from half a dozen countries, and one feels inclined to continue the quest for identification of the ephemeral acquaintances--generally anonymous people--mentioned by Gissing. Coriolano Paparazzo, the Catanzaro hotel keeper, whose name, through an extraordinary process, has become an international

neologism, is the best known. He has so far revealed only part of his secret. But what about, for instance, Eduardo Caruso of the Taranto Museum, what about the *padrona* of the Albergo Concordia, whom Gissing's book made famous, or about the director of the Museo Civico at Reggio? Their identification is still imperfect. Or again, what about the genial man whom Gissing met in the cemetery at Cotrone?



Giulio Marino, the guardian of the Crotone cemetery

The passage about him and the environment in the author's diary is short but suggestive: "At Cemetery found a delightful guardian, man who had travelled thro' Europe as servant to a gentleman of Cotrone. Been 9 years at the Cemetery, and has turned it from a waste into a garden. Tremendous geraniums--9 species, he said. Rosemary, splendid roses, and huge bushes of snapdragon, which he called Bocca di leone. Several mortuary chapels around; most of graves marked by a mere wooden cross. As in Greece, skull and cross-bones universal. A fine marble slab to a Lucifero; in Greek style--the scene of parting; a little owl at bottom (civetta) which the guardian said is very common here. Gave me a great bunch of flowers." Who was this "man of behaviour and language much more refined than is common among the people of this region"?

In 1998 and 1999 vain attempts were made by a group of Gissing scholars to find his name on some tombstone in the by now very large cemetery by the sea. Their sole ally in their difficult quest was Norman Douglas's classic book, *Old Calabria*, first published in 1915, but actually a picture, historical, geographical and cultural, of that remote part of Italy as it was between 1907 and the date of publication. Douglas, it was thought, was a good guide, and while full of praise for the highly positive improvements that had occurred in Cotrone in a decade, it was a gloomy account he had to give in some respects: "Death has made hideous gaps in the short interval. The kindly Vice-Consul at Catanzaro [Pasquale Cricelli] is no more; the mayor of Cotrone [Marquis Anselmo Berlingieri, a name misspelt by Gissing and other English travellers], whose permit enabled Gissing to visit that orchard by the riverside, has likewise joined the majority; the housemaid of the 'Concordia,' the domestic serf with dark and fiercely flashing eyes--dead! And dead is mine hostess, 'the stout, slatternly, sleepy woman, who seemed surprised at my demand for food.' [...] And what of Gissing's other friend, the amiable guardian of the cemetery? 'His simple good-nature and intelligence,'" wrote Gissing, "'greatly won upon me. I like to think of him as still quietly happy amid his garden walls, tending flowers that grow over the dead at Cotrone.'" A vision that was still truthful when Gissing wrote his book, but was no longer so by the time it appeared. "Dead," Douglas noted mournfully. "Dead like those whose graves he tended; like Gissing himself. He expired in February 1901, [...] and they showed me his tomb near the right side of the entrance; a poor little grave, with a wooden cross bearing a number, which will soon he removed to make room for another one."

Research rested there for decades--until a few months ago contact was fortuitously made with a great-grandson of the *giardiniere-custode* whose engaging personality had pleased Gissing so much that he devoted several paragraphs to him in his volume of haunting recollections. A meeting of the well-known cultural association Italia Nostra was the occasion of the first contact between the Italian co-author of the present article and Dr. Domenico Marino, an archaeologist who currently holds a post in Basilicata, Dr. Marino initiated his own researches after the death two years ago of his father Giulio Marino, who had on many occasions told him of his own grandfather, the homonymous Giulio, having met the English writer in the Cotrone cemetery, a meeting which had given him much satisfaction. The archaeologist had the story uppermost in his mind when, for professional reasons, he had to study *By the Ionian Sea* and *Old Calabria*. The coincidences between the testimonies of the two foreign writers and what he knew through family tradition were arresting. Research into the history of the Marino family was now in order.



The cypress by which Giulio Marino is said to have been buried.

Gissing's friend, Giulio Marino, who was baptized in Catanzaro in 1844, but may have been born the year before, was the son of Domenico Marino and Isabella Frijo. About fifty-three when he met Gissing, he was married to Francesca Maria Scalise, born in Cirò in 1857, and they had six children, the eldest being, like his grandfather, named Domenico. This Domenico Adalberto (1880-1968), who married Carmela Scerra, was in turn the father of four children, one of whom was Giulio (1924-1999), the archæologist's father. As he himself told Gissing, Giulio had been valet to a local gentleman, who very interestingly yet misleadingly, was Baron Luigi Berlingieri (1816-1900), mayor of Cotrone in 1882 and from 1883 to 1887. According to Augustus Hare in his *Cities of Southern Italy and Sicily* (1883), the Baron was with Baron Barracco, also a Calabrian, one of "the richest proprietors in Italy" (p. 349). However, contrary to appearances the Baron was no relative of the man of whom Gissing gave an unflattering portrait, another aristocratic Berlingieri, Marquis Anselmo Berlingieri (1852-1911), whose *permesso*, given condescendingly, has become a by-word for superfluous, worthless authorization. In a way that appeals to one's sense of justice, Gissing let fly in various ways at this particular Berlingieri, who was in office from 1896 to 1899. For instance, he approvingly reports that the poor illiterate woman to whom he showed the miserable scrap of paper bearing the mayor's scribblings ignored her employer's instructions. Then on meeting the handsome, distinguished gardener, he has his say fairly bluntly about the obscurantist *sindaco*: "I rang a bell at the gate and was admitted by a man of behaviour and language much more refined than is common among the people of this region; I felt sorry, indeed, that I had not found him seated in the Sindaco's chair that morning." So, once more, as after the encounter with the aged woman at the entrance of the orchard, he has a swipe at the local dignitary. To the foreign visitor, servants could be more intelligent and respectable than their betters. The parting shot is to be found in the conclusion of chapter IX, where Gissing echoes "a sudden clamour in the street, [...] the angry shouting of many voices," those from "a crowd of poor folk [who] had gathered before the Municipio to demonstrate against an oppressive tax called the *fuocatico*," that is hearth-money. "*Abbass' 'o sindaco*," Gissing seems to be shouting with the demonstrators.

So Gissing's sympathy for Giulio Marino was somehow increased by his contempt for the main representative of local authority. Little more is known of the poor man whose grave Norman Douglas was invited to behold. The exact date of his death is 9 February 1901, by

which time Gissing, still awaiting the publication of his travel book, was writing in Paris his satire of religious crazes and other forms of charlatanry. Giulio's wife survived him by over twenty years, dying on 19 July 1922, and her grave can be seen<sup>1</sup> in the Crotona cemetery on the right hand side, only a few yards away from the place where the more conventional grave of Giulio is said to have been, that is, at the foot of a stately cypress. Giulio is remembered locally as a man who had travelled much with his employer--the photograph of him we reproduce is said to have been taken in Switzerland, probably in 1889. In over a decade, with remarkable skill and care, he changed the floral aspects of the cemetery--an impressive one to present-day visitors--beyond recognition. He it also was who planted for the municipal authorities a great many trees along the main streets of the town from 1888 to his death. He lived in the Marina di Porto, afterwards Viale Cristoforo Colombo, in a house known as Casa Suriano, which is no longer extant. His great-grandson Domenico treasures his memory, as he does the books by Gissing and Douglas that commemorate this worthy ancestor of his. His copy of *Old Calabria* is one of an uncommon edition, which like the first, is extremely scarce. It contains thirty-two illustrations, like the first edition--photographs taken by the author--and among them are one of Roman Masonry at Capo Colonna, another of the Cemetery of Crotona which shows the *campo santo* practically as Gissing must have seen it, and a most striking one of "The Modern Æsaros" on which the famous river impresses one as extremely different from the stream to be seen by the early twenty-first century visitor.

It is especially fortunate that the gentle gardener should at long last be properly identified in 2001, exactly one hundred years after his death and after the publication of a book in which he is so warmly commemorated. Together with Dr. Riccardo Sculco, who tended Gissing at a time when his life was in the balance, he is one of the two most engaging figures that fate placed in his way during his eventful stay in Cotrone, now more aptly renamed Crotona.

<sup>1</sup>It is no. 213 and reads: A / Scalise M. Francesca Ved Manino / Madre affettuosa ed esemplare / M. il 19 7 1922 / I figli addoloratissimi / Posero

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## Bohemia's Bo(a)rders: Queer-Friendly Gissing

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In Italy in 1897-1898, Gissing wrote scathingly of the English society he found there, targeting the journalist Frank Hurd of the *Morning Post*: "Detestable type; effeminate in speech; boyish in manner; age cannot be more than 25, I think. He hardly knows any Italian--is taking lessons. What a correspondent for a London paper!" Always the proud autodidact, Gissing associates Hurd's effeminacy with his untrained, undisciplined mind. Gissing learned from his hosts two months later that Hurd had "just been adopted by Lord Ronald Gower!"<sup>2</sup> To some extent, this essay interrogates the possible emotions behind that exclamation point: disbelief, disgust, curiosity, wonder. Gissing would likely have known from his literary and artistic connections of Gower, a sculptor, author and aesthete (who, incidentally, would be the model for the seductive Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [1890]). There are no easy labels for Gissing. While his letters offer evidence that he was uneasy and even dismayed at the mention of male same-sex desire, Gissing did at times represent non-heteronormative, or "queer" lifestyles with tolerance and warmth. His bourgeois sensibility accommodated both a repressive concern for propriety and a sentimentality for a liberatory, idealized bohemia that defies middle-class social mores. Only five months after describing Hurd in the journal entry above, he began *The Crown of Life* (1899), a novel whose minor characters, the mannish Miss Bonnicastle and the effeminate Mr. Kite, are depicted with gentle humor and sympathy.

If bohemia is Gissing's ideal home he welcomes the Kites and Bonnicastles there; in fact, they are its instinctive inhabitants. Yet even as *The Crown of Life* celebrates the unconventionality and "queerness" of its gender-transgressive bohemians, it obscures (or denies) their homosexuality. There are two ways one can read this. One can argue that the novel marks a moment of confusion on Gissing's part, an inability to assimilate the "revelations" of the 1895 Wilde trials and 1890s sexological studies of inversion. But one can alternatively read it as a deliberate rejection of the new sexology, an epistemological desire to keep queerness vague, and a refusal to locate queerness in mere sexual object-choice. As this essay will illustrate, Gissing adopts the term "queer" to describe relations more indeterminate than simple same-sex attraction.

The purpose of this essay, then, is not to claim certain characters in *The Crown of Life* as homosexual. In fact, given the textual evidence of the novel, the characters resist our “outing” them. Mr. Kite, despite his infirmity, drooping limbs and waffly disposition, is nevertheless in love with Olga Hannaford. The commonsensical Miss Bonnicastle never approaches a romantic relationship at all, but ends up with a platonic, protective union with Kite, destined to be a sister rather than mate. At the conclusion of the novel, when Olga has sunk to unforeseen depths of vulgarity and ventures to seduce the now-enfeebled Kite, Miss Bonnicastle firmly takes him under her own wing and warns Olga to steer clear. Nursing Kite, she ensures with his recovery the continued production of his “queer” paintings. It can be argued that, whatever their respective sexual orientations, Miss Bonnicastle and Mr. Kite constitute a queer couple on their own—platonic, celibate, and (if Kite’s paintings inspire Bonnicastle) interdependent.<sup>3</sup> To assert their queerness throws us headlong into current theoretical debates on the definition and appropriate use of the term “queer.” Do effeminacy in men and mannishness in women themselves constitute queerness? Is queerness rooted in same-sex desire? Can one be “queer” without being homosexual? What, if any, are Gissing’s views on this? These are questions I will return to at the conclusion of this essay.

As an acute observer of late Victorian culture and politics, Gissing was aware of, if not committed to, all aspects of the sexual anarchy of the 1890s. Beyond his obvious familiarity with debates over the New Woman, his immediate community afforded him various complex, often passing, connections to social and sexual rebels. He sustained friendships with Grant Allen, who wrote an infamous novel on free unions, and H. G. Wells and Morley Roberts who pursued them. Gissing noted in his diary that Grant Allen’s wife supported her husband’s unorthodox views on sexuality (and also that she called him “Daddy”!).<sup>4</sup> As he searched for a legitimate means of divorcing his second wife Edith Underwood and marrying Gabrielle Fleury, Gissing looked to the legal maneuvers of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch whose wife, a friend of Gabrielle, supported herself by penning novels under the fictional name her husband had assigned her in his pornographic *Venus in Furs* (1870).<sup>5</sup> Yet Gissing was no willing sexual renegade himself. Indeed, he had a heightened sense of shame over the transgression of his heterosexual cross-class relationships. Although Gissing had a close friendship with H. G. Wells in the 1890s, Wells claimed never to have met Edith Underwood, Gissing’s working-class wife.<sup>6</sup> Gissing fictionalized the “closeting” of the Cockney spouse in *New*



*Grub Street* (1891). Given his self-consciousness, he serves as a provocative case study for heterosexual responses to male effeminacy, female masculinity, and queerness in the *fin de siècle*.

### **Gissing and Aesthetic Bohemia**

Since the publication of Jacob Korg's ground-breaking biography in 1963, critics have continued to examine Gissing as a "born exile" whose meagre income failed to meet the demands of his genteel, acculturated sensibility. Complementing Gissing's identification as a displaced gentleman is his romantic alliance with a mythologized bohemia--a bohemia he had absorbed through continental literature, observed in his avid study of the Aesthetic Movement, witnessed in visits to the continent and performed in his own clique the Quadrilateral. The belief in a bohemia that transcends traditional class distinctions is perhaps the most bourgeois of faiths; after all, it is merely another exercise in elitism; yet Gissing was fully invested in it. He imagined he could reside with his fellow "upward striving souls," those "well-educated [men], fairly bred, but without money"<sup>7</sup>--in a utopia where taste was valued and one's lack of money irrelevant.

In a recent article, I retraced Gissing's particular ambivalences towards British Aestheticism, from his love of Rossetti's poetry and paintings in the early 1880s and his delight in Wilde's aesthetic dress and manners in 1887 to his censure of decadent aestheticism in the 1890s.<sup>8</sup> One possible explanation for Gissing's early affection for Aestheticism is this: the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were *the* recognized model of an artistic fraternity in Britain, and Gissing was forever in search of a sympathetic community. Perhaps admiring their cohesiveness, he adopted their style. British Aestheticism was only one of the manifestations of a bohemia that Gissing constructed as a class-transcendent panacea to his own isolation and shame of poverty.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the critic Michael Collie attempted to rewrite Gissing's biography and revise Gissing criticism by emphasizing Gissing's status as a bohemian and using this as a means of understanding the motives behind the novelist's frequent relocations and his insistent (and Collie believes, unfair) expectations of his wives. Collie attributes every self-salvaging or self-serving act that Gissing commits to Gissing's continental moral relativism.<sup>9</sup> Here I reconsider Gissing's bohemianism not as a retreat from personal responsibility, but as a striving for creative fellowship.<sup>10</sup> Collie is correct in stating that Gissing's literary world was largely an interior one: adept at

French, Italian and German, Gissing avidly read French and Italian authors like Alphonse Daudet, Victor Hugo, George Sand, Balzac, Paul Bourget, Emile Zola, and Matilde Serao, as well as Russian realists, Turgenev, Dostoevski, and Tolstoy. Not knowing Norwegian or Danish, he read the plays of Henrik Ibsen and realist novels of Jens Peter Jacobsen in German. Gissing aimed at eventually teaching himself Spanish; before he died, he was reading Cervantes and Galdós in the original. The obvious tragedy of Gissing's life was the isolation of that cosmopolitan subjectivity. Gissing understood the paradox of his situation, acknowledging that the nature of his work demanded solitude, but that loneliness was a misery.<sup>11</sup> Characteristic of his perverse acceptance of defeat, in a letter to his friend, the social investigator Clara Collet, he justified turning down an invitation to the Frederic Harrisons: "I have made up my mind never again to mix in the society of educated people. It is a necessity of my circumstances. I find it a wretched discomfort to pretend social equality where there can be none. My acquaintance must only be with a few individuals; in a gathering I am at once set in a false position,--I cannot talk, cannot listen, & become a mere silent misanthrope."<sup>12</sup> From those "few individuals" alone did Gissing feel comfortable in accepting invitations, and in return, exposing the struggles of his domestic life.

Gissing was drawn to contemporary European writers not only for their formal innovations as naturalists, but for the possibilities they envisioned in their literary works of a supportive community of artists, a "cénacle," in Balzac's terms. One of the texts that shaped Gissing from his early days as a student was Henri Murger's *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* (1851). (He claimed in April 1890 to be reading it for the twentieth time.)<sup>13</sup> Gissing valued it for its depiction of an artistic community whose men and women engaged in simple, honest relations: it promised an alternative to the restrictive social conventions he knew in Britain. We see shades of Rodolphe and Mimi in the unconventional relationship between Osmond Waymark and Ida Starr in *The Unclassed* (1884), which begins casually in the street and continues through unchaperoned meetings in Ida's rooms where the two discuss the books he lends her. Gissing found evidence of his optimism about continental ease and solidarity in the general air of Italy. In Florence in 1889, he was dazzled by the ease and politeness of open-air cafés, where women and children nightly joined the men to drink coffee, eat ices and hear music.<sup>14</sup> Gissing claimed to find in Italian café life a class that was common without being "common," a local community in which laborers appreciated good art, and essen-

tially did not “act” like workers.<sup>15</sup> (Contrast this to the hairpulling, squalling denizens of *Workers in the Dawn* [1880] or *The Nether World* [1889].) Noting that he himself shed his customary shyness in Italy, Gissing dreaded returning to England and solitude. Once back, he fantasized about founding “Literary Homes” in England for communities of scholars and artists.<sup>16</sup> With this, he declared his preference for a garret of his own shaping--chosen out of taste rather than out of economic necessity. That ideal garret would not be an isolated one.

Through his friendship with travel writer Morley Roberts, Gissing gained an actual short-lived entry into an artistic coterie in 1889: the two, joined by W. H. Hudson and Alfred Hartley, formed “The Quadrilateral” to meet a few nights each month in one another’s rooms for meals and informal exchanges. Roberts further introduced Gissing to a colony of artists with whom he lived in Chelsea, among them the sculptor Thomas Stirling Lee, whose works were exhibited in the Royal Academy, the painter and engraver A. D. McCormick, and the painter and engraver Frank Brangwyn, who had at one point worked for William Morris.<sup>17</sup>

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, fictional bohemia, and his own Quadrilateral charmed Gissing because each constituted a *closed circle*; though they might be situated in shabby districts, these communities stood apart from the uneducated poor and remained uncontaminated by the poor’s vulgarity. Enabling him to distance himself from the coarse masses, these bohemia also satisfied his desire for community, solidarity and mutual responsibility between artists. In the terms of critic Regenia Gagnier, Gissing’s bohemia constituted both “decadence,” or “art as escape from others” in its avoidance of working people, and a positive “aestheticism,” or “art as transformation of daily life” in its promotion of a community, however insular.<sup>18</sup>

### **Homosocial Bohemia**

Although they could not truly offer him an escape from economic class, the institutions that claimed to represent the literary bohemia of the 1890s provided Gissing with a model of traditional, comforting homosocial alliances. With their formal toasts, the all-male meetings of Walter Besant’s Incorporated Society of Authors and the Omar Khayyám Club echoed the customs of the Victorian gentleman’s club.<sup>19</sup> As Eve Sedgwick has argued in her work on homosociality, such organizations militated against non-normative relations. For a self-identified outcast like Gissing, they confirmed his own normalcy

and offered a sense of belonging. Such communities suited Gissing temperamentally. "Surely," he wrote, "there ought to be *Colleges* for unmarried intellectual men (and even for married of small means,) where we could dwell much as students do at the University.... The life of a Fellow at Oxford or Cambridge is, I should think, almost ideal. He has his man-servant, his meals either in private or at the public table, an atmosphere of culture & peace."<sup>20</sup> In Gissing's novels, alienated impoverished characters like Edwin Reardon and Harold Biffen and Osmond Waymark and Julian Casti seek comfort through brotherly, heterosexual, intense friendships.

Mainstream homosocial culture contains yet condemns homosexual ties, constantly drawing the line between socially "safe," acceptable behaviors and questionable ones. As a participant in this culture, Gissing asserted the internal markers, the safe boundaries, of the homosocial continuum as a matter of habit. In his trusting, long-term correspondence with Eduard Bertz, he conveys his distance from Whitman's homoerotic poetry.<sup>21</sup> The topic of homosexuality occurs only rarely in Gissing's correspondence, but when it does it evokes a genuine panic and repulsion. At the nadir of his second marriage, Gissing complained to Gabrielle Fleury that his wife Edith maligned him before her neighbors for "unspeakable" vices; he confided to Morley Roberts that she accused him of being a "disciple of Oscar Wilde."<sup>22</sup> Gissing further records his dismay when, after the trials, the wife of an acquaintance mentions Wilde's name in company.<sup>23</sup> Certainly Gissing knew homosexuals, but he either failed to recognize their sexual orientation or chose not to. After a brief exchange of letters with the essayist and editor Edmund Gosse on poetry and the poor, he contributed a paper to a collection of Gosse's essays.<sup>24</sup> He was flattered to be painted by William Rothenstein, but wrote merely of Rothenstein's living with Verlaine "hardly an enviable privilege, I should think."<sup>25</sup> In his letters, he mentions meeting the artist Selwyn Image, who had publicly protested Wilde's imminent imprisonment--but he never discusses Image's alliances with Wilde.<sup>26</sup>

Gissing's horror at the revelation of Wilde's homosexuality represents that of the general Victorian middle classes, as newspapers and other media demonstrate. Like the public, Gissing had been tickled in the 1880s by Wilde's dandyism. For Gissing, the trials were a revelation, one which would seem to affirm the critic Alan Sinfield's argument that until Wilde's trials in 1895, Victorians did not associate effeminate behavior in men with homosexuality.<sup>27</sup> By the end of the 1890s, intellectuals in bohemian circles were conversant in the work of

Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, who had diagnosed effeminate men and masculine women as congenital “inverts” doomed to a tragic life for having been born into the “wrong” gender. It is fair to assume on the basis of his reading that Gissing knew these theories as well. He had read Havelock Ellis’s *The New Spirit* (1890) which conjectured about the erotic extent of Whitman’s “manly love,” and he had also read *Walt Whitman, A Study* (1893) by John Addington Symonds (who served as the model male invert in Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion* [1896]).<sup>28</sup> Given his shock at the Wilde verdict and his familiarity with theories of sexology, it is striking that when Gissing wrote *The Crown of Life* in 1899, he insisted that effeminate men and mannish women are not necessarily sexual inverts.<sup>29</sup> Yet the term “queer” appears frequently throughout the book. We ask then, what was his understanding of “queerness”?

### **Bohemia’s Queer Bo(a)rders and The Dissatisfactions of Heteronormativity in *The Crown of Life***

A minor character in a minor novel, Miss Bonnicastle would appear doubly tainted by her affiliation with advertising and her resemblance to the androgynous New Woman. Yet Bonnicastle is the novel’s most vital and charming figure.<sup>30</sup> She serves in part to unite and reconcile more central characters, to clarify and convey their mutual affections to one another. Unlike Edwin Reardon’s attic in *New Grub Street*, Miss Bonnicastle’s atelier is colorful rather than drab, a salon of offbeat friends rather than a lonely Siberia. Those in Miss Bonnicastle’s circle benefit from her humor and compassion as well as her aura of brightness and contentment. Her sunny flat, a sheltering “bonnie castle,” is Gissing’s fantasy of an ideal workshop, and those who climb the stairs up to it--literally transcending the undesirable people of the common street below--gain access to creative fellowship and, Gissing believes, freedom from traditional class-bound identity.

Miss Bonnicastle invigorates the second half of the novel through a language constituted largely of rough-and-tumble schoolboy slang. In her initial scene in the novel, Bonnicastle shows Irene Derwent the way up to hers and Olga Hannaford’s studio in their rooming house with a familiar “Oh, she’s my chum,” and further leaves her with an encoded joke to relay to Olga.<sup>31</sup> (Irene’s failure to understand the joke and Gissing’s refusal to explain it heighten the sense of an insider’s language, the privilege of a subculture.) Though not directly associated

with girls' schools and the games ethic that became popular in them in the last quarter of the century, Miss Bonnicastle through her language appears an unfeminine and boisterous "hoyden," the new social and quasi-biological throwback who exhibits, according to a popular girl's magazine of the 1890s, "a deplorable degree of roughness and puerile imitation of the off-hand manners of young men."<sup>32</sup> "She's very nice really--not a bit of harm in her," Olga assures Irene, "but she will play these silly practical jokes" (p. 140). The novel's protagonist Piers Otway later observes of Bonnicastle: "She was not ill-looking, but seemed to have no single characteristic of her sex which appealed to him" (p. 283).

Here aesthetic bohemia is inextricably associated with the reversal of gender roles. Yet rather than don masculine trousers, this "cheery-faced, solidly-built damsel" wears aesthetic dress, which would have been an assemblage of historical styles, of faded color, minimally draped, and perhaps featuring Japanese textiles or embroidery. She thus embodies the links between female aestheticism and New Womanhood.<sup>33</sup> Olga, upon leaving the flat she shares with Miss Bonnicastle, discards her own similar aesthetic costume (which "showed something of the influence of Miss Bonnicastle") and with it "the touch of masculinity on which she had prided herself in her later 'Bohemian' days" (pp. 144, 203).

Scenes like the one in which Bonnicastle, Olga and Kite share tea attest to Gissing's affection for the life of the atelier. We attribute the humor of the studio not merely to Miss Bonnicastle but to her work. To lighten a strained moment, Olga turns Piers's attention to a poster of "an elephant sitting upright, imbibing with gusto from a bottle of some much-advertised tonic" (p. 157). In response, Piers breaks into laughter, a rare instance in this particularly somber novel. Why then does Olga choose to leave the studio? "She was doing no good; all the experience to be had in a life of mild Bohemianism was already tasted and found rather insipid" (p. 154). It is the first point that Gissing chooses to underline rather than the second. (In fact, he offers no evidence that the life is insipid at all.) Olga is only slightly talented as an artist and knows that she cannot succeed as Bonnicastle or Kite could. Later, she confesses to Piers: "I must find a *mission*. Can you suggest one? Only don't let it have anything humanitarian about it. That would make me a humbug, which I have never been yet. It must be something entirely for my own pleasure and profit" (p. 181). Olga has sought both pleasure and profit in her art, and has found neither, since she has been relegated to "fill[ing] in the heads and arms and so on" in

a fashion paper (p. 140). The money that would give her independence from her mother and the work that would stimulate her have thus evaded her. In short, it is not so much the atelier that has disappointed Olga as her marginalization in a world of legitimate, self-supporting artists. Were she to stay, she would be a poseur, a humbug. Later on, living at her uncle's home in relative comfort and security, Olga longs to return to a life in Bonnicastle's studio (pp. 271, 283). She confides in Piers: "This life of loneliness and idleness is unbearable" (p. 287).

During her brief stay there, bohemia offers Olga not only community and industry, but the license to transgress traditional class and gender lines. Her fiancé Mr. Kite, who famously lacks "any decent connection that one could hear of," embodies the Bohemian enclave that Olga has claimed as her new home (p. 97). Much as a modern teenager might defend her flight into Greenwich Village, Olga argues to her mother: "money is nothing me," and later tells Irene: "I've broken with that world"; "I like the life, on the whole. It's freedom; no society nonsense" (pp. 100, 140). She finally exclaims: "Why do you come to interfere with me? What right have you, Irene? I'm old enough to live as I please. I don't come to criticise your life!" (p. 141). She also locks horns with Piers when he regards the studio with some distaste and asks her: "Is it really necessary for you to live here?... I should have thought that you... would prefer [home] to this life" (p. 155).

If, as I argue below, Olga's relationship with Kite is queer in its imbalances of power, Olga's affiliation with bohemia is itself an alliance with queerness. Critic Michael Warner defines the queer as "resistance to regimes of the normal," and by this definition bohemia is a queer realm.<sup>34</sup> It is also a refuge for the transgressive. When Piers first arrives at the studio and points to Bonnicastle's posters, asking Olga: "Is this your work?", Olga replies with an unsuccessful joke: "No, no! Mine isn't for exhibition. It hides itself--with the modesty of supreme excellence!" (p. 154). The joke fails--they simply stare at each other--perhaps because of her oblique reference to bohemia as a closet where things are hidden and sheltered in spite of (or because of) their fabulousness. Olga later says of her days with Bonnicastle:

"If I could see only the least chance of supporting myself, I would go to live with her again. She's the most sensible girl I know, and she did me good."

"How, did you good?"

"She helped me against myself," replied Olga abruptly. "No one else ever did that." Then she turned again to the safer subjects. (p. 271)

Gissing is certainly not claiming that Olga is lesbian--far from it--, but he is stating that she is at odds with herself and he tantalizingly refuses to define the source of her self-persecution. Olga is not gay, but she is queer for her self-marginalization, her proximity to “unsafe subjects,” and the vague way that she and Gissing represent that proximity.

The bohemia of Bonnicastle and Kite exists on the fringes of the novel outside of its main action. The overarching thesis of *The Crown of Life* is that only a select few experience real love, and that most of the population marry in compliance to custom, committing themselves to mechanical, scarcely tolerable relationships. But for its sanguine conclusion--the marriage of the long-suffering Piers Otway to his idealized woman Irene Derwent--, the novel might be said to be an exposé of the hypocrisy of heterosexual marriage in general. This is a story in which the hero Piers is, after all, a bastard son deprived of a proper inheritance on his father's death; he is, further, far more decent and upstanding than his legitimate half-brothers. There is in fact not one successful, unexploitative marriage in the whole novel. Irene's aunt and uncle, the Hannafords, despise one another. Although Jerome Otway loved his mistress Piers's mother, he barely tolerates his new wife. Even Piers's mentor John Jacks realizes in a moment of clarity and sympathy that his young wife, however devoted, has married him out of material need (p. 192). Piers encounters a lighthearted loving union in the marriage of his half-brother Alexander to the Irishwoman Bidy, but later in the novel we see Bidy taking to the stage, though Alexander has previously sworn he would never let her stoop so low to support him (p. 56).

In the place of strong conjugal relationships, Gissing offers us Dr. Derwent's bonds to his faithful servant Thibaut and to his daughter Irene, Piers's growing mutual trust with his business partner Moncharmont and the Russian Korolevitch, and Irene's growing dependence on her friend Helen Borisoff, herself a pragmatic survivor of an unhappy marriage. A milder double of Miss Bonnicastle--she even smokes like her--, Helen laughingly admits to having “riff-raff foreign intimacies” (p. 127). We learn from Irene's conventional suitor Arnold Jacks that Helen has forfeited her respectability through a “very dubious wandering life” away from her husband (p. 264). Yet Helen is level-headed, sympathetic and gentle in scenes where Irene seeks exactly those qualities. Jacks's standards are thus deliberately put up for question. The novel dares the reader to rewrite “respectability”: to cheer the illegitimate son on and applaud Irene for breaking her



engagement at the risk of embarrassing her family and fiancé. A further manifestation of this dismissal of conventional values is Gissing's promotion of a polyglot bohemia over English nationalism. In this anti-imperialist novel, Gissing concludes that the enemy to be feared is neither the aesthete nor the New Woman, but the militaristic, hypermasculine war-monger. A fey Mr. Kite in his garret is preferable to a (literally) explosive Mr. Hannaford in his arms manufactory.

At first glance, we observe two worlds in the novel: first, the mainstream world of business, civil service examinations, careful investments, and conventional courtships and marriages, and second, the bohemian world of artists in ateliers, late hours, unexpected visitors, and for some, joyous industry. Complicating the equation is Gissing's depiction of what we might call "false" bohemias. Representative false bohemians pretend to be counter-cultural, but instead of contributing to a utopian interdependent community, they merely work to manipulate others and gain power. Piers's half-brothers Alexander and Daniel are both scapegraces who have incurred their studious father's contempt. Both ally themselves at least nominally with the arts. Alexander is introduced as a comic character, effusive, amiable, delighted with life. Piers meets him and his family in their attic lodgings which appear to us suitably bohemian: "A small round table, two or three chairs and a piano were lost on the great floor, which had no carpeting, only a small Indian rug being displayed as a thing of beauty, in the very middle. There were no pictures but here and there, to break the surface of the wall, strips of bright colored material were hung from the cornice" (p. 52). His wife Biddy's acceptance of the disheveled state of the house and herself, the chipped and dirty tea service, and the simple dinner are all tempered by the fact that everyone has a genuinely good time: the meal is "uproarious" (p. 55). Like the Pockets' housekeeping in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, this disarray charms and amuses us. Yet once Alexander acquires Piers's loan, he quickly furnishes the house in a more bourgeois fashion (p. 64). To Piers's bemusement, Alexander and Biddy desire respectability--or at least material comforts they cannot afford. But more, Alexander is not above petty exploitation of Piers: he takes Piers out for dinner only to have Piers foot the bill.

The central false bohemian in the story is the blackmailing Daniel Otway, Piers's older half-brother. A kind of incarnation of Mephisto and Wilde combined, he charms the dinner company:

He told admirable stories, he started just the right topics, and dealt with them in the right way, he seemed to know intuitively the habits of thought of each person he addressed. The hostess was radiant; Olga was almost happy; Irene, after a seeming struggle with herself, which an unkind observer might have attributed to displeasure at being rivalled in talk, yielded to the cheery influence, and held her own against the visitor in wit and merriment. (p. 43)

Yet Gissing undermines Daniel as early as the second page of the novel where we see his clothing and physiognomy betray him. His dress is gentlemanly only “on the strength of externals”; “about the lips... came a suggestion of the vice in blood which tends to cruelty” (p. 2). Daniel is continually addressed in the novel in terms of “vice.”

The kernel of truth in this fascinating representation was that Daniel Otway, among other things, collected *bric-a-brac* for a certain dealer, and at times himself disposed of it to persons with more money than knowledge or taste. In whatever profession he had steadily pursued, Daniel would have come to the front; but precisely that steady pursuit was the thing impossible to him. His special weakness, originally amiable, had become an enthralling vice; the soul of goodness in the man was corrupted, and had turned poisonous (pp 41-42)

It is not surprising, given this dandiacal description, that Daniel should borrow money from Piers on the grounds that he is publishing a book “which would revolutionise opinion with regard to certain matters, and certain periods of art” and that this expensive little book lacked a financing publisher because it “appealed to a very small circle of readers” (p. 42). This book, he claims, will establish him as a connoisseur and enable him to win a directorship of a certain gallely “which he must not name” (p. 42). Daniel thus secures nearly half of Piers’s inheritance.

If Daniel does not dare to speak the name of his prospective and no doubt imaginary gallery, his desire can be named in the context of the novel. Daniel is a seducer not of young men but of an older, gullible, married woman who barely manages to resist his allure. His “vice” turns out not to be pederasty but simple greed: he gets what he wants through blackmailing her. Daniel Otway’s heterosexuality and his act of blackmail seem remarkably anachronistic given the novel’s 1899 publication date. By the late 1890s, blackmail, like effeminacy, was an offense immediately associated with “gross indecencies between men.” The 1885 Labouchere Act under which Oscar Wilde was tried was nicknamed the Blackmailer’s Charter, because it gave male prostitutes new license to blackmail their clients by threat of dis-

closure. We might then read Gissing's central plot mechanism, Daniel's seduction and blackmail of Mrs. Hannaford, as the "straightening" of a now queer social signifier. If the Wilde trials in 1895 changed the way that people viewed and defined dandyism, Gissing persists in seeing according to older paradigms. The character of Daniel Otway follows the pattern Gissing had set in earlier novels where dandies like Vincent Lacour in *Isabel Clarendon* (1886) and Everard Barfoot in *The Odd Women* (1893) are languorous, self-conscious, manipulative, and incontrovertibly heterosexual.

We can balance Daniel Otway's dandyism and suavity against other aesthetic traits as they are embodied through the "genuine" bohemian Mr. Kite. Kite is "[a] loose-limbed, indolent-looking man of thirty or so, with a long, thin face, tangled hair, gentle eyes" (p. 102). In contrast to Daniel Otway's polished appearance, "[t]he clothes he had were decent, but suggested the idea that they had been purchased at second hand: they did not fit him well; perhaps he was the kind of man whose clothes never do fit" (p. 102). The reader gains an overall sense of Kite's frailty and passivity: "He seemed chronically tired; sat down with a little sigh of satisfaction; stretched his legs and let his arms fall at full length" (p. 102). His sentences are "full of good feeling" but he leaves them incomplete as if he has not enough energy to end them. Kite is intelligent but speaks "oddly," and Gissing returns to the word "odd" again when he describes Kite's acceptance of the postponement of his marriage to Olga: Kite writes back "the oddest letter... all disjointed philosophizing" (pp. 102, 106). This disjointedness seems to echo Kite's own loose-limbed form.

It is clear that Kite's fragile effeminacy has its attractions for the women in the bohemian circle of Great Portland Street. In a passage worth quoting at length, Gissing cites Kite's strange magnetism.

[Miss Bonnicastle], no less than Olga Hannaford, credited Kite with wonderful artistic powers; in their view, only his constitutional defect of energy, his incorrigible dreaminess, stood between him and great achievement. The evidence in support of their faith was slight enough; a few sketches, a hint in crayon, or a wash in water-colour, were all he had to show; but Kite belonged to that strange order of men who, seemingly without effort or advantage of any kind, awaken the interest and gain the confidence of certain women. Even Mrs. Hannaford, though a mother's reasons set her against him, had felt this seductive quality in Olga's lover, and liked though she could not approve of him. Powers of fascination in a man very often go together with lax principle, if not with active rascality; Kite was an instance to the contrary. He had a quixotic sensitiveness, a

morbid instinct of honour. If it is true that virile force, preferably with a touch of the brutal, has a high place in the natural woman's heart, none the less does an ideal of male purity, of the masculine subdued to gentle virtues, make strong appeal to the imagination in her sex. To the every-day man, Kite seemed a mere pale grotesque, a creature of flabby foolishness. But Olga Hannaford was not the only girl who had dreamed of devoting her life to him. If she could believe his assurance (and she all but did believe it), for her alone had he felt anything worthy to be called love, to her alone had he spoken words of tenderness. The high-tide of her passion had long since ebbed; yet she knew that Kite still had power over her, power irresistible, if he chose to exercise it, and the strange fact that he would not, that, still loving her, he did not seem to be jealous for her love in return, often moved her to bitterness. (pp. 150-51)

Kite is a kind of benign Svengali whose "constitutional defect of energy" is his very strength. "The trouble is, he has no character, no will," Olga has said of him (p. 142). As we see in one of his early scenes, Kite elicits a maternal protectiveness in Olga, who orders him to have his boots mended lest he get wet feet and catch cold, and then asks with concern: "You can pay for them, I hope?" (p. 148). Interestingly, the effeminate Kite is a foil against the type of men whom Gissing has censured throughout the novel: the destructive Lee Hannaford and the boastful, jingoistic Arnold Jacks. These men possess that "virile force" and "a touch of the brutal." With his "morbid instinct of honour," Kite appears an agreeable alternative to them. Yet, complexly, although Kite's "male purity" is "subdued to gentle virtues," he himself subdues others, including Olga, over whom he has "power irresistible." Ironically, Kite's own weakness of body and will empowers him. Olga is annoyed that he makes no effort to claim her from the advances of other men. She would like him to be more active, more possessive, but if he were, he would not be the passive Kite--and that passivity is the source of his attractiveness. When he tells her that Piers's company will be good for her, she laughs and answers: "you are queer!" (p. 149).

Kite and Miss Bonnicastle are strange companions together. He stretches out and watches while Bonnicastle works at her easel, hums and whistles music-hall tunes. She swears vigorously in German when the work is slow. "Let's have some blooming tea!" she says at the end of the day, and adds: "All right, I'll get it. I've just about ten times the muscle and go of you both together; it's only right that I should do the slavey... Sit still. Do as I tell you. What's the good of you if you can't help us to drink tea?" (p. 152). Part counselor, part governess, Bonnicastle manages to end the limbo of Kite's and Olga's engagement by

clarifying for Kite how each is exploiting the other. Kite has kept Olga waiting; Olga is using Piers to make him jealous. Kite apparently loves Olga, even worships her, but is unwilling or unable to prove his love by playing the social games she requires of him. Olga loves Kite for the part of him that is inaccessible. In this sense, it is a perverse relationship. Bonnicastle says: "I don't pretend to understand you; I'm not quite sure I understand *her*. You're a queer couple" (p. 153).

Out of all the characters in the novel, Bonnicastle is the one who recurrently refers to objects and people as "queer": the queer is her provenance. Still, as frequently as the term "queer" surfaces in the novel, it does not simply stand in for "homosexual," especially since homosexuality was still a nascent concept during the *fin de siècle*. In his excellent essay on lesbian desire in the work of novelists Vernon Lee and L. T. Meade, Seth Koven has written: "The word 'queer' appears constantly.... it often means nothing more than 'odd' or 'unusual.' But on other occasions it is freighted with subtle sexual connotations." Citing a scene in which one character is moved by the other's musical performance, he adds: "Queer' linked with 'pleasure' in this passage seems to convey some element of attraction that goes beyond its usual meaning of 'unusual.'"<sup>35</sup> Likewise, "queer" in *The Crown of Life* may at times directly seem to connote non-normative sexuality, but in other lines it gestures more broadly to characters' idiosyncrasies, their vague "oddness," or their thwarted desires in mismatched relationships. One usage illustrates the multiple valences of "queer": Kite's drawings for the Paris newspapers draw great praise; they are "queer symbolical stuff," Miss Bonnicastle says, "but uncommonly well done" (p. 284). Their queerness is no doubt attributable to their maker, but also to the fact that they are nudes and would be deemed indecent in London. Here Gissing allies queerness with sexuality, if not homosexuality. Queerness has something to do with the forbidden and the racy in this context--as well as the alien, special, and invaluable. In her most slangy moment, Miss Bonnicastle refers to the nude figures as "the what-d'ye-call 'ems" (p. 287): it is a fascinating instance where Bonnicastle's performative masculinity merges with and confirms the unnameability of the queer object. To put it simply, Bonnicastle addresses the queer queerly.

Although the Oxford English Dictionary cites 1932 as the first occasion in which "queer" was used in print to mean "homosexual," the term would have been applied in various contexts and with varying sharpness to the homosexual subculture before its stabilization in the argot. While this essay does not anachronistically attribute a post-

structuralist agenda to Gissing, it does suggest that his open and indeterminate use of the term “queer” anticipates our own and that Gissing did not feel one’s queerness was necessarily rooted in homosexual identity. Our assessment of what “queer” means has come full circle. Categories of identity such as “homosexual” and “lesbian” were not yet stable in the late nineteenth century. “Queer” as we use it today deliberately obfuscates these same categories.

### **Conclusion: On Straight Queers and Queer Families**

Queer theory is inspired by the post-structuralist project to undermine the assumption of the individual’s unified and stable identity and to illuminate the way that ideologies construct identity. Queer theory thus undermines traditional gay and lesbian “identity politics” by examining rifts between individuals and within individuals. For instance, Eve Sedgwick has listed a number of valences through which we may judge sexual identity beyond a person’s mere sexual object choice (that is, the biological sex of one’s preferred partner). Among them, she lists a person’s procreative choice, preferred sexual acts, sexual fantasies, enjoyment of power in sexual relations, and community of cultural and political identification.<sup>36</sup> Queerness can be located in any of these, and so, as David Halperin has argued: “There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers”; Warner also calls it “a largely intuitive and half-articulate theory.”<sup>37</sup>

There is a growing body of literature arguing for the existence of the “straight queer.”<sup>38</sup> In the words of one theorist, “Even heterosexuals can be queer... because Queer encompasses all human sexual practices while rejecting the opposing binary hierarchies of gender, race, sexuality, class, etc that currently govern our culture and society. Queer theory seeks to overturn those binaries and the labels which go with them to acknowledge a fuzzy interstitial area where most of us really belong.”<sup>39</sup> Another critic concurs: “[Q]ueer’ does not stand in opposition to ‘heterosexual’ but instead to ‘straight,’ a term that by contrast suggests all that is restrictive about ‘normative’ sexuality, a category that excludes what is deemed undesirable, deviant, dangerous, unnatural, unproductive.”<sup>40</sup> We look again at Sedgwick’s list of factors and rest our eyes on the last, “community of cultural and political identification.” The cultural and political identification these characters share is their commitment to a nebulous bohemia of garrets and poverty, of impromptu meals with friends, of personal style and mutual toleration. One might argue: “What could be more

queer than a (possibly heterosexual) mannish woman setting up house with a (possibly heterosexual) effeminate man?" Shall we conclude that this constituting of an alternative family is an act of queer performativity?<sup>41</sup>

We might claim that Gissing was indeed ahead of his time in imagining the possibilities for complex, unconventional "queer-heterosexual" relationships. Two years before writing *The Crown of Life*, Gissing had already begun exploring this avenue with his short story "Comrades in Arms," published in *Human Odds and Ends* (1898). In this tale, a journalist, Wilfrid Langley, aids his fellow-writer the mannish Bertha Childerstone during a debilitating illness and in the process falls in love with her. Langley is strangely charged by her brusque manner, her disorderly flat, her lack of "domestic virtues."<sup>42</sup> As much as her fragility during her illness attracts Langley, in her recovery, Miss Childerstone still dazzles him.<sup>43</sup> She has lost nothing of her mannishness. To reinforce this, Gissing sets a scene in which Langley visits her friends "for the mere sake of talking about her," and we gain an insight into how the rest of the world sees her (p. 17).

They, it appeared, were ignorant of her [recent] movements.

"Gone as a war correspondent, I shouldn't wonder," said a young man; and the laughter of the company appreciated his joke.

"Oh, she really is too mannish," remarked a young matron. "I suppose you study her as a curiosity, Mr. Langley?"

"We're great chums," Wilfrid answered with a laugh.

"Well, at all events we needn't bid *you* beware," jested the lady. (pp. 17-18)

The last coy line in the passage is as overt a reference to mannish lesbianism as one will find in Gissing's complete works. Just as Miss Bonnicastle is "an abnormality" to Piers,<sup>44</sup> Bertha Childerstone is a "curiosity" to those around her. Yet Gissing refuses to confirm the popular assumption that masculinity in women signifies their homosexuality: Miss Childerstone admits to having been tempted by Langley's love letters.

Langley's courtship of Miss Childerstone involves a chaotic forfeiture and slippage of traditional power and gender roles. Perhaps an earlier version of Miss Bonnicastle, Miss Childerstone speaks like a schoolboy. Langley is "old man," "old chum," "my dear boy," and when he is stubbornly pursuing her, "goosey."<sup>45</sup> She never ceases to treat Langley as a mere "chum," and even rebuffs his advances with the gruff and pragmatic: "Don't be sentimental, old man. It's all right" (p. 12). Like Miss Bonnicastle, Miss Childerstone is likeable enough,

not least for her “blunt way,” her common sense and humor. She tells him at a crucial, uncomfortable moment: “Go a yard or two away, there’s a good boy. If not, I hobble back into the other room” (p. 12).<sup>46</sup>

Childerstone meets Langley’s unexpected kiss with “a look of confusion,” and no wonder: the scenario is confusing to Langley himself (p. 12). He visits her almost against his own will: “He... had fallen into so limp a state that there was no choice save to go and be tortured” (p. 14). It is only when he defends his love letters: “I’m not ashamed of them,” that Childerstone finds “a certain quiet manliness” in his words and approves of him again (p. 15). In imitation of his own generous help in restoring her health, Childerstone effectively cures Langley of his infatuation by sending him on a long holiday with a travelling bag and ticket she has purchased for him. The story ends with an assertion of their renewed pleasant, platonic relationship; presumably, Langley has only suffered a kind of queer temporary insanity. Yet in the design of the tale’s final sentence, their strange erotic episode lingers with Langley and hence, with the reader: “For all that--for all that--he could not forget that he had kissed her lips” (p. 19).

Gissing would seem to argue here that sexual desire and identity are indeed transitive: that desire may cross over to new object-choices and cross back again. Langley, in the habit of longing for “an old-fashioned girl” who would “make an ideal housewife and mother,” is temporarily and inexplicably smitten with a mannish woman (p. 5).

We can chart in *The Crown of Life* a development away from the limited conception of queerness, community and creativity in “Comrades in Arms.” In the short story, Childerstone is determined not to fall in love with Langley, because to do so would compromise a bohemian, independent way of life. Langley has courted her with earnestness and gentleness: she claims that these formalities anticipate a bourgeois, constraining marriage.

“That longing for domesticity gave me a shudder.... Oh, you are so much more respectable than I thought.” She broke off, laughing.... “Look at this room, dirty and disorderly. This is all the home I care for.... In poverty--and anything you or I can count upon would be poverty--I prefer the freedom of loneliness.” (p. 16)

Childerstone regains her strength by intentionally distancing herself from Langley. In contrast, *The Crown of Life* ends with the presumed chaste cohabitation of Miss Bonnicastle and Mr. Kite. They are mutually dependent as Kite requires Bonnicastle’s physical vigor to strengthen him, and she relies on his imaginative artwork to inspire



her. Here queerness is not about isolation but interdependence. Here Gissing sketches a proposal for a queer community.

Gissing refuses to name Miss Bonnicastle's desires or to question Kite's love for Olga. One may find this a weakness of characterization or a circumvention of homosexuality. Alternatively one may argue that it is Gissing's rather sophisticated bid for the reader to acknowledge indeterminacy and accept it. Gissing's bohemia seems to contain the queer in all its valences: Bonnicastle and Kite's transgression of gender codes, Olga's attraction to Kite's effeminacy, Kite's unexpected love of women and careless domination of them, Bonnicastle's claiming Kite as family. "A queer place, isn't it?" Olga asks Piers on his first visit (p. 154). To which the reader might just as casually reply: "Yes, isn't it?"

<sup>1</sup>*London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 477. Hereafter abridged to *Diary*.

<sup>2</sup>*Diary*, p. 483.

<sup>3</sup>The idea of celibacy as a queer lifestyle-choice remains under-theorized. While Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has famously listed various practices that fall into the queer net, including fantasies, unconventional power relationships, and cross-generational relationships, she does not mention the voluntary negation of sex. Calvin Thomas has written: "Celibacy can be positioned as a political refusal of the sexual possibilities legitimated by heteronormative culture, and hence... it can be read as queer" (email to the author, 13 August 2001). The Victorian classification of celibacy as non-normative and suspect has been documented in John Shelton Reed's work on High Anglican same-sex religious communities in *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup>*Diary*, p. 375.

<sup>5</sup>*The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, eds. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995), VII, pp. 280-81. Hereafter abridged to *CL*.

<sup>6</sup>H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography* (Boston: Little Brown, c. 1934), p. 483.

<sup>7</sup>*CL*, V, p. 296.

<sup>8</sup>"Practical Aesthetics and Decadent Rationale in George Gissing," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 55-71.

<sup>9</sup>Michael Collie, *George Gissing, a Biography* (Folkestone, England: Dawson; Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977), pp. 115-16, 122-23, 129.

<sup>10</sup>In the conclusion to his fourth chapter in *Gissing in Context* (London: Macmillan, 1975), Adrian Poole suggests Gissing's heartfelt alliance with "fellow sceptics and subversives" in the context of Gissing's self-conception as an exile of artistic integrity

within the literary market of the 1890s, but Poole does not explore this imaginary community in terms of Gissing's received images of bohemia.

<sup>11</sup>*CL*, V, pp. 212, 351; VI, p. 207.

<sup>12</sup>*CL*, V, p. 159.

<sup>13</sup>*Diary*, p. 214.

<sup>14</sup>*CL*, IV, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup>*CL*, IV, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup>*CL*, IV, p. 288.

<sup>17</sup>*CL*, IV, p. 123, footnote 6.

<sup>18</sup>Regenia Gagnier, "A Critique of Practical Aesthetics," in *Aesthetics and Ideology*, ed. George Levine (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p. 270.

<sup>19</sup>Gissing would scarcely have called the Society of Authors a bohemian set, for he doubted the artistic legitimacy of the work of many of its paying members--but its Syndicate was useful for providing authors with agents.

<sup>20</sup>*CL*, IV, p. 288.

<sup>21</sup>Gissing conveys a distance, but more, perhaps a denial of the poems' homoeroticism. He writes specifically, "the passages in which Whitman speaks in this way of male friendships awaken no sympathy in me; it is my habit to regard such language as a tender exaggeration. Far *truer* to me would it sound if he talked of hearty grasp of hands." *CL*, IV, p. 111.

<sup>22</sup>*CL*, VII, p. 290.

<sup>23</sup>*CL*, VII, p. 23, footnote 6.

<sup>24</sup>The essay was printed as an appendix to Gosse's *Questions at Issue* (1893). It is included in *CL*, V, pp. 96-99.

<sup>25</sup>*CL*, VI, p. 301.

<sup>26</sup>*Diary*, p. 433 (24 January 1897).

<sup>27</sup>See Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>28</sup>*CL*, VI, p. 286; *Diary*, p. 232. Gissing does not comment on either of these sources at length in his letters and journals.

<sup>29</sup>Gissing was interested in theories of bio-sociology, and his fiction alternately proposes and denies that environment can taint women's inherent femininity. In his short story "Comrades in Arms," the protagonist Wilfrid Langley observes that as a result of Miss Childerstone's struggle in the world of journalism, "she seemed to have been growing less feminine" (in *Human Odds and Ends: Stories and Sketches* [New York: Garland Publishing, 1977], p. 8). In *The Odd Women* Mary Barfoot, lecturing before the girls of her school, contests current theories that life in the workplace "unsexes" women (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1998, ed. Arlene Young, p. 151).

<sup>30</sup>The original reviewer for the *Manchester Guardian* wrote: "The book owes more of its strong interest to underplots and secondary characters" (7 November 1899, cited in *CL*, VII, p. 414, footnote 3).

<sup>31</sup>*The Crown of Life* (New York: F. A. Stokes Co, 1899), pp. 139-40. Subsequent references are given in the text.

<sup>32</sup>*The Girl's Own Paper* (4 October 1890), p. 4, cited in Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 56.

<sup>33</sup>On these connections, see Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp. 16-26.

<sup>34</sup>Introduction, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. xxvi. In *The Crown of Life*, the protagonist Piers comes to occupy a queer space politically by claiming residence and cultural affiliation with Russia. In its otherness, Russia might be claimed a correlative to artistic bohemia and perhaps this is why Piers is not discomfited on his visits to the studio.

<sup>35</sup>Seth Koven, "Nasty Books," unpublished mss., presented as a paper at the American Historical Association conference, January 2001. This is a chapter in *Slumming: Social and Sexual Politics in London, 1848-1948* (forthcoming).

<sup>36</sup>Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 7. In *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), Sedgwick writes: "It is a rather amazing fact that, of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another (dimensions that include preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, etc. etc. etc.), precisely one, the gender of object choice, emerged from the turn of the century, and has remained as *the* dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of sexual orientation" (p. 8).

<sup>37</sup>David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 62; Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 19. Both of these are cited in Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 96.

<sup>38</sup>See *Straight with a Twist*, ed. Calvin Thomas (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

<sup>39</sup>Harry M. Benshof, "Notes on Gay History/Queer Theory/Queer Film." <http://orgs.unt.edu/ally/queerfilm.html>. This belief in the "straight queer," fairly new to queer studies, has inevitably met with contestation. While some theorists have praised the concept of "queer" for its inclusivity, others have protested its potential to blur and obscure specific gay and lesbian constituencies in need of advocacy. See Jagose, pp. 101-26.

<sup>40</sup>Katherine Gantz, "Not That There's Anything Wrong with That: Reading the Queer in *Seinfeld*," in *Straight with a Twist*, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>41</sup>On queer families, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Tale of the Avunculate: Queer Tutelage in *The Importance of Being Earnest*" in *Tendencies*, pp. 52-72.

<sup>42</sup>*Human Odds and Ends*, p. 10. Subsequent references are given in the text.

<sup>43</sup>With this emphasis, my reading differs from the one critical essay published on the story: Lawless Bean, "Gissing's 'Comrades in Arms': New Women, Old Attitudes" in *Turn-of-the-Century Women*, Vol. 1 (1984), pp. 40-42.

<sup>44</sup>*The Crown of Life*, p. 183.

<sup>45</sup>"My dear boy" perhaps stands out among these. In Eve Sedgwick's analysis of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the phrase is among the endearments she calls "murmurs from... clubland, the fifth-form study, the darkened bedroom" (*Tendencies*, p. 69).

<sup>46</sup>In this way, she again anticipates Miss Bonnicastle who sees others' infatuations and dreams as "silly" (p. 289) and tells Olga in a sentence remarkably like Childerstone's: "Sentiment is all right but sentimentality is all wrong. Do get rid of it, there's a good girl" (p. 329). When Piers learns that Olga has rejected him for another man, Bonnicastle likewise orders him: "Now go home to bed, and sleep like a philosopher" (p. 302).

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### Gissing and the Railways

SYDNEY LOTT  
Eastbourne

"Greystone, the midland town which was missed by the steam highroad, and so preserves much of the beauty and tranquillity of days gone by."

When Gissing wrote these words in 1896 for the opening pages of *The Whirlpool*,<sup>1</sup> the fictitious town would have been one of the few places in the country to enjoy the advantage--or disadvantage--of escape from the Railway boom. The face of Britain had been transformed since Railwaymania had engulfed the country from mid-century until faint warning signs for branch lines came from the ominous appearance of the petrol-driven car at the turn of the century. It, therefore, fitted neatly into Gissing's lifespan and had a profound, if rather confused, influence on his life and fiction. He recoiled from the horror of noise, dirt and spoliation of the countryside although he took full advantage of the way they enabled him to travel frequently and extensively throughout the land. His most bitter comments came from the manner in which Railways encouraged the growth of his foremost hatred--advertising. The vitriolic description of King's Cross underground station given in *In the Year of Jubilee*<sup>2</sup> reads:

They descended and stood together upon the platform, among hurrying crowds, in black fumes that poisoned the palate with sulphur. This way and that sped the

demon engines, whirling lighted waggons full of people. Shrill whistles, the hiss and roar of steam, the bang, clap, bang of carriage-doors, the clatter of feet on wood and stone--all echoed and reverberated from a huge cloudy vault above them. High and low, on every available yard of wall, advertisements clamoured to the eye: theatres, journals, soaps, medicines, concerts, furniture, wines, prayer-meetings--all the produce and refuse of civilisation announced in staring letters, in daubed effigies, base, paltry, grotesque. A battle-ground of advertisements, fitly chosen amid subterranean din and reek; a symbol to the gaze of that relentless warfare which ceases not, night and day, in the world above.

Compare this nightmare at King's Cross with the charm of the entry on page 58 in the *Commonplace Book*<sup>3</sup>, which could have been written by John Betjeman half a century later:

A warm summer day in town always brings before my mind a vision of remote little railway stations, where the train, going holidaywards, stops on its long journey, where country people get in for a short ride & talk in dialect, where there is a smell of flowers about the platform, where the very puffing of the engine has a drowsy restfulness.

This sentiment is developed in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Summer I.

Gissing's diary, letters, novels and short stories abound with references to and anecdotes about Railways. They tell of careful research to capture the atmosphere of station platforms such as described in the opening paragraphs of *Eve's Ransom*. There is the early morning visit to Waterloo to see the departure of the 5.50 newspaper train in preparation for "Fleet-Footed Hester." They betray a knowledge of the complicated intricacy of time-tables for Hugh Carnaby's panic journey to Weymouth:

A glance at the time-tables had shown him that, if he travelled by the GreatWestern, he could reach Weymouth at five minutes past four; whereas the first train he could catch at Waterloo would not bring him to his destination until half-an-hour later; on the other hand, he could get away from London by the South-Western forty minutes sooner than by the other line, and this decided him. Yesterday, Waterloo had been merely the most convenient station on account of his business in town; to-day he chose it because he had to evade arrest on a charge of homicide.<sup>4</sup>

Gissing also used Railway developments to show the influence they had on the lives of his characters and, consequently, his story lines. One of the most notable examples is in *The Whirlpool*. Harvey Rolfe,

seeking a peaceful winter retreat, had come across a still little town between mountains and shore in Carnarvonshire on the outer sea. He triumphantly announced it to have “No railway within seven miles. Just the place for a pedant to escape to, and live there through the winter with his musty books.”<sup>5</sup> He was soon to replace the musty books with a far from musty wife--Alma Frothingham. After initial reluctance, Alma became a convert, even an enthusiast, for the simple life. She found the spot on her old school atlas and declared it to be just the kind of place--far off, but not too far. Any lingering doubts were brushed aside, although Chapter XI of *The Whirlpool* ends on an enigmatic note--“And the railway station?” Harvey did not respond.

After a while in the splendour of the Welsh mountains, a new temptation emerged in the form of the Metropolitan Railway. Most developing railways acquired a considerable amount of land in addition to that required for the track. One immediate aim was to make sure that the Company had the land specified in its limits of deviation which its authorising Act gave it to meet unforeseen difficulties in construction without needing to seek further enabling legislation. The other was to satisfy landowners who refused to sell the land required for the railway without adding a great deal more adjoining land from their holdings. The Metropolitan bought all of it, but far from selling it off again as was generally required by Parliament, it managed to manipulate its own Acts to help it develop the land for residential purposes. Thus Metroland was created and able to offer attractive housing to well-heeled City gents with easy access by rail to their offices in the heart of London.

Considerable cash in hand after the simple life in Carnarvonshire enabled Harvey to join this elite. He had never been beyond Swiss Cottage, but he now looked with interest at the new districts springing up towards Harrow. He even travelled by himself to a greater distance on the same line, making a survey of the country from Harrow to Aylesbury. He finally found a newly built house at Pinner, not many minutes by rail from Alma’s friends at Kingsbury-Neasden and only about half-an-hour from Baker Street. The rent was twice as much as he had been paying, but he signed a three years’ lease without misgiving.

Alma was delighted and declared that if she lived half-an-hour’s journey from the centre of activity, she would be “protected against the time-wasting intrusion of five-o’clock babblers.”<sup>6</sup> She would have the precious advantage of being able to use London for all legitimate

purposes without danger of being drawn into the vortex of its temptations.

Harvey appears to have agreed as he confided to his friend, Hugh Carnaby, that for anyone who wished to live practically in London and yet away from its frenzy, the uplands towards Buckinghamshire were the most convenient ground.

Gissing is the only major Victorian novelist to focus on the early development of the Metropolitan Railway. John Betjeman's considerable interest in the social implications of the Line, fifty years later, may have originated in his reading *The Whirlpool* when he commissioned Myfanwy Piper to write an introduction to the book for the Watergate Classics, of which he was General Editor. In 1948 it appeared above her *nom de jeune fille*, Myfanwy Evans.

In the world of Railways, the Metropolitan was unique and was justly championed and perhaps immortalised by Betjeman. John Glover in his book *Metropolitan Railway--Glory Days* (Ian Allan, 1998) paints a delightful picture of the late Poet Laureate sitting in the Baker Street buffet composing his poem "The Metropolitan Railway." Where else, he asks, in a public place could one enthuse over a stained glass windmill and a pot of tea, within a setting of fine woodwork and a smell of dinner? On the walls one could view sepia prints of Pinner's leafy lanes.

After a few months in Pinner's leafy lanes, Alma's enthusiasm waned somewhat—"What a nuisance that she lived so far from the centre of things! It was this perpetual travelling that had disordered her health, and made everything twice as troublesome as it need be."<sup>7</sup>

Harvey was equally uneasy with "Thousands of men, who sleep on the circumference of London, and go each day to business, [who] are practically strangers to the district nominally their home; ever ready to strike tent, as convenience bids, they can feel no interest in a vicinage which merely happens to house them for the time being, and as often as not they remain ignorant of the names of streets or roads through which they pass in going to the railway station."<sup>8</sup> These sentiments heralded a move for the Rolfes from Metroland at the edge of the whirlpool to urban Gunnersbury, a step nearer to the epicentre.

After a chronicle of greed, adultery, homicide and drugs, culminating in the death of Alma, the whirlpool subsides and the book ends with Harvey listening to little Hughie singing his favourite song, "Fear no more the heat of the sun," in the tranquil setting of their new home in the midland town missed by the steam highroad--Greystone.

<sup>1</sup>*The Whirlpool* (London: Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>*In the Year of Jubilee* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987), p. 309.

<sup>3</sup>*George Gissing's Commonplace Book*, ed. Jacob Korg (New York: New York Public Library, 1962).

<sup>4</sup>*The Whirlpool*, *ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 381.

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### More on Gissing and the Theatre

JACOB KORG

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In the July, 2001 number of the *Journal*, Pierre Coustillas analyzed Gissing's love of the theatre and his disillusionment with the contemporary theatrical scene. While warning that the accounts of theatrical performances in his novels and short stories do not give a complete picture of his attitude, Coustillas cites the many passages where plays and their audiences are treated with pronounced distaste.

Another instance of this is a passage that Gissing deleted from *Born in Exile*. The cancelled passage appears in the manuscript of the novel at the Huntington Library, and was originally in the section of Chapter 3 where Godwin Peak goes to see a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. His unhappiness at having to sit in the pit with the proletariat of the town is described, and he notes that he is seated between a shop-boy and a grocer's wife. The cancelled passage followed:

When the curtain rose there was a new subject of discontent. Capulets and Montagues were paltry ranters; if for a moment he lost himself in the currents of the story, too surely he was brought back to the present by mangled metre, vulgar pronunciation, ludicrous mock-heroic. The Juliet--she was pretty, and perchance had sounded her *h*'s from childhood, but her love-making was that of the English girl who "brings in" scraps of poetry and feels half ashamed as she utters them. The eulogistic remarks of his neighbours were a ceaseless torment. Notices in the papers had prepared him to admire this actress; by nature he was anything but finical, and desired nothing better than to enjoy heartily; but in truth he had already grown too old for the theatre. At ten or twelve his reshaping fantasy would have revelled in a performance such as this; at nineteen he could only criticize and lament traditional glories.



The published text continues: “By the end he had fallen into fatigue.”

The passage is of course intended to characterize Peak’s sense of his superiority, but we recognize many of Gissing’s own complaints about going to the theatre, such as the vulgarity of the audiences and the incompetence of the actors. Also characteristic is Peak’s willingness to be entertained, and his defeat by what is happening on the stage. As Coustillas’s article shows, Gissing too began as an enthusiast, but was deeply disappointed by what the contemporary theatre offered him.

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### **Paul Mattheisen (1925-2001)**

With great regret we have to announce the death of Paul Mattheisen, who was known to readers of this journal mainly as one of the three editors of the *Collected Letters of George Gissing* and *With Gissing in Italy*. He died in his sleep on 22 September at his home in Johnson City, N.Y. As all the volumes of Gissing’s *Letters* tell us, he was a native of Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he began his career as an actor and a radio personality, studying philosophy and classics at the University of Minnesota. His knowledge of Latin was a valuable asset while Gissing’s letters were being edited. A graduate of Rutgers University, he taught English literature for years at the State University of New York at Binghamton. With Michael Millgate he was editor of Edmund Gosse’s American correspondence, *Transatlantic Dialogue* (1965), wrote a monograph of *The Ring and the Book*, and contributed articles to various periodicals, including *Notes and Queries* and the present journal. He owned an important collection of Browning books as well as an impressive number of long-playing records. It is to be hoped that Brian Ború Dunne’s recollections of Senator Bronson Cutting, which he had finished editing with Arthur Young, will be published in the near future.

Paul was a disinterested friend, a great letter writer and debater, always prepared to look for information which might be of help to a fellow scholar. His sense of humour was remarkable.

Our sympathy goes to his relatives and friends, foremost among these Arthur C. Young, who had known him for fifty years.

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## Book Review

George Gissing, *Il sale della terra*, a cura di Emanuela Ettorre, introduzione di Pierre Coustillas, Pescara: Edizioni Tracce, 2000, pp. 118.

Since the latter half of the nineteenth century Gissing's works have enjoyed both an increasing popularity and a positive critical reevaluation. Indeed, he is now generally regarded as a precursor of a certain form of modern fiction rather than a marginal voice of the literary world of his own time. Temporal distance has inevitably sharpened our perspective of a bourgeois Victorian world which was all too eager to assert the values of industrial and scientific progress, being at the same time impervious to the degradation, poverty, corruption and squalor that were, in part, the price to be paid for such conquests. The stark realism of Gissing's fiction, with its frank depiction of those very aspects Victorian bourgeois society disregarded, was undoubtedly too close to the bone to be accepted. Yet, Gissing's fortune was not so much compromised by the fact that these features constituted the dominant traits of his narrative universe as by the bitterly critical manner in which he portrayed the society of his day. Also, not only was he to derive the focus and tone for his narratives largely from the French and Russian writers of the Naturalist School, his critical stance of Victorian society was likewise animated by an intellectualism that owed much to continental literature and philosophical speculation. He was unfortunate to have lived at a time in which foreign culture (particularly French) was regarded with suspicion and the lower classes lacked a literary voice to represent them (excluding the partial exception of Dickens) and in which anti-Empirical positions, although emergent, were few and far between.

In terms of critical reception at least, he was even more unfortunate with his stories than with his novels. Written, as he himself admitted, to supplement his meagre income, they met with little attention or recognition. But that they are far more than the mere "pot-boilers" he himself claimed they were can be perceived by any sensitive writer. Yet, in spite of this, there still exists no complete critical edition of his stories, the most significant collection to date remaining Pierre Coustillas's *The Day of Silence and Other Stories*, published by Dent in 1993. Since Gissing is still relatively unknown to the Italian public (very few of his works having been translated here), this elegant little volume which contains Italian translations of three stories from his output, "The Salt of the Earth," "The Pessimist of

Plato Road” and “Spellbound,” comes as a welcome surprise. In her lucidly written Afterword, Emanuela Ettorre (who is also translator of the stories) underlines the appropriateness of the choices by giving a thorough and acute analysis of the semantic and structural factors by which they are interlinked: the antithesis between life and death; man’s uneasy relationship with himself and with others and the corruption of power and money, all set within the sordid, degrading and frighteningly impersonal cityscape of Victorian London--a universe that constitutes not so much a background as a foreground in which Gissing’s anti-heroes are inevitably engulfed. Indeed, as Ettorre notes, in the end nothing in the lives of the main protagonists of the three stories changes, condemned as they are to lead a “minimal life [...] at the margins of existence.” This sense of inaction and passivity, of the individual overcome by the overwhelming forces of society can be seen as an anticipation of the similar kind of existential dilemmas that recur in the anti-hero figure of modern novels. Furthermore, the universe of Gissing’s stories can be seen to be clearly divided into two parts; selflessness and abnegation on the one hand and selfishness and egoism on the other (thus, the greed and moral degradation of which the characters are either active agents, as in the cases of Dolamore and Dunn, or passive victims, as in Thomas Bird, are at the centre of each). Thematic considerations aside, the urgency and stark directness of Gissing’s language is by no means lost in Ettorre’s translation as she admirably succeeds in rendering the incisive and biting qualities of his prose as well as revealing a sensitivity in lexical choice that reflects a profound understanding of the texts.

Since Gissing’s own life was racked by poverty and squalor, it has been a recurrent criticism that he puts too much of himself in his works, and that they are essentially a product of his own bitterness with the world. Pierre Coustillas, whose authoritative introduction elucidates several important factors concerning the inception and composition of the stories, points out that Gissing’s courage lies not so much in describing the sordid aspects of life, as in placing artistic sincerity above everything. Besides, not only did Gissing believe absolute artistic objectivity to be an illusion, but he also did little to suppress his own personality in his texts. Had he done so they would certainly have lost much of their power and impact, and we would probably have been denied writers such as George Orwell, upon whom Gissing had a profound influence.

Yet, behind this explicitly social-historical context, Gissing’s characters take on the universal guises of Everyman and the world they

inhabit assumes the moral-symbolic dimension of a fallen world, one void of passions and conflicts. His opening description of the impersonal and indifferent crowd in "The Salt of the Earth," which he compares to the flowing of the river Thames, anticipates Eliot's Dante-derived description of the crowds flowing over London Bridge in *The Waste Land* ("A crowd flowed over London Bridge so many, I thought death had not undone so many") by almost thirty years. This sense of spiritual death is what Ettore alludes to when she points out the fact that the protagonists themselves belong, in turn, to a mass of humanity characterised by a lifeless uniformity and anonymity. It is precisely this modernist sense of society as a waste land that made Gissing's vision so anti-Victorian. As Coustillas himself says, he would have undoubtedly been happier had he lived in the latter half of the twentieth century, which would have been better equipped to understand and appreciate his works more fully. As this volume testifies, that appreciation is now seen not only from a temporal point of view but also a geographical one.-- Renzo D'Agnillo, Università degli Studi "Gabriele d'Annunzio", Pescara.

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### Notes and News

We hear that *A Garland for Gissing*, the collection of papers that were read at the Amsterdam Conference in September 1999, is to appear early next year. It has been edited by Dr. Bouwe Postmus. The next Gissing conference, which will be organized by Professor John Spiers, will take place at the University of London in July 2003. We should be able to give further details in our next number.

While in London recently we visited the old Reading Room at the British Museum in the footsteps of Bouwe Postmus. His article in our July number made the place irresistibly attractive. We succeeded in taking a number of photographs of the various places where Gissing is commemorated, and we are pleased to add a footnote to the article. A souvenir book, *The British Museum Reading Room* by Marjorie Caygill, is now available from sales points in the Reading Room and the Great Court. This 48-page booklet issued in pictorial covers is a remarkable document, to be placed on the same shelf as the latest edition of *New Grub Street* in private and public libraries. It costs only £5.99. The booklet begins with a two-page photograph of the Reading Room in

1875, two years before Gissing first entered it with a reader's ticket he had obtained through the good offices of Captain Charles Mercier. Among other illustrations are the following: the Reading Room under construction in 1855; the builders at the apex of the dome, again in 1855; a card of invitation to a private view of the Reading Room, 5 May 1857, thirteen days before it was opened to readers; part of the labyrinth of bookstacks known as the "iron library"; views of the inside of the dome, and numerous portraits of such famous readers as Shaw, Thackeray, Wilde, Angus Wilson, Virginia Woolf, Karl Marx, Lenin, Trotsky--and George Gissing. On three occasions he appears in the text (pp. 16, 24-25, 26-27) with quotations from *New Grub Street* and *Henry Ryecroft* (unfortunately spelt *Rycroft* and dated 1902). The Reading Room is seen through the eyes of Marian Yule. Near the end of the book is a list of books about the Reading Room and about the British Museum and its library. Special attention should be paid to that by E. F. Ellis, *The British Museum in Fiction* (Buffalo, 1981), which contains a good many references to Gissing.

Not surprisingly, books in which Gissing appears more or less significantly, yet were overlooked by his bibliographers and critics in the last half-century or more, are regularly brought to our notice. Thus Vol. 8 of the Master Classics (Doubleday, Page and Co., 1927) which contains passages from the *Ryecroft Papers* on A Pot of Honey, Music, and Money (found by C. M. Wyatt); Henry J. Forman's *Grecian Italy* (Jonathan Cape, 1927), at the end of which occurs an account of the author's visit to Crotona, of the Albergo Concordia and of Gissing's dramatic stay there (reported by Peter Morton); *Het Literair Leesboek*, an anthology of texts selected by John Müller (de Bijenkorf, 1990), in which the *Tristram Shandy* section of *Henry Ryecroft* is reprinted (discovered by Bouwe Postmus); *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel* (Virago, 1994), in which *The Odd Women* and *The Unclassed* are briefly discussed (traced by the editor).

A positive-negative piece of news. In its number for September-October 1960 the French journal *Les Langues Modernes* published on p. 89 a twenty-five-line text entitled "The Deadly Sameness of Greater London," which was said to be Gissing's work. The contents clearly indicated that this text was part of a review of G. W. Steevens's posthumously published book, *Glimpses of Three Nations* (Blackwood, 1901). The chances of Gissing having reviewed this volume for an English periodical seemed extremely slight for at least two reasons--he

did next to no reviewing except, a little later, for the *Times Literary Supplement*, and the book appeared about the time he was staying with the Wellses at Sandgate, prior to entering the East Anglian Sanatorium at Nayland. However, earnest research to trace the elusive review was attempted in the last three or four decades--though in vain. The solution to the problem was eventually found last July when a copy of C. F. G. Masterman's collection of essays *In Peril of Change* fell into our hands. Not only does it contain the essay on Gissing which the *Critical Heritage* volume has made familiar to many readers since 1972, but one on Steevens's book, of which the text in the French review was a drastically condensed version peppered with misprints!

The following is an extract from "Fiction and Mrs. Grundy" by Grant Allen (*The Novel Review*, July 1892, pp. 294-315), which Gissing is likely to have relished if he read it: "Who, after all, is this redoubtable Mrs. Grundy, who has such a good opinion of her own moral and critical character that she dares to set herself up, with inconceivable effrontery, as the censor of the highest of the highest and noblest minds in England? Why, just the average specimen of English middle-aged matronhood, with all its petty prejudices, all its selfish narrowness, all its hatred of right, all its persistent clinging to every expiring form of wrong or injustice. A pretty sort of censor!" See Peter Morton's masterly article under "Recent Publications." Opening with a quotation from *New Grub Street* about literature as a trade, it offers a thorough and stimulating study of Grant Allen's life, personality and career. Allen, Peter Morton concludes, was "a mouthpiece for the *Zeitgeist*. His interests were so various, his grasp on his own time and its fleeting concerns and tastes so perceptive and lucid, that he will surely continue to command a small audience in each generation."

Articles on Gissing, as we report every quarter, continue to appear in Italy, and not a few of them in the last couple of years were the work of Teresa Liguori of Crotone. In no. 16 of *Arcobaleno*, the journal of the Istituto tecnico nautico statale "Mario Ciliberto," the latest activities of her school are recorded, especially those connected with her programme of research about Dickens, Gissing and Norman Douglas. Recently, in *La Provincia KR* ("La cultura non ha frontiere," 8 September, p. 13), she introduced her readers to the sad story of a German scholar, Erwin Ortmayer, who like Gissing visited Crotone, moved by his passionate interest in the history of the town, and is buried in the local cemetery by the Ionian Sea.

## Recent Publications

### Volumes

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, Oxford University Press (Oxford World's Classics), [2001]. Third impression in the new format. £6.99.

George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, New York and London: W. W. Norton. [2001]. Fourth impression in the new format. \$9.95 or £7.10.

### Articles, reviews, etc.

Kirsten Hertel, *London zwischen Naturalismus und Modern*, Universitätsverlag C. Winter, Heidelberg, 1997. Ch. IV consists in part of "In darkest London: George Gissing's *The Nether World* 1889," pp. 104-66. It is followed by a study of *A Child of the Jago*.

Peter Allan Dale, "Gissing and Bosanquet: Culture Unhoused," in *Homes and Homelessness in the Victorian Imagination*, edited by Murray Baumgarten and H. M. Daleski, New York: AMS Press, 1998, pp. 269-80.

David B. Eakin, "Gissing," in *Critical Survey of Long Fiction*, Second Revised Edition, Volume 3, Pasadena, California and Hackensack, N.J.: Salem Press, 1999, pp. 1271-77.

Diana Maltz, "Practical Aesthetics and Decadent Rationale in George Gissing," *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2000), no. 1, pp. 55-71.

Michael Cronin, "Recensioni," *Rivista di Studi Vittoriani*, no. 10, July 2000, pp. 154-56. Review of *Il sale della terra*.

Teresa Liguori, "Parco letterario e sviluppo economico," *La Provincia KR*, 19 May 2001, p. 13. This article is followed on the same page by "Un'esperienza da ricordare." Both refer to Gissing. See also the number for 30 June, p. 14, on the formal opening of the *parco letterario* devoted to Norman Douglas, contributed by Giulio Grilletta.

Teresa Liguori, "Una bella amicizia," *La Provincia KR*, 21 July 2001, p. 13. Professor Liguori has succeeded in identifying the guardian

of the Crotona cemetery whom Gissing so pleasantly mentioned in his diary and in *By the Ionian Sea*. A photograph of Giulio Marino is reproduced. The leading article in the present number of the *Journal* offers a good deal of additional information on Marino, his employer, Baron Luigi Berlingieri and the Mayor of Crotona in 1897, Marquis Anselmo Berlingieri.

Allan W. Atlas, "George Gissing on Music: Italian Impressions," *Musical Times*, Summer 2001, pp. 27-38.

Anon., "Un reporter statunitense ha ripercorso l'itinerario del celebre autore vittoriano," *Avvenire*, Anno XXXIV, no. 199, 23 August 2001, p. 23. This is a review of John Keahey's *A Sweet and Glorious Land*. Another anonymous article on the same page is devoted to *By the Ionian Sea*, "Un secolo fa l'inglese Gissing pubblicava il diario del suo viaggio italiano," while in a third article Massimo Giuliani explores the Paparazzo trail, "Cercando Paparazzo." The three articles are illustrated by the well-known portrait of Gissing reading a book by Mendelssohn (November 1895).

Fernanda Rossi, *Itinerari e viaggiatori inglesi nella Calabria del '700 e '800*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 2001. An enquiry into the successive Calabrian journeys of Henry Swinburne, Brian Hill, Richard Keppel Craven, Arthur John Strutt, Edward Lear and Gissing, to whom chapter VI is devoted. The volume, which is published in the same collection as Francesco Badolato's *La terra del sole*, contains a useful bibliography in which books by Agazio Trombetta and Mario Praz are listed.

Simon J. James, "'The Truth about Gissing': Reassessing the Literary Friendship of George Gissing and H. G. Wells," *The Wellsian*, no. 24, 2001, pp. 2-21. An excellent contribution to the subject.

Peter Morton, "Grant Allen: A Centenary Reassessment," *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, Vol. 44 (2001), no. 4, pp. 404-40. An authoritative article with significant *rapprochements* with Gissing, and a judicious use of Edward Clodd's memoir of Grant Allen.

Susan Colón, "Professionalism and Domesticity in George Gissing's *The Odd Women*," *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 44 (2001), no. 4, pp. 441-58.