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“More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”
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Escape from Marriage: A Gissing Theme

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Thirty-one years ago, Gillian Tindall perceptively surveyed imaginative interconnections between the many bad marriages in Gissing’s novels and the two in his life (Tindall, 74-84, 86, 97-98, 99-100, 120, 136, 146, 151-52, 155-57, 158-67, 171, 174-76, 178-79, 181-92, 195-203, 207-13, 215-26, 237-39, 242, 246-47, 251-53, 255, 256). Yet no one has said much about a closely related issue: getting *out* of marriage. Gissing failed twice himself at complete escape, but some of his characters do better, and many try. A historical rather than just a biographical framework has special relevance here. The narrowness of England’s divorce laws spoiled many lives besides George Gissing’s.

Gissing scholars all know about his marital troubles. Yet biographers and critics tend to stress his personal failings in relationships with women and not the inadequate divorce laws of his time. Very much to the point, Gissing once paid an enterprising sergeant of police to try to prove adultery by Nell, Gissing’s first wife—a self-destructive alcoholic ex-prostitute—so that he could divorce her (*Collected Letters*, II: 163, 164, 166, 171, 173). He had already separated from her informally, avoiding the expenses and delays of domestic court proceedings. Still, he did pay for her support (*Collected Letters*, II: 90). In England at this time—1883 and much later—adultery remained a husband’s only grounds for divorce. And without cynical collusion, such sexual unfaithfulness was difficult to prove. Lacking Nell’s help, Gissing’s policeman failed (*Collected Letters*, II: 182). After her death, during his second bad marriage, this time to the mentally unstable Edith Underwood Gissing, the novelist told the woman he loved, Gabrielle Fleury, that his wife’s repellent ways and unattractive looks ruled out adultery—his only hope for dissolving the marriage (*Letters to Gabrielle*, 43-44). Yet he did try to investigate an anonymous tip that Edith had had “relations with some” other “man” (*Diary*, 509, 512). Nothing came of this, though. At his friend Morley Roberts’s suggestion, he next considered

an easy divorce from the United States but decided that the prolonged required stay was not worth it for a divorce unrecognized in England. At last he persuaded Gabrielle to join him in an extra-legal union, although to save her reputation, they pretended to get married (*Letters to Gabrielle*, 43-44, 107, “Introduction,” 14-15, *Diary*, 513). Three years later, Edith’s violent craziness led to permanent hospitalization in an asylum—a further escape for Gissing (Halperin, 331, 360), though not, of course, the full freedom of divorce. In spite of his quarrels with Gabrielle’s ill and live-in mother and also his own emphysema leading to his death just a few years later, his non-marriage worked better than either of his legal ones (*Letters to Gabrielle*, “Introduction,” 15-16). Paradoxically, the hypothetical escape clause allowed by free union may have strengthened his ongoing commitment to his “wife” as something that always remained within his choice. In spite of occasional grumbling, he never even hinted at a wish to end this “marriage.”

The stranglehold on marriage in England’s domestic courts illuminates not only Gissing’s life but at least half of his novels. We should not treat his fictional concern with escaping out of marriage as only an expression of his own unhappy wedlocks. The Church of England’s opposition to divorce remained embedded in late-Victorian law. Up until 1857, in fact, the Church actually ran England’s domestic courts. It and they forbade divorces even for adultery (Stetson, 6-7; Holcombe, 94). And the Church courts granted the rare escape of an annulment only for the most narrowly defined reasons: incest, total impotence, or pre-existing and incurable insanity. These courts also stigmatized as bastards the offspring of later marriages even after an annulment. And such hurtful behaviour as adultery, sodomy, bestiality, or physical abuse could justify no more than a legal separation (misleadingly called a “divorce *a mensa et thoro*,” from bed and board)—a strictly limited relief forbidding remarriage. A separated wife who lived with some other man became an adulteress in the eyes of the law and lost her right to an allowance, no matter how much her husband had wronged her. Then, too, ecclesiastical proceedings cost £300 to £500—a sum beyond most citizens (Holcombe, 94, 95).

Until 1857 a private act of Parliament remained the only loophole for obtaining a divorce—one all but impossible for a wife. Yet even a husband first needed to get a legal separation from the old Church courts and legally to charge another man with adultery. Next a husband needed a divorce bill from the House of Lords. But its Bishop members managed such bills and always changed divorce into mere separation. The entire Lords had to

change it back again, the Commons had to agree, and the Queen had to approve. This long process cost £600 to £800—a ransom affordable only by rich men (Holcombe, 95-96).

Enlightened mid-Victorians argued for reforms, but religious and social conservatives blocked them. Parliament passed instead the seriously enfeebled Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. It did create secular courts—cheaper though still expensive—for divorces and also separations. Yet for seventy years after this, these newly empowered courts had to stick to the act’s old doctrines, taking back most of what it had seemed to give. A husband could now obtain a divorce—not just a separation—but only for adultery: just as before, a thing hard to prove without a spouse’s collusion. And because of the ancient sexual double standard, a wife could get a divorce for her husband’s proven adultery only if he also had engaged in one of the following: “incest, bigamy, sodomy, bestiality, desertion, rape,” or extreme physical violence (Stetson, 18-19; Holcombe, 99, 103). In the year after this weakened legislation, W. J. Fox deplored its narrow grounds. He urged Parliament to make “incompatibility” enough for formally dissolving a marriage (Holcombe, 103-05). But legislators balked even at moderate reform until long after Gissing’s death. The Matrimonial Causes Act (1923) allowed women as well as men divorce for adultery without other factors (Holcombe, 103), though proof remained difficult. In 1937 Parliament at last allowed divorces without the proof of adultery, adding the alternate grounds of cruelty, three years’ desertion, or incurable insanity (Holcombe, 105). Finally, in 1967 Parliament moved somewhat closer to Fox’s mere “incompatibility” by making “irretrievable breakdown of marriage” grounds for divorce. Yet even so, the secular judges interpreted this language in an old restrictive way as referring just to adultery, physical assault, or desertion. On the other hand, a two-year legal separation could also now provide grounds for divorce, though only if both parties agreed. And even with a five-year separation, the courts refused to issue a divorce if either party showed that it would do serious harm (Holcombe, 107). The long-lasting narrowness of English domestic law sheds light on Gissing’s obsession in his novels with locked-in marriages and the urge to escape them.

Workers in the Dawn (1880) portrays in detail a dismally bad marriage—that of Arthur Golding to Carrie Mitchell—a pathetically alcoholic ex-prostitute based on Gissing’s first wife. Yet only a minor character, the unpleasant John Waghorn, divorces his wife successfully on the grounds of adultery. She does not exactly collude. She simply runs off and lives with another man. Yet this cynical woman wants a divorce as much as her hus-

band does (Pt. 1: 285-87; Pt. 2: 374-76). By contrast, Golding has no legal means of escaping from his wife. In one embarrassing sequence, this locked-in husband conceals his married state and proposes to the idealized heroine, Helen Norman. Here as well as in late-Victorian life, bigamy offers a tempting if a criminal alternative to hard-to-get divorces. When Helen learns that Arthur has a wife already, he argues that love and not a binding ceremony makes one truly married. Still, he had no intention of letting her in on this all-important choice, so that his argument falls apart. In any event, she rejects it for social and moral reasons: “Such theories would result in the destruction of society...” (Pt. 3, 358-59). Considering Golding’s deception of a woman whom he claims to love deeply, his marital philosophy seems hardly more than a selfish rationalization. But it becomes at least more understandable in the light of constrictive domestic English laws. Golding later deserts the deteriorating Carrie and sails away to America, avoiding a legal separation’s delays. He does, though, leave her monthly support. Meanwhile she becomes incurably ill, Golding believes that he can marry Helen soon, but instead she dies herself, and he throws himself into Niagara Falls—an escape from life now and no longer from marriage (Pt. 3, 419-25, 435-36).

The Unclassed (1895 revision of 1884 1st ed.) depicts in detail the hellish marriage of Julian Casti—the protagonist’s best friend—to detestable Harriet Smales—an evil first cousin in a literary sense to pathetic Carrie Mitchell of *Workers*. After endless provocations, the impoverished, dying Casti at last deserts his wife, avoiding the costly and time-consuming entanglements of domestic court proceedings. Yet he regularly sends her money—the second pay-as-you-go escape from a deplorable marriage in Gissing’s novels (165-67, 187-89, 194-97, 203-04, 207-09). Casti has no chance of a divorce’s full freedom, for Harriet has apparently not committed adultery, and even if she had, would never collude to give him needed proof.

Demos (1886) stands out as Gissing’s first novel where a sympathetically depicted woman rather than a man gets trapped in a mismatch—one blamed explicitly on differences of class. Richard Mutimer wrongs Adela Waltham twice. First, in proposing to her, he hides his engagement to another woman. And later he attempts a drunken marital rape (134-37, 155-56, 160-62, 284-85). Yet under England’s laws, Adela has not the slightest hope of divorcing him. Only the most despicable character in the novel, the pseudonymous Rodman, escapes from marriage illegally not just once but three separate times. He “marries” Mutimer’s sister but already has de-

served his legal wife and child for seven whole years and left them unsupported. He encounters her by chance and acts fatherly towards their son. But Rodman soon deserts them again when she learns of his present polygamy. He also deserts his so-called other “wife,” who does not learn till later that he married her illegally (274-76, 424-28, 432-37, 462, 466). Yet in spite of his three magician-like escapes from wedlock, Rodman ends up convicted of bigamy (447, 466).

In *The Nether World* (1889) most husbands and wives treat restrictive domestic laws the way thieves respond to locked doors and windows: they go ahead and break them. Gissing here depicts working-class marriages as destroyed not only by poverty but also squalid habits. Most of the couples live in a run-down house-cluster known as Shooter’s Gardens—a slum they prefer to available decent homes for the poor (74). If these husbands beat their wives, if both of them get drunk, if they threaten to kill their children, or if either commits adultery (74-76, 248-49, 333-34, 141, 250), they scorn the law’s domestic interference. When Mrs. Candy prosecutes her husband for almost beating her to death, she merely gets him fined, the slum dwellers mock her, and she immediately regrets having asked for legal help (74-76). The Act of 1878 did allow mistreated wives somewhat cheaper “separation orders” from local magistrates’ courts instead of separation decrees through the higher-ranking judiciary (Holcombe, 105-06). But to take advantage of this, victims like Mrs. Candy needed sufficient money and knowledge of reforms—both sadly lacking in the slum of Shooter’s Gardens.

As a result, its ignorant poor couples escape from their marriages illegally, most often with distressing cruelty. Mrs. Candy’s wife-beating spouse deserts her without leaving her any money or allowance (248-49). The cynical Joseph Snowdon runs away from Clem, his vicious wife, without leaving her a penny (357-61). But she herself has planned to get the married Bob Hewett to murder her husband so that she can inherit his wealth. Even when Bob explains that, under English law, she would get as a widow only a third of Joseph’s wealth, Clem says that this will do (331-32). She also expects the compliant Bob to murder his own wife—another bloody substitute for impossible divorce—and then marry her (358). Sudden complications prevent both killings, yet Bob has all but decided to carry them out (334-47). Such extreme brutality toward marriage partners dramatizes the irrelevance of divorce or separation for degraded slum couples who despise the law.

The Emancipated (1890) portrays an upper-middle-class marriage ruined by the husband's many adulteries and absences from home. The story illustrates the double standard of both the law and culture, with inevitable injustice for an injured wife. Gissing's most appealing and intelligent heroine so far, the wealthy Cecily Doran, finds mutual love with Reuben Elgar, a ne'er-do-well Bohemian. They suddenly elope. She says that she has given Reuben her "life," though she might, in fact, have added, her wealth and large income. She asks in return for only one thing: "'Be faithful to me!'" (220). And how does her husband fail her? Let us count the ways. He commits adultery less than two years after their marriage and only a few months after she has borne his child. He runs into an old girlfriend, describes himself as single, and whisks her off to Brighton for two whole days. He later tells Cecily that he went there with an old male friend (265, 295, 301-03). Then he blithely carries on a series of adulteries. On two separate weekends, he leaves London without Cecily for further extra-marital sex (305). Next he spends six weeks away from her on the Continent (306), where he can enjoy adultery far removed from her social sphere. On returning to London, he rushes off to the theatre—most likely with a woman—yet the Elgars' ill child dies while Cecily holds him on her lap (307). Reuben reacts by extending his adulteries, but she refuses to suspect him. She recuperates in Rome, while he stays in London to carry on an affair with a music-hall performer in tights—an entanglement that lands Reuben in the police courts and also in the newspapers. Cecily at last learns about her husband's unfaithfulness (387). On top of this he now behaves even more distressingly. He declares that he will abandon her for good (445). He has yet another sexual affair, this time with a married Parisian actress, until the husband finally shoots "him dead" (454-55).

The self-controlled yet deeply anguished Cecily has already realized that England's double standard will prevent her from dissolving her marriage in spite of her husband's adultery (391-92). One odd characteristic of Reuben's behaviour rules out a divorce on a wife's allowable grounds of adultery *and* desertion (double-standard grounds when a husband needs just proof of his wife's adultery). Even after Reuben has left her for more than a month, he comes trotting home from his extra-marital sex and, according to his own sister, Reuben will go on doing so "'twenty times more'" (446). Yet bowing to a high-Victorian pseudo-biological credo, Gissing has Cecily blame her plight not just on unjust laws and an unjust culture but also on nature's "inexorable laws" (391, 422)—a less even-handed treatment of Woman's Question issues than later in *The Odd Women* (1893).

In *New Grub Street* (1891), dolorous marriages endure till death parts the couple—of course, the only exit plan mentioned at weddings. Yet Amy Reardon, though often depicted rather unsympathetically, speaks with eloquence against restrictions on divorce:

“Isn’t it a most ridiculous thing that married people who both wish to separate can’t do so and be quite free again?”

“... In America people can get divorced if they don’t suit each other—at all events in some of the states—and does any harm come of it? Just the opposite I should think.”

“The law ought to encourage such separations, instead of forbidding them,” Amy pursued. “If a husband and wife find that they have made a mistake, what useless cruelty it is to condemn them to suffer the consequences for the whole of their lives!” (334)

Amy has it right about American divorces. The federalist structure of the United States empowers state legislatures instead of the nation’s Congress to regulate how marriages may end. As of 1883—and *New Grub Street* is set in the early 1880s—Missouri, Montana, Oregon, Texas, Wisconsin, and the territory of Washington all had inserted “omnibus clauses” into their divorce laws. These permitted the dissolving of a marriage if “life” became “a burden,” “living together” became “insupportable,” or a spouse’s behaviour made the “condition” of the other “intolerable” (Snyder, 156-61). Any of these states would have suited Amy’s wishes. And because of her abandonment of Edwin Reardon as a poor struggling writer, he also approves of easy divorce. He says to his friend Biffen that “if only our idiotic laws permitted us to break the legal bond, how glad both of us would be!” (344). No one in the novel even tries to answer these arguments.

The potboiler *Denzil Quarrier* (1892) treats the defiance even of an absurdly unjust marriage with conventional morality. The innocent Lilian had married Northway—unknown to her, a forger—and the police had arrested him right after the ceremony (97-98). Yet under English law, a crime such as this revealed seconds after a wedding offers no grounds at all for divorce. For Lilian to gain her freedom, Northway has to commit adultery plus incest, bigamy, sodomy, bestiality, desertion, rape, or extreme physical violence (Stetson, 18-19; Holcombe, 99, 103)—not his kinds of crimes. Consequently, Lilian remains trapped in a most outrageous wedlock, although she refuses to live with him when he gets out of jail. Denzil Quarrier lives with her instead and feels smugly justified in defying the laws of marriage (99-101). Then he runs for Parliament and decides that they must pretend to get married (101-04). But melodramatic twists alter his conviction that exceptional persons like himself can violate such laws at

will. His treacherous friend Glazzard gets Northway to try to assert his rights as legal husband (182-93). A feminist acquaintance enamored of Quarrier pretends to help Lilian, gets Quarrier to pay out blackmail, and drives Lilian into drowning herself while this “friend” listens to the splash (251-61, 273-81). The uncovering of Glazzard’s betrayal causes Quarrier, in the novel’s final words, to sum up its moral: “Now I understand the necessity for social law!” (308) This includes, of course, laws of both marriage and divorce—a conformist ending appropriate for a potboiler.

Though the title of *The Odd Women* (1893) refers to a school for training single women to work, more than half of the novel centers around marriage—its constricting customs and laws. One of the three Madden sisters, Monica, leaves the feminist school to marry Edmund Widdowson—an unappealing older man but one, nevertheless, with a nice large income (74, 106-11). His attempts at patriarchal authority make Monica so unhappy that she asks the shallow Bevis, who simply wants sex, to take her to live with him outside of marriage. He rejects even this limited commitment (228-35). Her husband meanwhile has hired a detective to try to prove adultery as grounds for a divorce, though none has taken place. But this backward-looking husband has a single radical thought—one that he dismisses right away: “Perhaps there ought not to be such a thing as enforced permanence of marriage” (239). Gissing’s less conventional spokesman, Everard Barfoot, defends an acquaintance for deserting his wife and children because she kept distracting him from his “literary work” with complaints about butcher bills and servants—a detail clearly based on a private grudge of Gissing’s (80-81). Barfoot acquits his friend of any blame because he left his possessions with his wife—still another case of pay and run. This leads Barfoot to speak of free unions (103, 104). Only half seriously, he challenges Rhoda Nunn, a women’s movement leader, to join him in just such an extra-legal union (130-31, 180). This parallels Monica’s thwarted scheme with Bevis, though without adultery’s complication. Yet Barfoot prepares his challenge just to test Miss Nunn before proposing formal marriage (261). Also half seriously, she aims to get him to switch from free union to proposing actual marriage and then to reject him anyway (148). Barfoot puts forward his radical offer, she hesitates, he slips a ring on her finger, she calls him inconsistent, he proposes civil marriage, and Rhoda accepts. Both have changed their basic positions (264-67). Then a false accusation of adultery with Monica makes Rhoda insist that Barfoot prove his innocence. Yet as if he had stuck to free union after all, he simply refuses. In choreographed dance steps of additional reversal, Barfoot, clear-

ed of adultery by others, proposes formal marriage; Rhoda demands free union; and the relationship collapses (325-27). Gissing treats their free-union debate and courtship pretty much like a farce, most likely to soften the effect on his readers of a radical theory of non-binding “marriage.”

In the Year of Jubilee (1894) displays as much bitterness at marital imprisonment as any other Gissing novel. The classically read Lionel Tarrant seduces the attractive but Latinless Nancy Lord, she pleads for amends, and he marries her regretfully but does so in secret, just as she has asked (92-96, 98-105, 111-12, 123-26, 132-33). Then her wealthy father resolves to exclude this twenty-three-year-old daughter from his will if she marries sooner than twenty-six, but he dies without telling her (15, 146). Tarrant, in turn, loses his own expected inheritance, so that he and Nancy decide to hide their marriage until she has reached twenty-six (150-51, 154-55, 162, 164). But he has made her pregnant. Fatherhood and husbandhood send him hurrying to the Bahamas, ostensibly for work, though really to “escape” his wife (163-68, 171-72). When the job falls through, he travels through the United States on a loan from a friend and, for his recreation, enjoys casual adulteries (163, 224-25, 282-83). He later tells Nancy that “infidelity in a woman is much worse than in a man” (343)—the same double standard that Parliament in 1857 had used to grant men but not women divorce for just adultery (Holcombe, 103). Nancy herself learns toward the end that her father had divorced her own mother for adultery (119, 359-60, 362). Earlier in England Nancy has her baby without Tarrant present, and he fails even to respond by mail (223, 225). When an acquaintance learns of the birth, Nancy tries to save her inheritance by declaring herself an unwedded mother (236-37). Then a trustee of the estate finds out about her marriage, but Nancy still lacks help from her husband (181, 264-70). At last he returns to England, yet instead of hurrying to her, he merely sends a frigid note. She denounces him like an Ibsenite heroine (264, 271, 279-82, 284-88). Yet Gissing undercuts Nancy’s powerful scene by having her yield to Tarrant’s demand that they live in separate houses for the rest of their marital lives (342-43, 365-66)—a kind of semi-wedlock or semi-separation. In contrast, Arthur Peachey, a minor character in *In the Year of Jubilee*, deserts his hateful wife with convincing justification, continues to support her, but protects their son from his mother’s harmful ways by taking him to live with his own married sister. He later returns to his wife but leaves her forever when the birth of another child causes her to spew forth still more venom (202, 206-09, 317-21). This worse-case mar-

riage makes Tarrant's treatment of his own courageous wife seem even more offensive than it would by itself.

Escapes and would-be escapes out of marriage become less important in Gissing's next three full-length novels. *The Whirlpool* (1897) depicts bad marriages and one all-but-certain major adultery, yet just a single minor character wins a divorce for adultery—Mr. Buncombe (23, 122). The protagonist-husband Harvey Rolfe hesitates to judge his flighty wife or to separate from her self-destructive ways—a domestic fastidiousness leading to disaster (316, 419). The other important husband in the book, Hugh Carnaby, kills with a punch his wife's suspected lover, serves jail time for manslaughter, but naively ends by believing in her innocence (268-75, 300, 298). Both Rolfe's supposed enlightenment and Carnaby's lack of brains allow bad marriages to continue unchallenged. Superficially at least, *The Town Traveller* (1898) returns to the escape-from-marriage theme with considerable detail. Yet this would-be comic potboiler treats bigamy and desertion as merely ha-ha jokes. Mrs. Clover believes that she remains married to a "husband" who has left both her and her daughter many years before yet continues to send them money (19-20). An amateur Cockney detective named Gammon locates the missing man and finds that he has since become a lord. Yet the run-away soon dies, and Gammon quickly learns that this man had committed bigamy with unknowing Mrs. Clover. He had previously deserted or perhaps just parted ways from a now-dead legal wife (170, 250-51). In spite of deception and betrayal by her late "husband," Mrs. Clover joyfully accepts without any hesitation Gammon's marriage proposal. She does so even though Gammon has confessed that he tried unsuccessfully to marry her own daughter—an unfunny conclusion to an unfunny novel (285-93). Next in Gissing's writing career, as he urged Gabrielle to join him in an extra-legal union, he composed *The Crown of Life* (1899). It ends with Piers Otway's coming ecstatic marriage to a perfectly legal wife and perfect woman (356-60). By contrast, a minor character, the wealthy Mrs. Hannaford, separates through the courts from her utterly callous husband (106). More revealingly, though, Piers's father has thought tenderly about his past "irregular union" with a woman trapped in marriage—the long-dead mother of the illegitimate Piers (76, 78). This flashback reads like a slightly disguised personal ad aimed at the author's own future "irregular" "wife."

After *The Crown of Life* the escape-from-marriage theme disappears from Gissing's novels. No escapes or attempted ones occur in *Our Friend the Charlatan* (1901), *Veranilda* (written 1903, but left incomplete; pub-

lished posthumously 1904), or *Will Warburton* (written 1902-03, published posthumously 1905). Gissing wrote them during his own free union with Gabrielle Fleury, cut short by his death after just a few years. The lack of formal ties with a now-more-fitting “wife” eased his long obsession with constrictive domestic laws and desperation jailbreaks from maximum-security wedlock.

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**Where “Affable Hawk” stepped in,
Or how Desmond MacCarthy roamed on Gissing’s trail
for over three decades**

PIERRE COUSTILLAS

Some writers and journalists have been obsessed with the life and works of George Gissing from the day they became acquainted with him or discovered his novels to approximately their dying day. Morley Roberts was assuredly one of them; Orwell, a man of a quite different calibre, was another, and his influence as a Gissing critic, is still very much alive. Blurb writers regularly embrace him with affection and gratitude, and even abroad—witness the recent Italian translation of *New Grub Street*—the best way of introducing Gissing to readers who are unfamiliar with modern English literature is often thought to be through Orwell. But who would think of adding Desmond MacCarthy’s name to the list of commentators who gladly paid homage to Gissing when some review or newspaper editor gave them a chance to do so? MacCarthy (who was no relative of the Irish politician and writer Justin McCarthy, an older correspondent and admirer of Gissing) was known to have been an attentive reader of his works, but no one, it would seem, has so far realised and published his discovery that he wrote on Gissing on at least five occasions from 1904 to his death.

It is common knowledge that journalists and literary critics copy one another with both alacrity and impunity, but few men are likely to have copied themselves as gleefully as Desmond MacCarthy. So as to gain time and, we suppose, make money more easily, he developed a method which may have been general in his profession at the time, although we have never seen it exposed, and which consisted, when after a few years human memory could no longer denounce him as a self-plagiarist, in repeating entire paragraphs of his previous articles. If he happened to have made a mistake, a factual one like his confusion between a real book, *By the Ionian Sea*, and an imaginary one, *Magna Græcia*, he faithfully repeated it. But, all this notwithstanding, MacCarthy had valuable remarks to make about Gissing’s works and his last contribution to Gissing lore in the *Sunday Times* is unquestionably more polished and sophisticated than his first piece in the *Independent Review*, published barely a year after the author’s death.

Of his keen appreciation of his mentor’s achievement as a whole, there is no doubt. Indeed if Gissing’s originality had left him indifferent he would perhaps not have welcomed fresh opportunities to confirm some of his views and to update them with remarks on new publications in 1921,

1927, 1929, and 1938. Chance willed that no reliable and straightforward biography of Gissing was published during those years, so that his knowledge of the life remained grievously inadequate during the whole of his career, and he had to rely on *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* and, fifteen years after, on the badly edited volume of *Letters to the Family*. Alfred Gissing's *Selections* from his father's writings interspersed with biographical considerations added very few touches to the picture of the novelist that was available in the early half of the twentieth century. So Desmond MacCarthy was and had of necessity to remain only a pioneer in Gissing studies and, like all pioneers, he made mistakes. At his death in 1952, no special flair, no educated guess could help him imagine what the reputation of *New Grub Street* would be like in forthcoming decades. The lack of primary material available to potential biographers was at the time a huge obstacle which Gissing's descendants did very little to remove. There was no easy or even predictable manner in which the future might rationally be made to look brighter. Desmond MacCarthy's very modest contributions to a better knowledge of Gissing and his works seemed to lead to a desert peopled by a few impotent anchorites who, from the standpoint of present day analysts, hardly knew what they might do next. Would Herbert Van Thal, some frustrated enthusiasts wondered, manage to publish the Collected Works? Volume I of the enterprise, *A Life's Morning*, had no successor or companion; the two titles, *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool*, published in the Watergate Classics, a series launched by Sidgwick and Jackson, sold badly and had to be remaindered. MacCarthy, who was a witness of all this, could not be optimistic. But—

Who was Desmond MacCarthy? Born on 20 May 1877 at Plymouth, (Sir) Desmond Charles Otto MacCarthy can fairly be described as a literary journalist who was professionally active from 1897, the year of the publication of *The Whirlpool* and of its author's flight to Italy. He was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, and began his career as a freelance journalist, quickly moving to editorial work. His biographers—none of them very informative—tell us that at Cambridge he was a member of the Apostles and a close friend of the philosopher G. E. Moore, whose *Principia Ethica* influenced the Bloomsbury Group, with Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf among its best known figures. In an obituary of him which was published in the *Listener* for 26 June 1952, E. M. Forster praised his brilliancy, humanity and wisdom as well as his capacity for improvisation, a word, we may belatedly note, which does not rhyme with accuracy. He edited such periodicals as *New Quarterly*, *Eye Witness* and *Life and Letters*,

but his work on the *New Statesman*, for which he began to write in 1913, becoming literary editor in 1920, then for the *Sunday Times* as senior literary editor from 1928, won him a wider journalistic reputation. It was as a weekly columnist for the *New Statesman* that he adopted the *nom de plume* "Affable Hawk," which according to the entry on him in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, suited him well physically. A carefully compiled bibliography of his works, which an enterprising scholar could produce with the assistance of his papers held by the Lilly Library, might conceivably reveal other items than the following, four of them having been collected with the sole aid of chance, the fifth thanks to the friendly collaboration of Dr. Simon James, who traced a pasted cutting of it in a copy of *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (Eveleigh Nash, 1912, Second Edition, a bibliographical scarcity which Nash should have called Second Impression). MacCarthy went on writing weekly articles for the *Sunday Times* until the end of his life, and three of his eleven volumes, most of which consisted of collected articles from his pen, were published posthumously.

His initial contribution to the assessment of Gissing's works to which his name is attached was a mildly unfavourable discussion of *Veranilda* in the London *Independent Review* (December 1904, pp. 479-80). He was one of the critics who disagreed with Frederic Harrison about the artistic interest of the novel. After quoting from the uninspiring preface, which nobody really liked, he wrote: "I believe nearly all admirers of Gissing, who read this book, will think his praise misplaced. If in this review defects are mainly dwelt upon, it is in hope of counteracting in some measure the effect of an authoritative criticism, which implies too low an estimate of the bulk of Gissing's work." This seemed reasonable enough, though it betrayed a failure to understand an important aspect of Gissing's culture, that to which Samuel Vogt Gapp, that worthy pioneer, was to devote a volume which remains the best on the subject, classicism. Gissing's pupils, notably Walter Grahame and the two Harrison boys, would have disagreed about *Veranilda* being, "in a sense, a holiday, hobby-horsical product of his imagination." It emphatically was not. Poorly informed about Gissing at that stage of his career as a critic, MacCarthy was very vague in his appreciation. He mistakenly thought that "this romantic love story of the days when Justinian ruled the Empire from Constantinople, and Totila descended upon Rome" was not a subject for the author of *Demos* and *The Nether World*. Had he known through personal contacts of Gissing's extraordinary intellectual and artistic investment in his story of Roman and Goth, an investment abundantly attested by his private papers, he would have beaten a

prompt retreat. "Gissing's merits as a novelist," MacCarthy thought, "do not depend upon excellent writing, description, poetic imagination, or upon a grasp of the different ideas, social and moral, which vary from one generation to another, and even in class and class; and these are the qualities which infuse most life into accounts of the remote past. His merits are rather the result of an extreme sensitiveness to points of individual character, to gesture, movement and inflections of the voice. He is a master in describing the gradual effect of a prolonged trial or experience." MacCarthy's last sentence, like the whole of his review, reflected his desire to be fair, but even more his lack of enthusiasm due to his lack of interest in the period Gissing had come to know so well: "The story is exciting enough, but *Veranilda* will go the way of all waxwork." Well, certainly not in the eyes of the present writer.

The second item in this survey of MacCarthy's critical approaches to Gissing is that recently rediscovered by Simon James which appeared in the *New Statesman* on 24 December 1921. Entitled "Current Literature: Books in General," it is a double notice of a new edition of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, which Constable had issued in the previous August, and *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, then still available from Eveleigh Nash, and each of the two books considered as physical objects could have been presented as publications likely to surprise readers. On the one hand, Gissing's best selling title had been reset because, according to the publishers, the plates of the original edition, published in 1903, had become completely worn out. Unfortunately the new printers did their job very carelessly; the type they chose was unattractive if compared with that used for the 1912 "presentation" edition, and the new printing was a corrupt text which seriously misled those scholars who quoted from it in the next decades. This edition was obtainable in three formats until 1923, in blue cloth or brown leather, but also in taller copies covered in olive green cloth. In this format *Henry Ryecroft* was said to be in its sixteenth impression. On the other hand, the review of Roberts's book was most unexpected because it corresponded to neither the first edition, published nine years before, nor to the second revised edition, which did not appear until 1923.

Discussing Gissing's and Roberts's volumes in succession, MacCarthy gave the impression that he had refreshed his memory. In a nonchalant manner which was common among journalists at the time he remarked of *Henry Ryecroft*: "I have always been puzzled by its immense popularity, for though it has a charm such as few reflectively discursive books possess, it is a distinctly depressing and gloomy book. Its pessimism—and pessi-

mism is not popular—is perhaps forgiven because through the book there runs a feeling of relief, of rest after toil, port after storm. Although the reflections of ‘Henry Ryecroft’ upon life and literature are those of a tired and even doomed man, he is enjoying at the end of his life a handful of comfort and quietness, and the reader is always conscious of this blessed truce relished with epicurean and never ceasing content. Then, like every book George Gissing wrote, it is a sincere book.” For the first time in his five pieces, MacCarthy introduced the familiar comparison with Tchekov. “Like Tchekov,” he wrote, “he had an aptitude for a thoughtful, peaceful life, and was at bottom a sun-loving temperament. Because of that temperament he was sensitive to every shade in the drabness which surrounded him, and above all to the meaner miseries of a struggling existence. There are moments when the reader of his books cries out ‘Oh, why does not Gissing make his characters just a *little* better off?’ [A woman, doubtless a very low-brow one, had made the same remark to A. H. Bullen after reading some of Gissing’s works.] The corrosion of poverty acting upon every good human quality and decent human relation becomes almost unbearable to follow, for he makes it convincing. Those who react against such circumstances in his novels with few exceptions (Will Warburton is one) are characters of coarser grain; the better sort are doomed.”

After this positive allusion to Gissing’s last completed novel, of which new editions had been published by Constable in 1908 and 1915, MacCarthy passed on to Roberts’s fictionalized biography of his old college fellow, which he declared to be “an extremely interesting document,” as it still was by the early 1920s, considering that no book-length biography had yet been published, “though some of Gissing’s friends, it is only fair to add, notably Mr. Wells, were enraged by the book and complained of inaccuracies and misrepresentations.” The other reservations also seemed more than reasonable. “This method of achieving a greater degree of frankness in biography (this was Mr. Roberts’s object), by giving truth the appearance of fiction is a tiresome one. It is a bore having to translate ‘Outside the Pale’ into *The Unclassed*, ‘Paternoster Row’ into *New Grub Street*, or ‘The Mob’ into *Demos*, when Gissing’s books are mentioned, and names like ‘Rivers’ into ‘Wells.’ Where disguises are intended to be transparent, why use them at all?” Here he was following closely Edward Clodd’s example in his *Memories* (1916), adding, doubtless with the approval of Gabrielle Fleury, whose views and interests were known in some circles through her loyal, level-headed friend Clara Collet, that where “we must beware of taking Mr. Morley Roberts’s account as the whole truth and nothing but the

truth, is that part of it which deals with Gissing's final marriage. Though Mr. Roberts represents it as a comparatively halcyon period, he also represents Gissing's happiness (she was a French lady) on the shores of the Mediterranean as being marred by a nostalgia for English food. His consequent lack of nourishment, he says, also was most detrimental to his health, and amounted almost to starvation. The importance of this grievance and of its consequences are, I am told, exaggerated by Mr. Roberts." MacCarthy's informant, whoever he or she was, was right. What is true of the two years before Gissing's stay at the East Anglian Sanatorium cannot be said of those that followed it.

It was MacCarthy's belief that *By the Ionian Sea* (which here and subsequently he called *Magna Graecia*) was far superior to, though far less read than, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. "In it [Gissing] is really more himself, the self he would have been by preference if misfortune had not clubbed him down from the start and gone on bludgeoning him." And he concluded with a few remarks about Gissing's "good sound English," reporting Roberts's words about his revelling in Landor's style: "How many times have I heard him quote 'Many flowers must perish ere a grain of corn be ripened?'" Good rhythms, MacCarthy reminds us, he was very fond of and he found them sometimes in unexpected places, like this passage from Mrs. Ewing: "He sat, patient of each succeeding sunset, until this aged world should crumble to its close." Here Gissing was his father's son, as the son's reminiscences of his father evince.

After the *New Statesman* article, in which the need for a reprint of *By the Ionian Sea* was unaccountably expressed, Chapman and Hall having reissued the book twice in 1905 and again in 1917 and 1921, "Affable Hawk" became Desmond MacCarthy again. His three other review articles were much longer, more elaborate, and they showed the critic enlarging his knowledge and sympathetic appreciation of Gissing's life and works, but he went on borrowing regularly from his own press-cuttings.

"Literary Causerie: George Gissing" (*Empire Review*, February 1927, pp. 147-52) was essentially a review of the volume of Gissing's letters to members of his family, and MacCarthy blamed the author's relatives in passing for not providing the key to his misfortunes. Although Roberts had given one in his fictionalized biography, he refused to take it, until he was half-way through his article. A prelude to his fourth "effort," the *causerie* then presented Gissing's work as mostly concerned with poverty, "a disease which corrodes those very qualities which fit [men and women] for a better fate." For the first time, adapting Roberts's account in *Henry Maitland*, he

sketched a summary of Gissing's relationships with women, of the Manchester episode and of his difficulty in writing some of his works. Then deviating into a quotation from one of the best known letters to Clara Collet in which, in a fit of depression, Gissing said that only those semi-fictional recollections of Henry Ryecroft were likely to last "when all my other futile work has followed my futile life," MacCarthy flew to Gissing's rescue: "He was wrong. His work was not futile, for in it he has interpreted the value of culture and the degrading effects of poverty on those above a low level of spiritual development. We learn from Gissing's books, far better than from securely comfortable essayists, or the speeches of reformers, what culture means and what its absence implies. His work is a criticism of the squalor of modern civilization which hard circumstances compelled him, against his will and inclination, to understand. His work is more than 'a document' for future generations; it is a stimulus to public spirit, and a consolation to those who share aspirations which circumstances thwart. He has lived through their misuses and exasperations; to have done that is to have accomplished more for mankind than to have written some pages of unimpeachable prose." The *causerie* ended on a quiet note: "Now he is dead his faults and blunders are of small consequence beside the importance of that deep instinct in him to hold fast to his standard of what life ought to be and his resolution to describe it as he saw it."

If anything, the last two articles that MacCarthy wrote on Gissing show that, by the late 1920s and 1930s, his esteem for the novelist whom he had slightly misjudged in his first piece earlier in the century, had definitely risen. The substantial review article entitled "A Specialist on Poverty" (*Sunday Times*, 17 February 1929, p. 9) dealt with Alfred Gissing's *Selections, Autobiographical and Imaginative, from the Works of George Gissing*. In the last few months MacCarthy must have read Gissing again and thought of his artistic achievement a good deal more deeply. One might believe that another critic, starting from different premises, now undertook to build a fresh image of his originality:

"Gissing ranks high as a novelist for sincerity and pathos, and as a painter of the lives of the respectable poor during the latter end of the nineteenth century. He is the great authority in English literature on poverty; a specialist on the consequent sufferings and degradations of characters of some refinement, who are born or become poor. Samuel Butler's aphorism, 'No gold; no Holy Ghost,' expresses profanely and laconically what Gissing illustrated poignantly in a series of remarkable novels. He had as passionate a love of culture as Matthew Arnold; he was a cultivated man himself; but unlike Matthew Arnold he was compelled to live among the inhabitants of the 'smoky dwarf houses,' which the apostle of culture saw with disgust from a

railway-carriage window, and those regions of society where mean respectabilities take the place of decent aspirations.”

MacCarthy, belatedly it would seem, had discovered that a few months before he himself had reviewed *Veranilda* in the *Independent Review*, another admirer of Gissing’s work, Nathaniel Wedd, had contributed a thoughtful survey of it in the same journal, with which he warmly concurred:

“‘We realise better what culture and its absence mean in practice,’ Mr. Wedd wrote, ‘from Gissing’s pictures, alive as they are with the very breath of reality, than from any essays of the moralist, writing in the study and dealing with abstractions; while the education for which politicians clamour has little in its nature, and nothing in its aims, in common with education as Gissing understood it. What Gissing meant by education was the development of the feeling for the beautiful, the cultivation of interest in things of the mind for their own sake.’”

Add to these items, MacCarthy perceptively pursued in his own name,

“the development of that disinterestedness necessary also to decent human relations, and you have a fairly complete account of the things the *absence* of which was Gissing’s theme as a novelist—the substance, in short, of his criticism of life as he knew it. That criticism was a distinctly valuable contribution to civilisation; a much more important ‘work’ than that which Gissing would have accomplished had Fate allowed him to follow the career he pinned to follow, and written the scholarly and elegant books which he longed to write.”

Interestingly MacCarthy took exception to two passages in the introductory essay by Virginia Woolf which the publisher, Jonathan Cape, had thought it marketably profitable to append to the book though Alfred Gissing was unaware of it before publication, and consequently of a number of factual errors it contained. With her such errors were nearly institutional and she looked down upon anyone who did not share her views. MacCarthy was hardly in a position to pick a quarrel with her about some minutiae of Gissing’s private life which, at the time, were hardly known outside the family. The battle with her was one of ideas. It shows how determined he was to take up the cudgels for a vigorous defence of Gissing and his art. Confronted with some oft-quoted untenable statements he reacted at some length:

“Gissing,” she says, “is one of those imperfect novelists through whose books one sees the life of the author faintly covered by the lives of fictitious people. With such writers we establish personal rather than artistic relations.” I remember reading *The Nether World*, *Thyrza*, *The Odd Women*, *New Grub Street*, *Eve’s Ransom* before I knew anything about Gissing himself; and I have read them since. Yet both on first and second reading they struck me as quite sufficiently projected from what might have been at first divined, and afterwards known, to be personal experience. It

is certainly not upon the writer himself that the reader's attention is concentrated in the novels of Gissing. Clearly in a story like *New Grub Street* the strain and humiliation of writing for starvation wages has been experienced, but the other characters are by no means shadows compared with the author in the book. In Gissing's novels we are not nearly so definitely invited into a particular and personal relation with the hero himself as in many other novels—in those of Mr. Wells for instance.

Secondly, I do not agree with the implications of the following passage. "Partly because he so revered facts and had no faculty it seems (his language is meagre and unmetaphorical) for impressions, one wonders whether, since he had to make his living and was married, unfortunately, by the time he was twenty, his choice of a novelist's career was a happy one. There was a whole world, with its history and its literature, inviting him to haul it into his mind; he was eager; he was intellectual; yet he must sit down in hired rooms and spin novels about 'earnest young people striving for improvement in, as it were, the dawn of a new phase of civilisation.'"

The implications of this passage are worth dwelling on. One is that Gissing found himself when he turned at the end of his life to reconstructing the Græco-Roman age, which had always been the refuge of his imagination and his Land of Romance, or to discoursing about books, as he did in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. This is an opinion which his son in his Preface also seems to share, holding that Gissing never wrote so well as he did when he wrote his posthumous and unfinished story, *Veranilda*. Mrs. Woolf clearly suggests that he ought to have been a scholar or historian, not a novelist. Now it is always rash to suggest that anyone who has succeeded as well as Gissing in his own line would have done better in another; but what is interesting is her reason for thinking so: "he so revered facts and had no faculty it seems (his language is meagre and unmetaphorical) for impressions." This seems to me to imply a wrong conception of the novel itself. Neither charming words nor metaphors can make a novel good (though they make it readable), nor is the novelist's art that of recording impressions. It is something at once deeper and more primitive—the creation of living human beings and their environment, so that the reader hears them speak, sees them move, and feels what they are feeling. Gissing had this rare gift. Mrs. Woolf ignores it in making the suggestion that he would have been better employed in hauling history and literature into his mind, because he could not also render the iridescence of momentary reflection upon life, and charm our aesthetic sense—things delightful, things precious in themselves, things well worth doing, but *not* essential (vide Balzac) to the novelist's art.

Only when Virginia Woolf, after sadly running off the metals, resumed a straight course did MacCarthy declare himself willing to follow her:

Later on, however, she defines admirably the essential quality of tragedy in Gissing. His novels "owe their peculiar grimness to the fact that the people who suffer most are capable of making their suffering part of a reasoned view of life. The thought endures when the feeling has gone. Their unhappiness represents something more lasting than a personal reverse; it becomes part of a view of life. Hence, when we have finished one of Gissing's novels, what we have taken away is not a character, not an incident, but a comment upon life, as life seemed to a thoughtful man." This is excellently said, but it is by no means true of all Gissing's tragic characters, many of whom, like the old fiddler in *Thyrza* or little Pennyloaf, suffer in dumb, uncomprehending humility. The impression of pessimism derived from Gissing's

books is due chiefly to his clear perception that the natural refinement which such characters as these possess actually prevents them from getting the better of conditions which torture them; while those who most often save themselves do so by virtue of mean qualities. Poverty is an impasse: if you are of "the better sort," then you cannot save yourself; if you are not, you may rise to decent conditions, but your innate vulgarity and coarseness of feeling will then prevent you from profiting, in any admirable sense of the word, from them. That is certainly a pessimistic conclusion; but it is a comment on modern civilisation worth constantly pondering, even by those perched well above the welter of "the nether world"; for only a few are so securely perched that a shove or two would not dislodge them, while even most of those few have to spend a considerable portion of their lives in tying life-belts on their children.

At this stage MacCarthy returned to one of his favourite ideas, namely that Gissing, in a sense, was the English Tchekov, that he was, we might say in French, *un méridional rentré*. His last paragraph was a repeat of some remarks he made in his 1921 article, notably on Gissing's style, on his appreciation of Landor, and of Mrs. Ewing's memorably sonorous sentence quoted above. "Mr. Morley Roberts," he now concluded, "thinks that if Gissing had had fifty pounds a year he would have retired to a cottage and asphyxiated himself with books. It is quite probable. But that he was forced to write the novels he wrote we can never regret."

Opportunities to write further articles about Gissing and his work were not many in the next few years. The Gissing volume in Harrap's collection of Short Stories of To-Day and Yesterday came out almost simultaneously with Alfred Gissing's selections from his father's works and could therefore not be noticed in another number of the *Sunday Times*. The publication by Cape of a new edition of *By the Ionian Sea* in 1933, again with Virginia Woolf's essay by way of introduction (although not only did it keep embarrassingly silent about the travel book, but it led her to admit that she had not read it, adding that she did not even *wish* to read it) might have been a new temptation, but MacCarthy doubtless wisely ignored it. So it was not until 1938, when the last volume of uncollected short stories was issued by Michael Joseph that MacCarthy bethought himself he could do Gissing another posthumous good turn. The volume, entitled *Stories and Sketches*, contained a number of texts, none of them of outstanding artistic value, which had been left out of *A Victim of Circumstances and Other Stories* and they had to be defined. Considered as a whole the fifteen narratives certainly contributed to enlarge the thematic range of Gissing's art as it could be determined from published sources.

Faithful to his method, MacCarthy gave his review article in the *Sunday Times* for 20 February 1938 a title—"An English Chekov"—which would

have been just as suitable for the previous one, and he concerned himself more with generalities likely to facilitate an intelligent understanding from readers altogether or largely unacquainted with the subject. “The most comprehensive definition of poverty I have come across,” MacCarthy began, “is to be found in one of the essays in Hilaire Belloc’s *Short Talks with the Dead* (Cayme Press): ‘Poverty is that state in which a man is perpetually anxious for the future of himself and his dependents, unable to pursue life upon the standard to which he was brought up, tempted both to subservience and to a sour revolt, and tending inexorably to despair.’” MacCarthy applauded the fine authorial consciousness revealed by this idiosyncratic definition and turned his thought to Gissing who, he said, “would have rejoiced in the thoroughness of that, who knew that poverty can be also a relative thing”—a view of things he had lent to his alter ego, Henry Ryecroft, to “whose mind the meaning of the term ‘poverty’ depends on one’s standing as an intellectual being.” The imaginary man of letters went on: “If I am to believe the newspapers, there are title-bearing men and women in England who, had they an assured income of five-and-twenty shillings per week, would have no right to call themselves poor, for their intellectual needs are those of a stable-boy or scullery wench.” Individuals like Lord Dunfield, one presumes, in the story of that name (*Human Odds and Ends*).

“What life showed him seldom provided him with cheerful subjects,” MacCarthy wrote with some emotion, “and as integrity was Gissing’s master-quality, he could not but describe the world as he knew it. As a novelist he ranks high for sincerity and pathos, and highest among English novelists as a painter of the lives of the respectable poor during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.” To MacCarthy Gissing was the “specialist in the sufferings and degradations endured by men and women of some refinement and delicacy of feeling who have been born poor or, worse, have become so.” And at this point the critic’s voice—an uncommon thing for a journalist at any time—became confidential: “If such a fate had been mine (once or twice I have had to envisage that possibility from afar), no novelist would have brought me so surely the consolation of finding that at least my plight was understood.”

Now that the main facts of Gissing’s life had become public property, MacCarthy had no difficulty in showing that he mismanaged his private life. “From having suffered in youth,” he tentatively explained, “a man often carries henceforth something within him that creates fresh occasions for suffering; for there is in human nature a curious thing—an unconscious loyalty to the world of pain. Disgrace had isolated Gissing and made him

feel even more friendless than he was. It cut him off, he thought, from society where he might have met some woman capable of being a companion to him. [...] Gissing often described the way poverty prevents those who might have supported and comforted each other from meeting or, having met, from discovering in time that they are kindred spirits. It is true that Dostoevsky has dramatised isolation far more luridly and terrifyingly, but the sober pathos of Gissing's handling of the theme of separation is, to me, if less impressive, more permanently moving. It is easy, at any social level, for human beings to lose each other in the labyrinth of life; in the world of the well-to-do, amusements, engagements, ambitions, obligations come constantly between. In his world it is a fluke if they meet again."

From the volume of short tales he was reviewing, MacCarthy, who readily admitted that they are naturally "no measure of his sweep," chose three of which he gave his readers some idea, "Under an Umbrella," "The Ring Finger" and "The Peace Bringer," and he gave of each the pathetic elements, suggestive of Chekov, "though Gissing's drawing of types he disliked was harsher, and probably due to the heavy smugness of the atmosphere in which they flourished." And the reviewer bravely became more personal for reasons which are transparent:

"There are not many novelists I respect more than George Gissing, and I feel an anxious, almost angry, concern lest his books should be forgotten. *New Grub Street* (probably the best novel about the drudgery of writing on starvation wages), *Odd Women* (the nearest approach in English to *The Three Sisters*), *The Nether World*, *The Whirlpool*, and even the slighter stories, *Will Warburton* and *Eve's Ransom* are so genuine that such anxiety seems unnecessary. Then I recall how few, even among the readers of serious fiction, seem able to distinguish between the good and sham-good. That is ominous. If novels served up with stylistic kick-shaws, or drenched in the flavouring of the latest frankness or revolt, pass with so many as "distinguished" or "powerful," what chance have Gissing's merits which are unaccompanied by such attractions?"

This fifth essay on Gissing from Desmond MacCarthy's pen was to all appearances the last he devoted to him, and the volume he reviewed was the last of Gissing's hitherto uncollected fiction that was published before the Second World War. But it was not the last time MacCarthy's name appeared above or under an essay of his on Gissing. And at this point a bibliographical mystery looms ahead. There is in existence in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester, a copy of an amateurishly bound twenty-two page booklet, the title page of which reads: REVIEWS | OF | GEORGE GISSING | By | Desmond MacCarthy | [ornamental rosace] | Privately Printed | 1938, the whole being printed inside a decorative frame. The booklet contains three sections: The Permanent Stranger, An English

Chekov and A Specialist on Poverty. Now it is clear that the texts of the three sections or essays were not reset, but reproduced from press-cuttings of the three pieces with part title pages inserted. It is also clear that “The Permanent Stranger,” which can be read in this writer’s volume of *Collected Articles on George Gissing* (Frank Cass and Co., 1968), was an essay by Walter Allen originally published in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 14 February 1948, p. 92, as established by the TLS Centenary Archive. Only the second and third articles are the work of Desmond MacCarthy and the booklet cannot have appeared before 1948 at the earliest. It is impossible to believe that he himself was responsible for the publication of this bibliographical oddity although he was still alive and may have known of its existence. The mystery is not likely to be cleared up in the foreseeable future. Desmond MacCarthy was knighted in 1951 and died on 8 June 1952. By then his fears concerning the likelihood of Gissing’s reputation being secure in the canon of English literature were still fully justified. At least he had done his best to sustain it before the era of serious scholarship heralded by Jacob Korg began in earnest.

The Gissings’ Wakefield Circle

I – The Benington and Binks families

ANTHONY PETYT
Wakefield

When Thomas Waller died in 1870 his widow was left with the problem of educating her three sons. During his lifetime T. W. Gissing had been a leading figure in Wakefield, he had served as a Liberal member of the Town Council from 1867 until his death and had been a member of many local societies and institutions. He served on several committees including those of the Wakefield Mechanics’ Institution, the Wakefield Microscopical Society, Wakefield Book Club and the Liberal Party and held many offices in those bodies over the years. He was also involved with the management of the Wakefield Industrial and Fine Art Exhibition which was held in 1865, Clayton Hospital and Wakefield Lancasterian School. As a result of all this work he had made the acquaintance of many of the prominent men in the town, who, on his death, came to the assistance of his widow. Amongst these friends were Henry Benington, a wholesale and retail draper with his business premises in Northgate, and John Binks, a

corn merchant of Thornes Lane. Both were Quakers, hence the choice for the schooling of the three Gissing orphan boys of Lindow Grove School, Alderley Edge, Cheshire, whose headmaster, James Wood,¹ also a Quaker, had married Rachel, the sister of Henry Benington.

The census return for 1841 lists George Benington, a draper, born at Skeffling, in the East Riding of Yorkshire in 1796, living with his family at Cliff Field Terrace, Wakefield. The family consisted of George Benington, his wife Mary, two sons, Henry and Edmund, and two daughters, Rachel and Isabel. Also living in the house were Isabel Benington, a relative, Charles Allen, a draper's assistant and three domestic servants. George Benington had been married twice; his first wife, Sarah Yarwood,² had died at Walton, a nearby village, in 1837, and was the mother of the four children. He married his second wife, Mary Bragg, in 1840. He died in October 1850, just four months after the death of Mary. George and his two wives are all interred in the burial ground of the Wakefield Friends Meeting House in Thornhill Street.³

Of the four children of George Benington the two sons, Henry, born 1833, and Edmund, born 1836, were to carry on the family business although Edmund was to leave Wakefield some years later and settle in Liverpool; the elder daughter, Rachel, born 1831, was to marry James Wood in 1859 and Isabel, the younger daughter, born 1834, married John Binks in 1871. Henry, who never married, continued to run the draper's business until his death in 1902 and was a well-known figure in the public affairs of Wakefield.

Henry Benington was a close friend of T. W. Gissing and the two men worked together on various committees and boards of management. For many years Benington was a committee member at the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution and in 1889 was elected to the post of Honorary Librarian. In the succeeding years he was heavily involved, with others, with the compilation of a new catalogue. He was also a long-standing member of the Wakefield Book Club and he succeeded William Stott Banks⁴ as secretary on the latter's death in 1872. His long service of twenty-five years as secretary of the Book Club was rewarded by the presentation of two silver candlesticks and a silver inkstand.

A Liberal in politics, Benington was a member of the Wakefield Town Council from 1863 to 1867. He served on the committee of Wakefield Technical College, was a manager of Wakefield Lancasterian School and a governor of Clayton Hospital. The Wakefield Tradesmen Association counted him among its members and he played an active part on the council

of the Tradesmen's Benevolent Institution. He also belonged to the Yorkshire Archaeological Society.

He died at his home in Wentworth Terrace, Wakefield on 11 April 1902, following an attack of influenza.⁵ His death was marked by the tolling of the Town Hall bell, a mark of respect for all serving and retired members of the Town Council. He was interred in the Wakefield Friends Meeting House burial ground on 14 April 1902.

Occasionally Benington would visit the school at Alderley Edge to see his sister and brother-in-law, Rachel and James Wood, and no doubt he kept a close eye on the progress of the three Gissing brothers. One of these occasions was mentioned by George in a letter to his mother dated 5 May 1872.⁶ Writing from Wakefield three years later, William Gissing told his brother George on 28 June⁷ that the Gissing family had been invited to have tea that day with Mr. Benington because all his relatives were away from Wakefield; then shortly afterwards, in July,⁸ he reported that Mr. Benington was absent from Wakefield on a visit to his Wood relatives in Colwyn. George may well have kept up some sort of contact with his father's friend in later years. From Agbrigg on 4 August 1889,⁹ he included in a list of local news which ended a letter to his sister Ellen, who was staying with Algernon at Broadway, Benington's election as Hon. Librarian at the Mechanics' Institution. Some years later, during a short stay in Wakefield in 1895, he recorded in his diary that he had called on him, and after his death wrote to Ellen: "Henry Benington—well, well! He was very frail when I saw him last. A long, quiet and surely not an unhappy life. Very much of a gentleman always. And one always felt that he would have been more at ease in a more intellectual circle than he could find at Wakefield—at all events since 1870." Surely an oblique reference to his friendship with T. W. Gissing who died in that year.¹⁰

John Binks, Henry Benington's brother-in-law, was born on 3 December 1826 at Bolton-le-Moors, Lancashire. Between 1838 and 1840 he was a pupil at the Quaker school at Ackworth near Wakefield. At the age of sixteen he entered the service of Messrs. Mackie and Sons, corn merchants of Wakefield, where he was placed under the charge of Richard Whiteley, who was to train him in all aspects of the trade. They worked closely together for several years until Richard Whiteley left Messrs. Mackie's employment and commenced business as a corn merchant on his own account. Soon afterwards John Binks entered into partnership with him and the firm traded as corn merchants under the title of Whiteley and Binks.

Like Benington, Binks was a close friend of T. W. Gissing. All three were closely associated with the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution. He served on the Institution's committee for many years, was a vice-president and held the posts of Honorary Secretary and Honorary Librarian. Binks took a very active part in the organisation of the Wakefield Industrial and Fine Art Exhibition that was held in 1865. Along with such personalities as T. W. Gissing, Samuel Bruce,¹¹ W. R. Milner,¹² R. B. Mackie¹³ and W. S. Banks he served on the committee and several sub-committees. The exhibition was a great success and the profits were used to finance the Wakefield Industrial and Fine Art Institution.

Binks was also a member, with T. W. Gissing, of the Wakefield Microscopical Society. This society, limited to ten members at any one time, was formed in October 1854 and remained in existence until 1871. During his period of membership Binks held the positions of Secretary and Treasurer.

For more than thirty years he worked energetically on behalf of the Clayton Hospital and Wakefield dispensary. Having held for over two decades the post of Honorary Secretary, he was, in recognition of his services, presented by public subscription with his portrait in oil and a silver tea and coffee set. Other interests included the Lancasterian School in Wakefield, where he was a manager and held various positions on the committee. He was also a member of the Wakefield Tradesmen's Benevolent Institution, and of the Liberal Party. On the death of T. W. Gissing Binks was one of the pallbearers. Along with George Mander¹⁴ and Samuel Bruce he was invited to accept the nomination for the seat left vacant on the Town Council by Thomas Gissing as Liberal representative of St. John's Ward. All three refused the nomination.

On 2 November 1871,¹⁵ John Binks married Isabel Benington at the Wakefield Friends Meeting House. The groom was forty-four and his wife thirty-seven. There were no children of the marriage. Isabel was a member of the Ladies Committee of the Wakefield Lancasterian School from its formation in 1858 until the early 1880s. She was to outlive her husband by twenty years, dying in November 1919, aged eighty-five. He died on Sunday, 15 June 1890¹⁶ at his home in Burton Street, Wakefield, being then sixty-three. He was buried in the graveyard at the Wakefield Friends Meeting House on 17 June 1890.

There are very few references to John Binks in George Gissing's correspondence. Brief mentions of him appear in two letters, one from William Gissing to George¹⁷ and one from George to his brother Algernon,¹⁸ in which he discusses the latter's idea of setting up a new newspaper in

Wakefield. George suggests that Algernon should approach John Binks and Samuel Bruce with his plans in the hope that they might become partners in the venture. George would, no doubt, call to see John Binks whenever he was visiting his family in Wakefield. His diary entry for 4 April 1895,¹⁹ five years after Binks's death, recorded a visit to his widow.

¹James Wood married Rachel Benington at the Friends Meeting House, Wakefield, on 27 December 1859.

²*West Riding Herald*, 5 May 1837, p. 5, col. 5.

³Burial Register, Friends Meeting House, Wakefield.

⁴William Stott Banks (1821-1872), Wakefield solicitor and friend of T. W. Gissing.

⁵Obituary, *Wakefield Express*, 12 April 1902, p. 8, col. 3.

⁶*Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 1, p. 11.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁹*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 92.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 372.

¹¹Samuel Bruce (1829-1905), Wakefield barrister and friend of the Gissing family.

¹²William Ralph Milner (1810-1868), Resident Surgeon at the Convict Department of the Wakefield House of Correction and friend of T. W. Gissing.

¹³Robert Bownas Mackie (1829-1885), Liberal M.P. for Wakefield 1880-1885, corn merchant and friend of T. W. Gissing.

¹⁴George Mander (1821-1890), Wakefield solicitor and friend of T. W. Gissing

¹⁵Marriage Register, Wakefield Friends Meeting House.

¹⁶Obituary, *Wakefield Echo*, 20 June 1890.

¹⁷*Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 1, p. 36.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 125.

¹⁹Diary of George Gissing, p. 370.

Book Reviews

George Gissing: Voices of the Unclassed, eds. Martin Ryle and Jenny Bourne Taylor, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005.

The centenary of Gissing's death was celebrated in a variety of manners and places three years ago, notably in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, where on 28 December 2003, his grave was made a little less impersonal and a number of local personalities gathered with a few foreign devotees for an unassuming ceremony which was reported first in the local press, then in a privately printed brochure. But publishers did not seem eager to pay him homage in the traditional manner with eyes riveted on the calendar. A few volumes had been announced in the last year or two and in retrospect one still sees

the firms concerned hesitating to release their volumes at a time when they might look like semi-official celebrations. The finely ironical French phrase “Il est urgent d’attendre” occurred to several impatient people on both sides of the Channel. However, it is perhaps closer to the truth to say that spacing out was a better policy from the purely commercial point of view.

The present volume carries an attractive sub-title which is perhaps better suited to the earlier part than to the whole of Gissing’s career, but a look at the index shows that the whole of it is covered, however cursorily. Still, let no reader try to check how *Denzil Quarrier* and the 115 short stories have fared at the hands of the ten critics: they are ruthlessly and, we think, unwisely ignored. Besides, though *By the Ionian Sea*, if read with an open mind, could have been a source of many illuminating allusions, this single and unique travel narrative published by Gissing receives no more attention than those parts of his life which attest that until the late 1880s he himself was one of the unclassed. About one half of the contributors are known to have written at some length on Gissing, and two of them have done a good deal more: Patrick Parrinder, who once edited *The Whirlpool* for the Harvester Press and very recently Simon James, who devoted a book-length study to Gissing’s novels and edited his critical study of Dickens. But Emma Liggins has a chapter on Gissing and social investigation in *Women’s Work Cultures 1850-1950*, edited by Louise Jackson and Krista Cowman (Ashgate, 2005), a book we have not yet seen, and her *George Gissing, the Working Woman and Urban Culture* (Ashgate again) is apparently in the press. The list of former contributors to Gissing studies who appear again in the present volume will be about complete if we add David Glover, whose piece in *A Garland for Gissing* was one of the most widely appreciated in 2001.

To scholars who have had a long experience of Gissing studies, it will be obvious that the contents of the present book are of strikingly unequal value. A few contributors betray a knowledge of Gissing’s life and works the deficiency of which is signalled by the authors’ recurrent deviations into irrelevant debates with their favourite analysts of artistic creativity. To some of these critics, notably Martin Ryle, Christina Lupton and her fellow commentator Tilman Reitz, Gissing’s name is hardly more than an excuse for wandering with a good deal of mental gesticulation into the unbounded fields of tiresome abstraction. Readers, we fear, will inevitably learn or renew their acquaintance with the art of skipping. The giddiness of abstraction makes some pages of this book, notably in the third, fourth, eighth and ninth chapters barely readable. The writers all too often forget they have

contracted to throw light on Gissing's artistic achievement, not to bury him and his work under pages of abstruse comment provokingly alien to the subject. The following example, taken from p. 71, will speak for itself: "An unstable trope, mental duality enables dissonant meanings to be held together within an embedded structure by a voice that shifts between identification and distance in its simultaneous analysis and representation of a consciousness that teeters on the brink of control of its own associations." Sometimes we come across mouldy nuts as unappetising as this: "'Brains,' which equip the thinker to think and the writer to write, also distance thinkers and writers from ready-made assumptions; so intellectual integrity tends to entail marginality." When Jacob Korg published his first article on Gissing in *The American Scholar* some fifty-five years ago, he said very much the same thing in far simpler terms and he did not pretend he was reinventing the wheel.

A striking characteristic of the majority of the essays collected here is their lack of empathy with their subject. Scott McCracken for instance writes as though Gissing's novels were the work, not of a human creature, but of some machine like that which Marian Yule has in mind during a fit of depression under the great dome. His close analysis of selected passages in *The Nether World*, *Thyrza*, *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile* makes pleasant, stimulating reading (his string of quotations under the heading "The meal as socially symbolic art" will repay the effort of re-reading), but clever as are the passages in which he temporarily leaves aside his brevities of critical theory, his essay is in some respects a reminder of lost opportunities. His bibliography reveals no (besmirching?) contacts with Gissing's private papers like his *Commonplace Book* or a number of short stories such as "An Inspiration" and "Simple Simon," which would have made his sources so much richer. Another example of sadly missed opportunity traceable to a mistaken unconcern with anything biographical and epistolary is offered by Deborah Parsons' grandly titled essay "Whirlpools of Modernity: European Naturalism and the Urban Phantasmagoria." She promises to deal with Gissing, Zola and Peréz Gal-dós, but rather than ground her subject in solid biographical considerations supplied by Gissing's diary and correspondence (see his letters from November 1902 to 3 June 1903), she dawdles amid largely irrelevant theoretical aridities borrowed from a little known book, *The Philosophy of Money*, variously attributed to George or Georg Simmel and no less variously dated 1900 and 1990! The rigid partitioning of her chapter amounts to a refusal to suggest comparisons between the views of urban life offered by the three novelists.

By far the most useful chapters, pleasantly free of critical jargon, are those by Simon James on the discontents of everyday life in *The Whirlpool*; by Diana Maltz about Gissing and philanthropic slumming, which does full justice to recent work about Clara Collet; by Emma Liggins, who discusses the dangers to which women are exposed in urban public life; by David Glover whose valuable essay explores some views on sex and the city shared by Gissing, Helmholtz and Freud; and last but not least by Patrick Parrinder whose excellent chapter functions as a tailpiece which links up Gissing with a number of figures in twentieth-century English fiction, notably Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, Morley Roberts, Frank Swinnerton, George Orwell, V. S. Pritchett, Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, John Wain and Philip Larkin. Conversely, the ninth chapter, although the only one written by two scholars, cannot even claim to attest to a passable knowledge of Gissing. By and large the proofs of the volume have been read efficiently. Yet some of the misprints are typical of what careful readers hate to find in books available from good publishers. Should a second edition be called for, the following list might prove of some use: “speaks backs” (p. 1); “Sybil” for “Sibyl” Carnaby (pp. 18 and 86); single quote badly printed in l. 15 on p. 37; “Carrie Fisher” for “Carrie Mitchell”, p. 41; “an” for “and,” p. 49; “the this encounter,” p. 58; “Héredité,” pp. 65 and 80; “1870” for “1873,” p. 68; meaningless sentence in middle of p. 69; lack of indentation, p. 90; “Rougon-Macqart” for “Rougon-Macquart,” p. 108; “Parson” for “Parsons,” p. 124; “Micheaux” for “Michaux,” p. 144; “deals” for “dealt,” p. 149. To these should be added another five misprints in the index: Black Clemantina/Clementina; Frederico/Federico, Annette; Girls/Girls’ Own Paper; Sichel, Ethel/Edith; and—the supreme test in books and booksellers’ catalogues: Ward, Mrs. Humphrey/Humphry! — Pierre Coustillas

Diana Maltz, *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870-1900: Beauty and the People*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

This is one more book on Gissing in context, but nothing even remotely connected with Adrian Poole’s, which is now thirty years old. It is also a study which *had* to be written. Indeed, anyone who has read attentively Gissing’s novels of the 1880s up to *A Life’s Morning*, preferably in order of publication, as well as his collected correspondence of the same period, must have been struck by the recurrence of themes and words such as philanthropy, education, lecturing, housing, sabbatarianism, ritualism, aestheticism, working-class leisure, rational recreations as well as by the inter-

mittent presence of the names of Ruskin, Browning and William Morris. Since serious studies of his life and works began to be published, biographers and critics have been aware that his interest in art and—marginally—in aestheticism—amounted to a passion. Art was to him a vital component of cultural life and it is present as a subject in all his works from the still partly unpublished juvenilia to his unfinished story of Roman and Goth known as *Veranilda*. It is to this that the sixth chapter of Diana Maltz's book is devoted, the first five chapters being at once an independent study of that typically Victorian question—how to introduce beauty into the life of the people, how to bring the people to respond to beauty, whether natural or man-made—and a detailed backdrop for Gissing's unquenchable interest in the making or impression of what is beautiful or true.

The volume is an intensely serious though colourful enquiry into the various brands of aestheticism which more or less easily succeeded in flowering in Victorian cities along with the horrors born of rampant industrialism. At a time when intelligent entertainment was comparatively uncommon, it was not surprising that amusement was sought in activities which the passing of time has made thoroughly ridiculous and Gissing's well-known phrase "Time could not be more solidly wasted" repeatedly occurs to one as one goes through passages descriptive of—say, slum ritualism or quarrels about the opening of museums on Sundays. Diana Maltz tells us about Walter Besant's novella, *In Deacon's Orders*, a mid-nineties tale in which a young deacon working in a slum "indulges in expressions of reverence and penitence, but remains essentially heartless and exploitative. The complaint of the deacon's forsaken lover, 'Nothing is real, everything is acted,' presumably applies," we are more than plausibly told, "not merely to the protagonist's false repentance, but also to the genuflections of all sacrificing Ritualist priests. While devotees defended the beautification of churches through the maxim that 'art was handmaid to religion,' skeptics wondered if the opposite were true—if religion had become a mere excuse for art." The illustrations, those by George Du Maurier reproduced from *Punch* in particular, are devastating. A cartoon shows a self-important clergyman guiding two wealthy young women along a slum street to the derisive catcalls of the ragged children: "Ello! Ere's a Masher. Look at 'is Collar and 'At!" Another cartoon, entitled "Overdoing It" depicts the very latest craze, visiting a dear little slum with a lord who has just discovered it: "Fourteen poor things sleeping in One Bed, and no window." The mackintoshes worn by the ladies are to keep out infection and hide one's diamonds, says one of the visitors. In her section

entitled “Slumming as decadence: living one’s slum,” Diana Maltz quotes from a Harvard unpublished dissertation, “Culture and Poverty” (1987), by Seth Koven, who called Toynbee Hall the *locus classicus* of shallow, fashionable slumming and a mandatory stop on high society’s tour of east London. It was thought worthy of a mention in Baedeker’s Guide Book to London. Visiting the down and outs of the metropolis was regarded as a must for foreign visitors.

In such a context one naturally thinks of Helen Norman’s slumming tours in *Workers in the Dawn* and of John Pether’s angry warning to her about the harmfulness of philanthropy which, he thinks, kills the independence of the poor and delays the outbreak of the revolution (Vol. II, ch. 7), a passage which would have graced the present book. But this absence is amply compensated for by the author’s shrewd comments on the novel, from which illuminating quotations like the following are culled: “In appearance, [a beautiful picture] may do no more [than please its painter and a few rich *dilettanti*] but in reality its spirit permeates every level of society,” an enthusiastic statement characteristic of young Gissing, whose faith in the capacity of culture to elevate the poor was still largely intact. Commentators on Gissing and the power of learning will be grateful to Diana Maltz for her close analysis of his evolution on the subject. No phase of it is neglected, from the time when his letters to his familiars were long anguished pleas for self-improvement to that when he could wearily conclude a section of the Ryecroft Papers on education with these words: “On an ungenerous soil it is vain to look for rich crops” (Spring XXII). This is how, on p. 16, the critic sums up the evolution from *Workers in the Dawn* to *Will Warburton*: “Gissing enthusiastically identified with Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites in the 1880s, only to end by vilifying aesthetes in his later fiction. Caught between his intense desire for an art-loving English populace and his belief that no educational scheme could crush widespread vulgarity, Gissing designed narratives that punctured missionary aesthetic programs’ optimism and conduct.” Most of the choice bits in the works one spontaneously thinks of to illustrate his pungent, if not corrosive, thoughts on aestheticism are aptly quoted in the book, from the telltale remark made by the working man at the end of the 1883 essay “On Battersea Bridge” which strikingly shows how an uneducated observer and an educated one, confronted with a beautiful sunset over the muddy Thames respond contrastingly to the sight, to the satirical scene in *Our Friend the Charlatan* where May Tomalin relates how she inured a working-class family to the beauties of English medieval literature.

Perhaps inevitably some of the critic's assertions will fail to meet with universal approval. Gissing for one would have rejected the epithet "naturalist" if applied to his early work; nor would he have said that some of his work was set in the East End of London. He once corrected a journalist on this point. And travellers who have been in Gissing's footsteps in Calabria will reject the idea that during the whole of his travels there he slept in filthy hovels and ate inedible food. Taranto must not be confused with Cosenza, Catanzaro with Cotrone, Reggio with Squillace. Besides it is slightly misleading to write that in all these places Gissing was on holiday. He was, as Diana Maltz herself writes on p. 204, reliving the sensations he had stored in memory. But these are tiny quibbles. Her book is admirable from cover to cover, well researched, fraught with suggestions and attractively illustrated. The notes will be fresh starting-points for historians and literary critics anxious to discover material on aestheticism which is accessible only in half-forgotten files of Victorian magazines. We venture to predict that it will find readers for decades. The publishers might do well to publish a paperback edition. It would find a wider readership than the present edition which, though not *very* expensive, can hardly be considered a compulsive purchase. It should be made something more than a tempting one.— Pierre Coustillas

Rivista di Studi Vittoriani, no. 17, January 2004, Pescara : Edizione Tracce.

The seventeenth number of *RSV*, like the September 1993 number of *Merope*, is a special issue devoted to George Gissing. Also published by the "G. D'Annunzio" University of Chieti-Pescara and edited by Francesco Marroni, this Gissing number is the first in a series of monographs to be dedicated to individual Victorian poets and novelists. It contains seven essays, which together highlight Gissing's skill and versatility as a writer. Certainly, admirers of both the major and the neglected shorter works will find much of interest here.

Two of the contributors focus on short stories. In his scholarly contribution, "'Human Odds and Ends.' A Historical, Structural and Aesthetic Approach to Gissing's Twenty Sketches," Pierre Coustillas draws upon the unpublished scrapbook to show its significant role as a preparatory source for the sketches which, together with nine short stories, make up the volume *Human Odds and Ends*. Whereas earlier critics dismissed these pieces as mere potboilers, later critics have tended to cite Gissing's own unfavourable appraisal of them. Coustillas throws an illuminating spotlight on

Gissing at work to show that he approached the writing of the sketches with the same professionalism he brought to his major works. As a result he places the scrapbook where it undoubtedly belongs on the front shelf of source materials alongside the *Memorandum Book*, *Commonplace Book*, and *Extracts from my Reading*. For each of the twenty sketches Coustillas establishes its source either in a press cutting or in a manuscript note from the scrapbook. The entries are fascinating reading because enriched by Coustillas' expert knowledge of the highways and byways of Gissing country. So we learn that "The Tout of Yarmouth Bridge" originated in a press cutting "entitled 'Lodging-touts'" and "misadventures experienced by Gissing and his family at Yarmouth and Gorleston in late July and early August 1895." Meanwhile "Raw Material," inspired by an article entitled "The Servant Question," brought Gissing the friendship of Herbert Heaton Sturmer, "who praised Gissing's candid picture of domestic misery." Coustillas directs special attention to the unity and variety of situations in the sketches whilst emphasising the originality of Gissing's fictional world. He also makes the important point that the stories are neither expressions of an inherent pessimism nor of the prevailing decadent theme of the 1890s, but realistic period pieces.

In "Physiognomy in Gissing's 'The Scrupulous Father,'" Bouwe Postmus traces the influence of physiognomical theory upon Gissing's character descriptions, concentrating on one of the most anthologised of his stories. Postmus provides a richly informative historical overview of physiognomy and documents the frequency of the word and its derivatives in Gissing's complete oeuvre, having checked them on the excellent *Gissing in Cyberspace* website. Since Mitsu Matsuoka's digitalising of Gissing's works is incomplete, four early occurrences of "physiognomy" or "physiognomical" in "One Farthing Damages," "The Quarry on the Heath," and "All for Love" are missing. Postmus' analyses of the telling scene in *Demos* in which Adela studies "her husband, Richard Mutimer's sleeping face," and of a similar scene between Rufus and Rose in "The Scrupulous Father" are admirable. He also gives an erudite account of the European prejudice against red hair, which he then relates to Gissing's works. In his treatment of "The Scrupulous Father" he observes that Gissing used physiognomical terms to convey class characteristics or to show how outward features could reflect "changes in a character's inner life." This essay succeeds splendidly in its aim of ranking Gissing among those "greater and lesser novelists in nineteenth-century Europe" who were influenced by Lavater's theories.

David Grylls in “Sex and (Self-) Censorship: Gissing’s Revision of *The Unclassed*,” takes up the 1884 text of *The Unclassed* to analyse the sexual content omitted in the 1895 revised edition. Gissing readers not possessing the rare first edition will only know the revision, for all subsequent publications of *The Unclassed*, including The Harvester Press edition, used the 1895 text. Considering Gissing strongly condemned restraints on expression in 1884, Grylls’ assessment that “the first edition is far more explicit and ... far more shocking” is both startling and unexpected. This is an exhilarating finding, proven time and again in the comparisons of both texts. Furthermore, Grylls’ remarkably informed reading of Waymark’s first encounter with Ida enables us to see their behaviour from a contemporary reader’s perspective. We learn that their public interactions would have been regarded as highly immoral. When Grylls writes, “It is almost unknown in the English fiction of the period for an unmarried man and woman to visit a public restaurant,” we can appreciate how courageous the younger Gissing was in his defiance of conventions. One wonders what he might have given us were Mrs. Grundy less censorious. The most surprising discovery and Grylls’ main point is that Gissing himself saw fit to tone down the revised edition of *The Unclassed*. He gives several valid reasons why Gissing did this. The most plausible is that “he felt embarrassed by the fervent, earnest, polemical nature of his earlier treatment of sex.” In his summary Grylls rightly calls for a republication of the 1884 first edition.

In “*The Nether World* and the Abysmal Topography of Human Negativity,” Emanuela Ettorre offers an intriguing examination of Gissing’s fictional world. She asserts that while Gissing attempted an authentic portrayal of “the degrading and sordid aspects of Clerkenwell,” he produced a distorted view of the world, hence a deceitful, selective picture coloured by his own disenchantment with the lower classes at the time of writing. Using theoretical terms from Barthes, Greimas, and Social Darwinism, Ettorre focuses on various aspects of Gissing’s representation to demonstrate her point that his “profound nihilism” pervades Clerkenwell with an atmosphere of eternal hopelessness. According to Ettorre Gissing’s crowd in *The Nether World* is a fragmented, brutal mass which negates all individuality, and through its anonymity nullifies any potential revolutionary threat. This absorbing analysis shows Gissing’s nether world to be savage, cruel, and inherently rotten, a Hell on earth from which there is no escape. In her reading of *The Nether World* Ettorre sees Gissing questioning and ultimately rejecting philanthropy and the efficacy of reconstruction. She

underlines her argument by referring to a resonant passage in which Gissing seems to be suggesting that “the only remedy lies in total destruction ... only by obliterating the present and those who belong to it can civilisation flourish again.”

Francesco Marroni’s stimulating essay, “*Born in Exile: George Gissing’s Construction of Godwin Peak as an *exul immeritus*,*” cogently argues that “the novel is a landmark in the history of Victorian fiction” because Godwin Peak anticipates the outsider of modernist literature. Rejecting contemporary critics of the novel for holding too negative a view of Peak, and biographical approaches for being too narrow in insistently asserting that *he* is Gissing, Marroni proposes looking at Peak’s life and death in exilic solitude in a more positive light. In his view Godwin Peak is representative of a type of *exul immeritus* in the “time-honoured tradition of famous exiles” such as Dante, whose solitude and inner restlessness find positive expression in cultural growth. In a thoroughgoing examination of Peak’s character Marroni focuses on such recurrent lexical terms as “solitude,” “loneliness,” “isolation,” “remoteness,” and “hypocrisy” in order to interpret and define Peak’s life as an exile and to get “to the bottom of his existential problem.” Simultaneously he shows how Peak’s conflict with society and with himself epitomises the polarising attitudes and moral sensibility which often characterise the outsider in modernist literature. Marroni’s thought-provoking reading of *Born in Exile* demonstrates precisely what he calls for in his critique, a full appreciation of Gissing’s accomplishment in his creation of his most profound novel and of his most fascinating character.

Recently modern critics have shown new interest in *Eve’s Ransom*. It is pleasing to find this trend continuing in Maria Teresa Chialant’s “*Eve’s Ransom: Narrative Strategies and Politics of Gender*,” which is devoted to championing this novel and easily dispels the long-held view that Gissing could not adapt to new forms of storytelling. She asserts that this most compact and readable of Gissing’s works encapsulates all the themes and motifs found in the longer efforts. She then identifies these representative narrative elements so as to relate them to his three-decker novels. Pursuing “The Anti-Industrial Theme,” she highlights the omniscient author’s ubiquitous critique of industrialism owing to which she places the work within the tradition of the “industrial novels” of the 1840s and 1850s. In her discussion of “The Figure of the Exile” not all readers will share her endorsement of Gillian Tindall’s view that Gissing “tended to use his novels to explore situations he later entered himself.” Yet Chialant provides an intel-

lignant sociological study of Hilliard as a type of exile, seeing in him a latter-day Godwin Peak. The last heading “The Passion of New Eve: Eve Madeley and the New Woman in the City” is followed by a fine commentary on Hilliard’s baffled and ambivalent perception of Eve as she roams the public spaces of London. Is she a flâneuse or slave to patriarchy, a new Eve or fallen Angel? Undoubtedly, as Chialant argues, to the late-Victorian gentleman Eve is a problematic figure. This refreshingly positive reading of *Eve’s Ransom* will surely win the novel new readers.

In “Honest deception: Class and Character in George Gissing’s *Will Warburton*,” Arlene Young examines Gissing’s treatment of class prejudice in one of his most neglected works. An admirer of the novel like John Halperin before her, she praises Gissing’s handling of the narrative and his skilful characterisation of Will Warburton. Particularly interesting here is her view that Gissing’s satiric comments on class biases are more telling and effective because his critique does not smack of the bitterness noticeable in earlier works. Young is at her strongest in her exploration of Warburton’s changing class perceptions as his class displacement compels him to act and behave in ways foreign to his benevolent nature. Warburton soon realises, she observes, that preoccupation with the petty concerns born of being in “straitened circumstances” will inevitably result in “moral detriment.” She also notes that, in spite of his new awareness of the absurdity of class assumptions, he is nonetheless riddled with a strong sense of shame at his predicament, a feeling which causes him to lead a double life so as to deceive his relatives. Thus, she concludes, Warburton “pretends that he is not a grocer” simply because he is unable to cast off his own snobbish perception of himself as a gentleman. What emerges from Young’s fine study of *Will Warburton* is the humaneness Gissing brings to his defence of lower middle-class misdemeanours. It is above all this quality, which permeates all his works, that has gained him and will continue to gain him many readers.— Markus Neacey, Berlin

Francesco Badolato, *George Gissing: romanziere del tardo periodo vittoriano*, Soveria Mannelli (Catanzaro): Rubbettino Editore, 2005.

For nearly forty years Francesco Badolato has devoted himself especially to the study of Gissing and his works, and has been a leading pioneer of Gissing studies in Italy. He has translated and edited several works by Gissing, and has also written many articles, which are republished in this volume. Most of the pieces were designed to capture the interest of Italians

of literary tastes, but with little or no knowledge of Gissing. Sometimes they were introduced to recent books (editions of his works and letters, as well as biographical and critical studies) reflecting the revival of interest in Gissing, which has been a feature of English literary studies since the 1950s. Most of these pieces, then, have an essentially “introductory” character; and those about recent books on Gissing give information about their contents rather than offer critical assessments of their merits and demerits. Moreover, some points in this book are repeated several times.

The first two parts (comprising 243 pages) are in Italian, the third part (39 pages) is in English. The first part outlines Gissing’s life, career, and personality, and his early engagement with Comte’s positivism and Schopenhauer’s pessimism. The second part consists of mainly short pieces on various aspects of Gissing and his writings, but the dominant theme is his relationship to Italy, and above all to Calabria, the southernmost region of mainland Italy, where Francesco Badolato was born and grew up. Gissing was one of the few English travellers who ventured beyond Naples to the far south of Italy, and his impressions of this remote area are discussed in several pieces. He was primarily interested in its classical past, when it was a part of Magna Græcia, and was then ruled by the Romans. Nevertheless, he also made many remarks about modern Calabria, and modern Italy, and their inhabitants. Two interesting pieces (one in Italian, one in English) are about Gissing’s illness in Crotona, and the doctor who treated him. The author interviewed Dr. Sculco’s son, and casts light on the relationship between Gissing and the Italian physician. There are also two longer pieces (again, one in Italian, one in English) recounting the extraordinary story of how the surname (Paparazzo) of Gissing’s hotelkeeper at Catanzaro was used by Fellini in the film “*La Dolce Vita*” to designate a type of intrusive press photographer, and has since gained international currency.

It would have been helpful if details of the dates and places of publication of the pieces in this book had been given (sometimes the dates can be inferred). But most of them first appeared in Italian newspapers and semi-popular periodicals, and a few in academic periodicals. The exigencies of newspaper space clearly determined the length of many pieces, which usually come to four or five pages in book form. Some topics can be properly treated within such limits: e.g., Lear, Gissing and Douglas as English travellers in Calabria, and the comparison of Gissing’s and Cesare Pavese’s Calabrian experiences (the latter, from Turin, spent nine months at Brancaleone, on the Ionian Sea, in 1935-6, as a political prisoner).

However, such limits are unsatisfactory for discussing more complex or conceptually difficult topics: thus, writing about “Art and Nature” in the works of Gissing, Leopardi and Pater in less than five pages must result in superficial treatment. Another short piece is “La morte cristiana in D’Annunzio, Pater e Gissing.” “Christian death” means, apparently, the Christian concept of, or attitude to, death, namely, it is “not only the end of earthly life, but the beginning of eternal happiness” (p. 198). That is, it is the start, too, of a future life (which may, however, also be one of *unhappiness*). But why were these novelists chosen to illustrate this theme? As an adult, D’Annunzio lived a conspicuously unchristian life: he was a notorious hedonist and libertine; Pater, when he wrote *Marius the Epicurean* (this is the only work of his considered) had long ceased to be a Christian; and Gissing, as a young man, was militantly anti-Christian—later he became more tolerant, but he was certainly never a Christian. Should the quotations given from *Contemplazione della morte* be taken seriously? (Cf. John Woodhouse, *Gabriele D’Annunzio* [1998], p. 266.) And it is not a “Christian death” that is celebrated in *Notturmo*, but a “heroic death” on a battlefield; for him, this is what can result in “immortal fame” (*immortalità fra gli uomini*). Again, the apparently irrelevant matter of “love of the poor,” or Christian charity, is brought into the discussions of novels by Pater and Gissing. Readers may find this piece puzzling.

In the long study “L’umanesimo cristiano in Gissing, Manzoni e Pater,” the title seems misleading: “Christian” is appropriate only for Manzoni, and “humanism” is left undefined. It is an interesting, though admittedly tentative, attempt at a comparative study, beginning with the “realism” of their novels (and Pater’s novel is judged, surely correctly, less realistic than Manzoni’s novel and than several novels by Gissing). Then these authors are considered as moralists (“humanist” appears to be used mainly in this sense); next, classical influences on them are briefly discussed, followed by a longer section on their attitudes to religion.

What is said here about Manzoni seems convincing, but perhaps too much attention is paid to theological dialogues in Gissing’s *Workers in the Dawn*. And did he (and Pater, too) really accept “the revelation of Christian values” (p. 188)? On this page, moreover, the thoughts that Gissing ascribes to Helen Norman are quoted as if they were those of Gissing himself. Furthermore, the claim that Gissing “retained (*ha...conservato*) some elements of the Catholic religion, apart from those of the Christian religion in general” (p. 190; cf. pp. 59-60) seems very surprising; no evidence is adduced that Gissing was ever even influenced by Catholic doctrines. And

why should it be considered “a great paradox” (p. 190) that a few characters in some of his novels are portrayed as thinking of becoming Catholics? A novelist’s characters do not necessarily resemble their creator. As for Pater, the claim that he “probably yearned [*anelava*] to become a Catholic” (p. 192) finds no support in the accounts given by his English biographers. Altogether, this seems a worthwhile and stimulating essay; its treatment of Manzoni is excellent, though that of Pater and Gissing has some troubling features.

In “George Gissing e la democrazia,” there is an interesting discussion of his political ideals and opinions; this is a difficult subject, because Gissing did not usually express his opinions explicitly, and they often need to be inferred. His father was a Liberal and, basically, George’s position was Liberal, too; he was opposed to aristocratic privilege, and considered himself a progressive. He approved of the extension of the suffrage, in general or in principle, but I think his position is somewhat misrepresented on p. 239 (pp. 241-42 seem to state his views more accurately). Like many in the late nineteenth century, he also feared it: while most men were uneducated or ill-educated, their having the vote could easily result in grave political evils (just as the lack of education for women resulted in notable social evils, and made married life more difficult). Gissing was certainly repelled by demagogues and by the irrational behaviour of crowds. In general, this is a sensible and balanced treatment of an important topic.

However, in my opinion, the two outstanding pieces in this book are the lengthy comparative study, in Italian, of Gissing and the Sicilian novelist, Giovanni Verga (whose last two novels, published in the 1880s, are widely recognised as masterpieces, though they are too little known in the Anglophone world) and “The Influence of Virgil on George Gissing.” The first of these excellent studies breaks new ground, and the second deals with its topic in a way that leaves little to be desired; readers will find both of them illuminating. Though this book will, of course, appeal especially to Italians interested in Gissing and English literature, others will also find in it many things to interest them.— R. Price

Notes and News

In this number we begin to publish a series of articles on the friends of the Gissing family in Wakefield. The author of these articles, Anthony Petyt, as all readers of this journal well know, is an authority on Gissing in

Wakefield like the late Clifford Brook before him. His knowledge of the history of Wakefield is to be envied. Not only has he been living in the city for years, he is a scrupulous and well-informed local historian and has a considerable knowledge of life in Wakefield from the nineteenth century to the present. One of his specialities is genealogical research, and he has much to tell us about families whose names crop up in Gissing's correspondence, his diary and other private papers. Besides Henry Benington and John Binks with whom it begins in the present number, the series will include articles on W. R. Milner and his sister (who was Gissing's first school mistress), William Stott Banks, the Hick family, Samuel and Lucy Bruce, the Wood, Thompson, Mackie and Ash families. Some photographs of these people have successfully resisted the ravages of time and, despite possible material difficulties, we shall try to reproduce them. It is worth bearing in mind that all these figures of Wakefield life were known to Thomas Waller Gissing and his eldest son.

Markus Neacey writes about some of his discoveries, notably an article by Ralph Pordzik entitled "Fictions of Empire: Imperial Vision in George Gissing's Later Fiction, with special regard to Henry Ryecroft (1903)." This curious essay was published in *Erfurt Electronic Studies in English* (ESEE) 8/2002. It is more remarkable on account of its author's obsessive ideology and its equation of Ryecroft with Gissing than for the knowledge of Gissing it reveals. Ralph Pordzik is also the author of an essay we have not yet seen, "Narrating the Ecstatic Moment: George Gissing and the Beginnings of the Modern Short Story" which appeared in *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* (AAA). A third item mentioned by Markus Neacey is *Jean Rhys Revisited* (Exeter: Stride Publications, 2000), a memoir-cum-biography by Alexis Lykiard. To these discoveries should be added *The Victorian House* (2003) by Judith Flanders, a book of non-fiction which contains numerous quotations and discussions of *New Grub Street* and *The Odd Women*.

Christine Huguet, of the University of Lille III, read a paper entitled "Figures de l'exil dans *New Grub Street* de George Gissing" at a conference organized by the University of Tours a couple of months ago. She has sent us the following abstract:

George Gissing's Fictional Elaboration on Exile in *New Grub Street*

The sense of exclusion is ubiquitous in George Gissing's fiction: whether it be heavily foregrounded from the title page, most notably in *Born in Exile*,

or merely suggested by the intrinsic reality inseparably bound up with it. In *New Grub Street*, Gissing's one acknowledged masterpiece combining autobiographical resonances with an insider's dissection of the contemporary literary scene, estrangement is raised to the level of systematised exile, it is monopolised and articulated as a logical predicate.

This paper will look at Gissing's comprehensive vertical exploration of the concepts of belonging and exclusion in this 1891 novel which, being deeply rooted in material and metaphysical uprooting, tremulously urges the paradox of exile at home.

Shortly after the text of our last number was sent to the printers we heard from Christina Sjöholm, the author of "*The Vice of Wedlock*" : *The Theme of Marriage in George Gissing's Novels* and translator into Swedish of *By the Ionian Sea*, that the latter book, *Vid Joniska havet*, had been selected by the National Board for Braille and talking books to be recorded as a talking book sometime this year. Naturally Christina Sjöholm is both pleased and flattered by this decision, which clearly means that the text reads well in her native language and that the story of Gissing's adventures in southern Italy is expected to be welcome by listeners.

Wulfhard Stahl, of the World Trade Institute in Bern, informs us that he has found a 23-line entry on Gissing in a Polish "History of English Literature: An Overview": Przemyslaw Mroczkowski: *Historia angielskiej literatury*. Zarys. Wrocław/Warszawa/Krakow: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1999, 2004, p. 378. — A review by Stahl of recent books of Gissing interest (the Rivendale Press bibliography, the three Grayswood Press volumes of Gissing's writings on Dickens, the Italian translation of *New Grub Street*, and *Voices of the Unclassed*) is soon to appear in the German academic journal *Anglia*.

Mitsuharu Matsuoka has drawn our attention to a Finnish Master's Thesis of the University of Helsinki, *Rewriting Literary History: Peter Ackroyd and Intertextuality* by Ukko Hänninen (Faculty of Arts, June 1997). Chapter 4 is devoted to *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994). Naturally Gissing's name often appears in it.

Gissing was mentioned several times in the *TLS* in recent months. Under the weekly heading "Author, Author," a passage from *New Grub Street* was submitted to readers for identification on 6 January. The source was revealed on 3 February. On 27 January (p. 14) Jeremy Treglown, in an article on the *TLS* life of Anthony Powell with Maclaren-Ross, Pryce-Jones

and Orwell, wrote that Powell (in October 1947) asked Orwell whether he would contribute a piece on Gissing. Orwell declined, saying he would “have loved to do it,” but “was struggling with this book of mine” [*Nineteen Eighty-Four*]. On 10, 17 and 24 February, respectively pp. 21, 19 and 15, apropos of D. J. Taylor’s new novel, *Kept*, and the difficulties of creating the Victorian effect, the reviewer of the book, Daniel Karlin, and Taylor exchanged some acid remarks about phrases, notably one from *New Grub Street*, the Victorian authenticity of which was unwisely contested.

Some time before, in the *Spectator* for 26 November, D. J. Taylor had chosen *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography* as one of the best books of the year (p. 42).

Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, New York: W. W. Norton [c. 2005]. Fifth impression in the large format. The book, a paperback with a pictorial cover, remains fundamentally what it became in 1995. \$10.95 USA, \$16.50 Canada.

George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, London: Penguin [2006]. New pictorial covers, which can be seen on the Penguin website. The titling is no longer in the upper part of the front cover, but near the bottom. The cover picture, “The Newspaper” by James Tissot, has been used again. £8.99, U.S.A \$14.00, \$20.00 Canada.

George Gissing, *Il riscatto di Eva*, Naples: Liguori Editore, 2005. Pp. lii + 410. On p. [411] is a list of the nine titles published in Angelica, a bilingual collection of titles selected by Laura Di Michele. The last one is *Eve’s Ransom*, translated and edited by Maria Teresa Chialant, of the University of Salerno, with an afterword by Laura Di Michele. Cream stiff wrappers. ISBN 88-207-3884-8. €27.50.

Articles, reviews, etc

Richard Whittington-Egan, “Gissing Games,” *Contemporary Review*, September 2005, pp. 157-59. Review of *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*.

Francesco Badolato, "Pierre Coustillas, George Gissing: the definitive bibliography," *Il Corriere di Roma*, 30 November 2005, p. 18.

Anon., "L'ex preside besanese pubblica un nuovo libro," *La Provincia* (Como), 29 December 2005, p. 29. Review of Dott. Badolato's *George Gissing: romanziere del tardo periodo vittoriano*. The same book was reviewed in *Il foglio di Besana* for December 2005, pp. 1 and 4 and in no. 5 of *Il Besanese* for 2005, p. 19.

Christine DeVine, *Class in Turn-of-the-Century Novels of Gissing, James, Hardy and Wells*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. The book will be reviewed in a forthcoming number of the *Journal*.

Angelica Palumbo, *Passione e ascesi di William Somerset Maugham*, Venice: Marsilio, 2005. For Gissing, see pp. 9, 32, 33, 35, 47-50 (on the link between *Liza of Lambeth* and Gissing and Arthur Morrison), 86.

Mauro F. Minervino, "I libri della settimana: Il mestiere di scrivere," *Diario della settimana* (Milano), 14 January 2006, p. 45. Review of the Italian translation of *New Grub Street*. Another review of the same book, entitled "Gissing, lo scrittore che sapeva dire la verità," by Massimo Romano appeared in *Il nostro tempo*, on 20 January 2006, p. 9. It was illustrated by a view of London and a sketch of Gissing by Steve.

Cynthia Crossen, "Readback: George Gissing's 'New Grub Street' Illuminates the Incompatible Values of Literature and Commerce," *Wall Street Journal on Line*, 24 February 2006. A poorly informed and badly written article on *New Grub Street*.

George Gissing, "Early Impressions," *Dickens Magazine*, Series 4, issue 1, February 2006, p. 15. Reprint of a passage from chapter 2 of *Charles Dickens, a Critical Study* ("An accident...unfinished *Edwin Drood*"). The number is devoted essentially to this last unfinished novel of Dickens.

Philippa Howden and Ichoro Kawachi, "Paths to and from Poverty in Late 19th century novels," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (Wellington, N. Z.), Volume 60 (2006), pp. 102-07. *New Grub Street* is quoted several times.

Anthony Curtis, "Book Reviews," *Book Collector*, Spring 2006, pp. 147-49. Review of *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*.

John Spiers, "Book Reviews: Gissing Bibliography," *English Literature in Transition*, Volume 49 (2006), no. 1, pp. 109-14. Review of *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*.

Jonathan Wild, *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture, 1880-1939*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2006. Contains a chapter on Gissing. The book will be reviewed in a forthcoming number of the *Journal*.

Tailpiece

Edward Clodd as seen by his contemporaries

Nevinson once described Clodd as "the friend of genius and the genius of friendship." For the latter phrase, at least, one could quote the support of half the distinguished men and women whose names appear on these pages. "He had wonderful genius for friendship," said Professor H. E. Armstrong, who never writes an idle word. He was "one of the truest, kindest, most vitally alive spirits that ever breathed," said Professor Selwyn Image, after his death. "The Great Magnet," Morley Roberts called him. Meredith was unusually generous in devising kindly epithets for him. I do not remember to have seen, either in the literary remains I have had at times to handle or in published biographies, so rich a collection of personal tributes as one could compile, if it did not savour of extravagance, from the innumerable descriptions of Clodd in the verse and prose and letters of his friends.

But this characteristic of his became a sort of literary tradition in the first and second decades of the present century, and one's task is rather to explain it. There is no difficulty on the ground of subtlety of character, for this is the last quality that any friend would ascribe to him. It was, in fact, a large part of his attractiveness that he was so candid and spontaneous; one felt that the pleasant acts and words were the simple expression of kindly and companionable impulses. In calling him the good Epicurean I had in mind at the time the way in which he passed from the comparative austerity of his early ideal of life to a more generous appreciation of enjoyment, in such directions and such measure as would encourage, not disturb, his fine

taste and feeling for culture. But the phrase is more applicable in the stricter sense that, like Epicurus, he concluded that the most enriching thing in a man's life is warm and untroubled friendship, a quite brotherly contact with as large a group as possible of his fellows. If there was any reaction to the "bleak Calvinism" of his youth, it was in this transition from a self-centred concern about his soul to an exuberant sociality. ...

In [Societies] and Clubs Clodd met almost every type of character in metropolitan life—I suppose he would say, all except priests and politicians, whom he did not wish to meet—and his character, with its blend of sincerity and geniality, of modesty yet high ability and culture, attracted the personal friendship of a singular variety and number of them. It was, in short, the high quality of the friendships which he had the opportunity to attract that completed the spontaneous happiness which overflowed upon his circle and made men whose association was eagerly sought by ambitious folk find a more cordial pleasure in his hospitality. The longer he lived—to a certain point—the more lovable he found life; and the point was much later than his pessimistic expressions about us post-Victorians suggest. "I am a glutton for life," he would say to his wife in even the ninth decade of his life. He had chosen a kind of life that was worth prolonging. He never came to desire the final rest, and never dreaded it. ...

Seeing that the greater part of his waking life for more than forty years was spent in the same monotonous and prosy employment in the same office, his life certainly offers a remarkable interest and diversity. All the pageant of the literary and intellectual life of London in the last decade of the nineteenth century defiles in the crabbed pages of his pocket-diaries. From about 1895 onward, in fact, the pages are so packed in every half-inch with minute writing that one has almost to abandon them. But there would be no object in repeating year after year the names of the distinguished people he met at dinner or at-home or club. Let me say only that at this time he surely had no thought, not even one of those tremulous half-thoughts that occasionally intrude, that a biographer would one day take notes from these diaries, yet there is not the least expression of complacency or vanity or striving. He puts down half or more of the better-known names of Englishmen of letters with just the same feeling as, perhaps, some stockbroker in Surbiton, with the diary-writing itch, was noting down how he dined on successive nights with Smith, Jones, and Robinson. ...

Nowhere was Clodd more at home than at the O.K. dinner [Clodd became President of the Omar Khayyám Club in 1895]. The bond of union, was just that standard of personal life he had achieved, the old Arab-Persian

ideal: the blend of intellectual and sensuous enjoyment, a book as well as “the jug of wine and thou,” the candour of happily balanced temperaments, complete freedom from the hypocrisies of life. There he contracted his warm life-long friendship with George Whale and Clement Shorter, perfect Omarians, who formed with him, he says, “a trinity of friendship.” Other members—Andrew Lang, Holman Hunt, Grant Allen, etc—were old friends, and he now became a closer friend of Edmund Gosse, H. W. Massingham, W. T. Thiselton-Dyer (with whom he spent delighted hours at Kew), “Anthony Hope,” Sir Martin Conway, and George Gissing. ...

But Clodd’s greatest days as the genius of friendship were only now beginning. Somewhere he complains that the man with whom you talk in the bustle of a club or a dinner is not a friend: you must have him by your fireside with his feet on the fender. The little house at Tufnell Park, Rosemont, had, we saw, for many years gathered some notable groups under its roof, but Clodd began to use more and more the house now his at Aldeburgh for gatherings of intimate friends. ...

The house was not a large mansion to which one could invite large parties of week-enders, but a cosy little double-cottage...where men must sit close together in complete good-fellowship. Hence the list of those who stayed in it at one time or other is a very different matter from a list of the notable men and women Clodd met in clubs or at dinners in London. [The list that follows of the “better-known men and women who came under Clodd’s definition of friends, or guests of his fireside, from the time when he began to entertain at Aldeburgh” includes 78 names.] ...

There are few who could afford not to envy him his friendships; and the brilliant diversity of the list, containing as it does, so many leaders in science, art, and letters as well as famous travellers and administrators, make us appreciate the kind of atmosphere in which he lived and mellowed from 1890 onward. Often when he was alone in Aldeburgh he must have smiled at the Baptist Chapel or looked fondly at the old capstan on the beach before his house, on which he had once played. From there he had set out at the age of fourteen, with neither friends nor money nor high education, for the great adventure of life in London. How many such men convert the cottage of their boyhood into a house for entertaining exalted friends?

From Joseph McCabe, *Edward Clodd: A Memoir* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited, 1932), Ch. 5, “The Genius for Friendship.”

