

The Gissing Journal

Volume XLIII, Number 3, July 2007

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

George Gissing’s Scrapbook Edited by Bouwe Postmus now available



On 29 April 1958 the Parke-Bernet Galleries at New York auctioned a lot that they described in their catalogue as “a very interesting and important group of Gissing’s writings in his autograph. Being manuscript notes written mainly in connection with his works and novels.” This material (“the property of a lady”) was doubtless offered for sale by Alfred Gissing, the writer’s younger son, into whose hands many of his father’s miscellaneous papers had passed from his uncle Algernon by the mid-twenties of the twentieth century. Through the thirties Alfred Gissing had regularly been disposing of the manuscript material and valuable books and papers left by his father and he continued to add to his income in this way after he settled in Switzerland soon after World War II. In offering his father’s literary documents and private papers for sale, he would often discreetly hide his identity behind that of an unspecified “Continental lady”, a ploy which seems to betray a slight sense of guilt as to the frittering away of his father’s artistic inheritance.

Even a superficial examination of the collection will show that it would be more adequate to claim that most of these notes were written by way of preparation for future literary activity and as such they formed the indispensable raw material of Gissing’s art. That he felt the need to introduce verifiable, realistic details into the worlds of his imagination, is perhaps more crucial to our understanding of his art than the analysis of certain recurring structural and thematic concerns, which these notes invite.

The collection put up for sale in 1958 was acquired for the celebrated Carl H. and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation that remained its owner until 1992 when it moved west to end up on the shelves of the Lilly Library, at Bloomington, Indiana. In Quaritch’s chronological catalogue (1992) of the Pforzheimer [Gissing] collection, Arthur Freeman gave an admirable and

detailed description of lot 74. Under the heading “An Evidential Goldmine” he stated:

The Pforzheimer Manuscript ‘Scrapbook’. Twenty-five groups of MS comprising 70 leaves folio, 7 leaves 4to. (some blank, some written on recto and verso, some with newspaper clippings mounted), plus 8 leaves 8vo. and 12mo., in all about 25,000-30,000 words in Gissing’s holograph, plus a large quantity of mounted and loose clippings, ephemera, etc. [Assembled c. 1885-95.] (Freeman’s square brackets.)

It was David Grylls who in 1991 claimed that the Pforzheimer *Scrapbook* “is the single most important manuscript source that might be made available to Gissing scholars,” arguing that it would deepen “our sense of Gissing’s realism by exposing the broad social areas he researched ... [and] how he processed raw materials.”¹

In preparing the present edition of the Scrapbook the editor has felt privileged to attempt another major contribution to the growing insight into the nature of Gissing’s working methods, a good century after his death.

Most scholars working on Gissing today are only too familiar with the difficulties of finding a publisher for their work. That is the reason why *George Gissing’s Scrapbook* has now been made available through one of the major print on demand sites active on the net. Lulu.com is a printing and distribution service with headquarters in [Morrisville, North Carolina](#) that serves [self-publishing](#) authors, artists, and musicians. It offers [print on demand](#) publishing and order fulfilment through an online store featuring the works of its customers.

George Gissing’s Scrapbook is available in two forms: either as a download at a price of €18.75 or as a hardcover book (8.5" x 11") at a price of €34.63. Number of pages: 527. The download or book can be ordered by going to the following link:

www.lulu.com/content/759681

NB: Access through lulu’s home site is **not** possible.

Bouwe Postmus

¹David Grylls, “A Neglected Source in Gissing Scholarship: The Pforzheimer MS ‘Scrapbook,’” *Gissing Journal*, vol. XXVII, no. 1, January 1991, pp. 11-12.

Mr. Baker and Miss Yule: Mass Literacy and the Complexity of Reading and Writing in George Gissing's *New Grub Street*

RYAN STEPHENSON
University of Ottawa

"I can't break it up," says Mr. Baker, a minor character who makes a brief but important appearance in George Gissing's 1891 novel *New Grub Street*. The frustrated Baker is commenting upon the fruits of his intellectual labours in the garret room of his tutor Harold Biffen, who, along with the also present Edwin Reardon, is one of the novel's most noticeably struggling writers. In order to keep the wolves from the door while he writes his barely-publishable, ultra-realistic novel *Mr. Bailey, Grocer*, Biffen has hired himself out as an instructor and has been trying to aid men and women like Mr. Baker in their efforts to improve their literacy skills. So far, however, Mr. Baker's results do not seem promising, and he soon continues, "The thoughts come in a lump, if I may say so. To break it up – there's the art of compersition" (Gissing, p. 173). In striking contrast to his consumptive-looking instructor, Mr Baker is described as a "robust, hard-featured, black-haired young man" with "something of the riverside about him"; the narrator judges that "he might [have been] a dockman, or even a bargeman" (p. 173). Clearly a member of the lower classes, a fact reinforced by his mildly idiomatic speech, Mr. Baker is in active pursuit of improving his lot in life by "preparing for the examination of the Outdoor Customs Department" (p. 173), and his goal reflects the role that literacy had in the possibility of social mobility in the Victorian period.¹ Biffen's tutorials are said to be helping, but although his pupil claims to be making much "headway with the other things," English composition evades him: "There's handwriting, there's orthography, there's arithmetic; I'm not afraid of one of 'em, as Mr. Biffen 'll tell you, sir," Baker explains to Reardon, who has been observing the lesson as he waits for his friend. "But when it comes to compersition, that brings out the sweat on my forehead. I do assure you" (p. 173). While Biffen and Reardon sympathize with Baker, no doubt recalling their own recent struggles, specifically with the "compersition" of three-decker novels, the student leaves cheerily unfazed by his unsatisfactory results: "I'm not easily beaten when I've set my mind on a thing, and I'll break up the compersition yet, see if I don't!" (p. 173).

This scene, seldom commented on by critics who examine *New Grub Street* for the light it sheds on the late-Victorian literary market, has much to say about the complexity of the issues that surround mass literacy in the

Victorian period as well as the complications that arise from attempts to define mass literacy in general. Although it is often claimed that literacy in England was nearly universal by the beginning of the twentieth century, a few years after the publication of Gissing's novel, studies in nineteenth-century literacy consistently remind us of the intricacies and complexities that hide behind the apparently positive numbers.² This paper endeavours to demonstrate that the depictions of Mr Baker's struggles and the struggles of another of the novel's troubled writers, Marian Yule, allow Gissing to explore the social and cultural distinctions that Victorian society made between the practices of reading and writing and the divergent assumptions and regulations that accompanied each individual practice.

In an essay entitled "The Reading Public in England and America in 1900," published several years after his landmark *English Common Reader*, Richard Altick points out that the types of Victorian literacy figures that researchers have to work with are always "undependable indexes of size or quality" of the reading and writing public (p. 212). While the literacy rate of England and Wales in 1900 is most often recorded as approximately 97 per cent, Altick reminds us that "this figure . . . represents only those young men and women who, upon being married in that year, were able to sign their names" and "does not reveal how many could actually read – a quite different accomplishment from the mechanical one of scrawling a signature – and it is useless as an indication of the understanding with which the brides and the bridegrooms could read, if they read at all" (p. 212).³ Yet reading, the practice that Altick is focussing on here, is only one edge of the double-edged tool that is literacy.⁴ In a more recent look at nineteenth-century education, David F. Mitch has sought to restate the complexity of Victorian literacy by drawing his readers' attention to the fact that "defining the term *literacy* is problematic, in particular, when proposing a stark dichotomy between the literate and the illiterate" (Mitch, p. xvii). While literacy is commonly defined as the ability to read and write, it is likely that a number of Victorians would have possessed one skill while not possessing the other. "Partial literates were most likely to be able to read but not write," Mitch explains, "[and] because reading is a more passive skill, it is generally easier to master than the more active skill of writing" (p. xvii). Like Altick's claims, Mitch's reminder of what the concept of literacy involves complicates the notion of a nearly "universal" late-Victorian literacy.

While studies like those undertaken by Altick and Mitch present evidence of the different levels of literacy that are sometimes shrouded by laudatory statistics, they are also warnings to those who would use terms such as “mass literacy” and “mass audience” without considering the material and historical situations that the terms are used to convey. It is exactly the material complications of literacy that Gissing draws out for us in the character of Mr. Baker and his attempts at “compersition.” While determining exactly who made up the mass *reading* audience proves to be difficult enough for historians of literacy, the situation is even more complex in the case of *writing*. For one thing, although it is easy to take for granted the interconnectedness of reading and writing from the standpoint of twentieth- and twenty-first-century education, it is important to remember that the unity of these two skills is specifically a product of the nineteenth century, and that even then their relationship was constantly evolving.⁵ Although the gap between the acquisition of reading and writing skills that Mitch alludes to in the above comments began to diminish slowly over the second half of the nineteenth century, the ability to write continued to lag behind the ability to read for many of the newly literate classes. Additionally, even when the ability to write was acquired, it seldom included those skills that many of us associate with definitions of “writing” today. As David Vincent argues in his book on literacy and popular culture in Victorian England, even as late as 1862, under the Revised Code, “which was explicitly designed to focus attention on the basic elements of literacy, ‘writing’ meant, as it always had done before, copying, not composing” (p. 43). It was not until 1871, in the year after Forster’s Education Act was passed, that composition became an element of the official syllabus in schools run by the national school board: “Throughout the period, the great majority of the ‘literate’ working class had never been taught anything more than a basic manual dexterity” (Vincent, p. 43).

Harold Biffen’s student Mr. Baker is a particularly intelligent member of what another of Gissing’s characters calls “the quarter-educated,” by which he means “the great new generation that is being turned out by the Board Schools, the young men and women who can just read, but are incapable of sustained attention” (Gissing, p. 379); for Baker and others of a similar background, the contrast between manual dexterity and the actual active composition of text is one that has frustrating results. Thus, although he has little problem with spelling and handwriting, his ability to compose is hampered by the limited education in writing that his Board School provided. In Biffen’s explanation, the text Mr. Baker composes is not terrible,

but it lacks coherence because of the writer's habit of grouping all his ideas together in tight knots. Biffen explains to his student, "You have put all you had to say into three appalling periods, whereas you ought to have made about a dozen" (p. 173). Clearly, the subject of English composition, in Biffen's words, "isn't quite such a simple matter as some people think" (p. 173).

There are a number of ways in which this scene is meant to function within the narrative of *New Grub Street*. For one thing, Mr. Baker's troubles with writing are no doubt intended to shed further light on the exertions of Edwin Reardon as he struggles to maintain a respectable, middle-class existence through writing fiction. After excruciatingly churning out three-volume novels at the expense of his physical and mental health, Reardon's response to Mr. Baker's comment that "compersition ... brings out the sweat on my forehead" ("You're not the only man in that case, Mr. Baker," he replies) sounds a darkly comic note (p. 173). As well, there is a similarity in the efforts of Mr. Baker to draw his ideas out into a dozen sentences and Reardon's effort to stretch enough plot and character development for a single volume into a salable triple-decker. The struggle of writing for money and position, Gissing implies, affects more than those employed in the literary trade, and the difficulty with which it is practiced by the many suggests that it is neither a healthy nor a "natural" occupation for men and women, no matter what their class.⁶ However, the scene in Biffen's garret alludes, more importantly, to another theme that Gissing pursues throughout the novel: namely, the intricacies of mass literacy and the difference between reading and writing.

By situating *New Grub Street* within the cultural context of its production, we are better able to understand the degree to which the developments of mass literacy were transforming and complicating definitions of reading and writing for educators and critics, as well as for novelists such as Gissing. The novel shows us not only that generic concepts such as "writing" were more fluid and fraught with difficulty during the Victorian period than literacy rates let on, but that the newly united practices that comprised literacy were subject to different assumptions, regulations, and restrictions as they interacted with notions of class, gender, public space, and the changing technology of literary production. Although some of these themes are illustrated in Mr. Baker's only scene, Gissing explores them much more thoroughly through the character of Marian Yule, particularly as she is depicted in those passages which dramatize her literary exertions in the Reading Room of the British Museum Library. In these Reading Room

scenes, which are featured in almost every discussion of the novel, Gissing explores the diverse cultural expectations of women *readers* in contrast to those of women *writers*. Indeed, although Marian Yule is often aligned with other women readers that were thought to be “invading” the British Museum Reading Room in the late-Victorian period, or is seen as little more than an amanuensis, secretary, or slave to her literary father, I argue that to fully comprehend her characterization and her struggles in the Reading Room we need to redefine Marian as an active and productive writer of texts, rather than a passive reader and consumer of literature, a more traditionally feminine position in the literary market.⁷ I argue that Marian’s sense of discomfort and alienation is the result of her economically compelled negotiation of both the Reading Room and the literary market beyond its borders, and that her move from passivity to activity in the Reading Room scenes dramatizes the expansion of the end-of-century literary marketplace to include women. Paradoxically, however, Gissing’s version of this expansion leads not to feminine self-determination but to the implication of the woman writer in restrictive structures of authority no less debilitating than those faced by her male counterparts, making of the Reading Room a hauntingly paradoxical symbol of both classed and gendered cultural emancipation and panoptical constraint. Through his exploration of Marian’s writing experience and his investigation of the factors determining her writing practice, Gissing points to the changing definitions and representations of reading and writing that were brought about by an increasingly literate nation.

In recent years, the Reading Room of the British Museum Library has become an important site of discussion in the context of the Victorian literary world, and a sizeable canon of criticism has been constructed out of this repository of “The World’s Knowledge.” It was, in fact, in the final two decades of the Victorian period, during which *New Grub Street* was first published, that the Reading Room “enjoyed its greatest fame amongst the general public as the Mecca of literary research workers” (Harris, p. 24), used frequently by the likes of Walter Besant, Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett, H. Rider Haggard, and Gissing himself. Yet, the British Museum and its Reading Room were far more than just locations for literary and antiquarian research, but symbols for the growth of imperial and archival knowledge more generally. As Ruth Hoberman points out, “the reading room’s growth coincided not only with the expansion of the British empire . . . but also with the increasingly sophisticated means by which it

was administered and explained,” so that the British Museum participated in the construction and organization of the nation as a whole (p. 169). In these ways, the British Museum could easily be depicted as one of the crowning jewels of the imperial centre. More importantly in the context of Victorian literacy, however, the growth of the Museum and its Library and the steady increase in Reading Room use could be taken as indications that Britain was fast becoming a more informed and more literate nation, and that educational reforms such as the Revised Code of 1862 and the Education Act of 1870 were improving its intellectual character.⁸

Although, as Richard Altick has convincingly asserted, the Reading Room was never a popular place for members of the newly literate lower classes, who were more likely to frequent the free libraries that had begun to spring up throughout London and other cities in the latter half of the Victorian period (Altick, *Common Reader*, p. 215), a number of comments made by users of the Reading Room do, in fact, allude to a new degree of social heterogeneity in those decades that some at the upper end of the social scale seem to have found disturbing. For instance, in his now standard popular history of the Reading Room, G. F. Barwick refers to an 1863 letter addressed to the Trustees of the Library “complaining of the delay in getting books and ‘the presence of certain readers in a state of uncleanness and unsavouriness wholly inadmissible,’” complaints, Barwick goes on to note, that the Trustees found were not without foundation (p. 112).⁹ Such comments reflect at least the perception that a new, less seemly class of reader was increasingly likely to be present under the dome.¹⁰ One also sees this shift in the reading demography in other trends that Barwick outlines in his history, including the increase in younger readers and the decrease in established and well-known older ones. Barwick explains, for instance, that as early as the 1860s, the overcrowding of the Reading Room was attributed by the administration to “the influx of young persons who have not yet completed their education” (p. 118). According to an order issued by the Trustees, “at least one-fifth of the visitors are of this class, and this proportion of accommodation and attention is thus to a great extent diverted from those whose studies and pursuits are of a graver character” (p. 118). The Trustees’ response was to increase the limit age of admission from eighteen to twenty-one. Barwick also makes note of a comment by Dr. Garnett, superintendent of the Reading Room from 1875 to 1884, that “the falling off of distinguished readers” observed over the course of his tenure was a trend that had begun as early as 1830, a fact which he attributed to the increase in private libraries and reading clubs throughout London (p. 139).

At these places, the “graver” and more “distinguished” readers might not have to put up with the distractions and crowding of the Museum Reading Room. Comments such as these reveal the degree to which changes in the reading public and in the educational character of the nation in general contributed to the changing definition of the British Museum Reading Room over the course of the Victorian period, particularly during its latter decades.

Although it is possible to see the Reading Room’s demographic shifts and increased use as positive signs of national improvement, it is also true that as a space specifically designed for reading and writing, the Reading Room was a contested and sometimes troubling space in the era of *New Grub Street*’s creation. The complications of using the Reading Room had much to do with the particular physical qualities of the space itself. To some extent, it is these physical qualities to which Marian Yule is responding in Gissing’s depiction of her oft-cited Reading Room lament. In Marian’s words, the room is “gloomy, and one could scarcely see to read; a taste of fog grew perceptible in the warm, headachy air” (p. 89). Later, as the fog grows thicker, we are told that “she looked up at the windows beneath the dome and saw that they were a dusky yellow” (p. 90). Although the creation of the 1857 Reading Room seems to have gotten rid of the Reading Room flea of previous decades, it did little for the poor lighting, poor ventilation, and generally unhealthy atmosphere of the Room, which appear initially to be the immediate cause of the malaise that Marian is experiencing in this scene. Drafts and overheating, combined with heavy London fogs that would often blot out the light coming through the glass dome (for many years the Reading Room’s only source of light), might naturally lead to the physical ailments known as the “museum megrim” and “the Reading Room cough” (Gissing, p. 69).¹¹ However, if these physical conditions were often difficult for users of the Reading Room to deal with, the nexus of gender and class issues that accompanied library use in general also seem to have affected the British Museum.

As the use of libraries and reading rooms by women increased over the latter decades of the Victorian period, statements about the effects of women on the library environment – as well as the equally dramatic effects of the library environment on women – proliferated in the periodical press. In large part, popular wisdom among those involved with libraries in the Victorian period maintained that open reading rooms like that of the British Museum were uncomfortable places for women. For example, in a paper given in 1891 at the annual meeting of the British Library Association, a

librarian named Butler Wood explained that it was his experience that when a woman reader entered the general reading room “it was with the air of an intruder who felt her position, and who would very soon beat a retreat from what appeared to be an embarrassing situation” (Wood, p. 108). Views such as Wood’s contributed to the construction of separate reading rooms, entrances, and borrowing desks for women in libraries throughout Britain.¹² In public libraries, this need for separation was created not only by the interaction of the sexes, but by a significant blend of classes within the reading rooms, and Kate Flint notes that middle-class women were expected to be frightened off by the working-class patrons of the free and public libraries who may have entered only to find a warm place to rest or to consult the betting papers (p. 174).¹³ Although the British Museum was becoming more socially heterogeneous over the course of the Victorian period as the result of an expanded and increasingly demotic reading public, the only substantial representatives of the lower classes present under the dome would have been the employees who delivered the books to the Reading Room from the stacks, and these workers were of a decidedly more “white-collar” character than those visiting the free and public libraries.¹⁴ Primarily, then, it was the interaction between men and women in the Museum Reading Room that occasioned the creation of a separate group of tables set apart for women some time before the 1880s. This separate area was the cause of much controversy, especially as the Room became more and more crowded during the 1880s and women became more willing to take “the risk of sitting next to a man” in order to claim a needed reference book after he had used it (Barwick, p. 137). Indeed, in an 1882 article on the Reading Room by Percy Fitzgerald in *Belgravia*, the writer remarks that “one of the standing jests of the place is that these [tables for women] are left solitary and unattended” (qtd. in Barwick, p. 131).¹⁵ Marian Yule, for one, does not use this separate ladies’ area, but Gissing’s reference to the “ladies’ cloak-room” (Gissing, p. 70) alludes to the sense of separation maintained between the sexes in Victorian public spaces.

More often than not, in fact, the rationale behind separate reading rooms and other reading areas in Victorian England was understood as an attempt to save the scholarly men that frequented the Museum and other libraries from the distracting effects of women. In the discourse on library use, these distractions were figured in two ways, and both were the result of Victorian notions of gender difference. For one thing, women were thought to gossip, giggle, and frivolously occupy seats in an environment where space was already at a premium.¹⁶ Butler Wood must make a case that the ladies’ read-

ing room at his library in Bradford is “quiet and orderly” (p. 108), a fact he attributes to the sufficiency of the newspapers and magazines provided within to “keep in subjection the natural conversational propensities of the sex” (p. 108). The British Museum attempted to keep its Reading Room quiet and orderly through the creation in 1889 of a “salutary rule” decreeing that “readers cannot, as a rule, be supplied with novels within five years of publication, and every reader requiring for special purposes to consult a recent novel must state his reasons in writing” (p. 110).¹⁷ The assumption that the Trustees made with their use of the masculine pronoun that the potential novel reader would be male was out of place, however, as it is women who are most often portrayed as novel readers in articles about library use. In addition, women were also thought to cause distractions of a more intimate nature, and there was a sense that the Reading Room was a space that promoted too free amorous interaction amongst the sexes; as an unpoliced public space, the Reading Room might provide an arena for flirting and gazing.¹⁸ Indeed, a common conception of the role of women in the British Museum Reading Room in particular is recorded in an article in the *Saturday Review* in 1886, in which the writer claims that when a woman is in the Reading Room “she flirts, and eats strawberries behind folios, in the society of some happy student of the opposite sex” (p. 213). Representations such as this illustrate Ruth Hoberman’s claims that when it came to women in the Reading Room, “male observers seemed to experience their conspicuous presence as an imposition of bodily imperatives – their clothes, food, and flirtations are most frequently complained of – on an otherwise disembodied, rational workspace” (p. 175).

What these popular representations of feminine library use lay out for us is a model of women’s reading practices, particularly as they are mediated through women’s experiences of select public spaces. Unlike representations of reading men in the library atmosphere, the women that we meet in the periodical press rarely if ever transcend the traditional, consumptive role that Victorian culture was most likely to afford them.¹⁹ The conspicuous frivolity of the flirtatious woman reader in the Reading Room, as it is depicted by the writer for the *Saturday Review*, is echoed by the behaviour of the ladies who use London’s free libraries as they are described in an 1892 article in *All the Year Round*. Here, the consumption of books through reading and the consumption of commercial goods through shopping go hand in hand. For instance, while men who use the libraries described are more likely to do something with what they read, like the curates “who meet and converse, and write letters and postcards after consulting the

clerical journals,” the middle-class ladies that the writer finds inside have come only to “consult the oracles of fashion, and [to] muse and meditate over drawings of skirts and trains, and [to] wonder if the new style of hair will become them” (p. 305). The use of the library here is presented as little more than preparation for a trip to the shop or the salon. This connection between women’s library use and the act of consumption in a commodity market is further strengthened when the writer moves on to discuss the Kensington Free Library, which is “well lodged in the former Vestry Hall, in the midst of the bustling High Street, with its fine shops and crowds of women – ladies of every degree, who are engaged, one and all, in the exciting pursuit of shopping” (p. 306). Such a direct link between the location of the library and the act of shopping suggests that a woman’s role inside the library differs very little from her role outside of it. The atmosphere of the market seems to be carried into the library so that the oracles of fashion that are explored directly on the High Street may be consulted virtually in magazines within the walls of the reading room. Quite strikingly, the article presents young ladies as the most prevalent users of the public library, beginning as it does with this exchange between a man and his wife: “‘Well, ta-ta, I am going to the club,’ said he. ‘And I to the free library,’ said she” (p. 305).²⁰ With these illustrations of women’s library use in mind, it is not hard to understand why women who use the British Museum Reading Room are so frequently assigned to the role of consumer in periodical discourse, regardless of the fact that the British Museum was of a different character from the free and public libraries.

Although it is important to recognize the characterizations and stereotypes of women readers in the Reading Room that persisted in the late-Victorian period, and that Gissing would have been familiar with, it is essential that we examine how different Marian Yule’s fictional experience of the Reading Room is from those (no doubt equally fictional) accounts of feminine library use in the popular and critical press. Above all, it is important to keep in mind that to use a library does not necessarily make one a reader, and that categories like reader and writer can be more complicated than they first appear, just as general definitions of reading and writing can obscure important complications, a fact that Mr Baker’s scene reveals. If men such as Gissing’s Jasper Milvain and Alfred Yule can make use of the Reading Room and maintain their positions as writers, then we should be equally open to the fact that Marian herself may be more than a reader in her use of this space of reading. Furthermore, while critics such as Hoberman want to link Gissing’s representation of Marian Yule to a “set of

representations [that] depict lower-middle-class women” who work as copying-clerks for literary men and are “in danger of tumbling into indigence, eccentricity, and ill-health” (p. 175), I would like to argue that such characterizations only make these connections at the expense of misunderstanding the truly productive role that Marian takes on in the Reading Room.²¹ Indeed, when we begin to compare Marian’s Reading Room experience with other representations of the Victorian lady in the library, it becomes clear that Gissing is working against such traditional figurations, and that *New Grub Street*’s depiction of Marian’s discomfiting experience in the library is a direct result of the pattern of non-traditional library use that its author outlines for her.

If we look closely at the novel’s Reading Room scenes, we can see plainly that Marian neither giggles, sketches, nor gossips. In fact, she does not even read novels, and although her response to the space as a foggy, headachy tomb seems to be the result of the physical difficulties associated with the Room, her apprehensions actually extend to other, far more complex, problems. The depth of her concerns become evident when, upon observing the sickly light emerging through the Room’s glass ceiling, Marian falls into a frightening fantasy:

Then her eye discerned an official walking along the upper gallery, and in pursuance of her grotesque humour, her mocking misery, she likened him to a black, lost soul, doomed to wander in an eternity of vain research along endless shelves. Or again, the readers who sat here at these radiating lines of desks, what were they but hapless flies caught in a huge web, its nucleus the great circle of the Catalogue? (p. 90)

Along with this dark vision of the dome above the unwieldy and “trackless desert of print” (p. 89) and its transformation into a giant spider-web, Marian’s eyes fail her, she feels faint and headachy, and she imagines that at any moment “the book-lined circumference of the room [will become] but a featureless prison-limit” (p. 90).²² This experience of restriction, sickness, and exhaustion bears no resemblance to the happy consumption of fashion plates and magazines that comprises the experience of women readers as they are represented by the periodical articles outlined above. However, although Gissing’s depiction of Marian’s experience has little in common with other depictions of women readers represented in the periodical press, to discount the role of her gender in determining the anxiety that Marian expresses would be a mistake. Where Gissing’s character differs from the other women who use the Reading Room as they are configured in the contemporary press is in her adoption of a *productive* rather than *consumptive* role in her negotiation of the library space. It is important that

women not only frivolously read novels and rustle their skirts in the scenario presented by the *Saturday Review* article, but they are also shown literally *consuming* strawberries, and using the Museum's precious folios as mere screens to hide their conspicuous ingestion. Incorporating the gendered distinction between production and consumption that relegated women to the consumptive position, Gissing places Marian in an anomalous position in the literary market.²³

The strange position that Marian finds herself in is the result of her Reading Room practices. More than a secretary to a literary man, she is able to complete pieces of "manufacture," like her essay on seventeenth-century French authoresses, virtually by herself, so that "her father's share in it was limited to a few hints and suggestions" (Gissing, p. 67). In this way, she is assuming the masculine place of her father, who submits her articles in his name, and then publishes them unsigned. Alfred Yule realizes the real nature of his daughter's work, and late in the novel when Marian finishes a critical paper on James Harrington, author of the unwieldy piece of seventeenth-century political theory, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, Yule tells her, "there is so little to add to this paper – so little to alter – that I couldn't feel justified in sending it as my own work. I think it is altogether too good to appear anonymously. You must sign it, Marian, and have the credit that is due to you" (Gissing, p. 328). Although Marian has been characterized at times as no more than her father's secretary and amanuensis, comments like these make it clear that she is not only a writer (in the strictly physical sense of copying and compiling her father's notes), but an independent *composer* of literature.²⁴ That Gissing recognizes the complexity of nineteenth-century literacy and the relationship between reading and writing is as evident in his construction of Marian as a troubled writer as it is in his exploration of Mr. Baker's problems with "compersition."

Adding to the complications of Marian's position in the Reading Room, the genre of writing that she produces is one that is not typically associated with Victorian women, regardless of whether they occupied the position of reader or writer. As Dorothy Mermin explains in her book on Victorian women of letters, "literary culture was most resistant to female infiltration in the arena of high-prestige non-fictional prose," the genre most typically linked with the public sphere during the period (Mermin, p. 95). Even though the "prestige" of any genre is put into question by the decidedly debased nature of the works produced by all of Gissing's characters, it is important that Marian's productive role in the public space of the Reading Room involves working in a genre yet *un-feminized*, unlike fiction and

travel-writing. In contrast to Marian, Jasper's sister Dora Milvain, another of the novel's woman writers, produces short fictional pieces for a journal called *The English Girl*, recalling the large number of women employed in the field of "light literature" during the Victorian period, a form of writing that required education, but no special training or skills and was thus open to many middle-class women (Mermin, p. 45). There is a striking difference in the attitudes that these two women writers take towards the act of writing. Gissing makes it clear that their competing responses to composition are partially the result of the very different locations in which that writing takes place. Fittingly, Dora's works of fiction are produced in the private, much more domestic space of her apartment. In contrast to Marian's restrictive surroundings, the narrator explains that the "boudoir" in which Dora writes "could not well have been daintier and more appropriate to the charming characteristics of its mistress. [She] affected no literary slovenliness; she was dressed in light colours, and looked so lovely that even [her brother] Jasper paused on the threshold with a smile of admiration" (Gissing, p. 419). Such a representation fits Dora's literary production neatly into the model of "women's work," or "the notion that women's public engagement must be an extension of domestic virtues and talents" (Epstein Nord, p. 183). Dora is noticeably untroubled by her writing experience because it occurs within what Gissing and many others perceived to be the physical confines of women's writing in the Victorian period.

It is also true that the audience for the kind of writing that Marian and Dora produce elicits different responses in its writers. Unlike the quasi-academic, non-fictional prose that Marian writes, Dora writes for a domestic audience that Victorian editors would assume to have no interest in seventeenth-century French literature nor in political theory. The kind of writing that Dora practices requires very little thought and no research, at least in Jasper Milvain's opinion. Jasper's advice to his sister Maud (whom he has also tried to enlist into the life of Grub Street) about an article she is preparing for a women's illustrated paper likely reflects some of Gissing's own attitudes about an expanded literary market: "You must remember that the people who read women's papers are irritated, simply irritated, by anything that isn't glaringly obvious. They hate an unusual thought. The art of writing for such papers – indeed, for the public in general – is to express vulgar thought and feeling in a way that flatters the vulgar thinkers and feelers" (p. 321), or, he might have added, "the quarter-educated." In contrast to Marian's writing, the circuit of Dora and Maud's writing begins in the boudoir of the writer and ends in the boudoir of her audience, skipping

entirely over the masculine space of the study and the public space of the Reading Room. With these details in mind, we can see more clearly that the painful experience that Gissing conceives for Marian is not the result of the physical eccentricities of the Reading Room space but of her emergence as a woman in a productive role onto the public sphere; this emergence is marked in Marian's case by her work in a genre and a space associated with the Victorian public sphere.

As it is conceived of by Jurgen Habermas, the public sphere is a discursive space for rational-critical debate between individuals determined to be guided by argument rather than status. While the early public sphere consisted primarily of a small section of the population – literate, educated, and propertied white men – Habermas' description of the transformation of this discursive space emphasizes its increased expansion and inclusiveness over time. In a response to Habermas' theories, Michael Warner re-emphasizes the degree to which the development of print was central to the expansion of the public sphere and that the possibility of publication through the medium of print was largely responsible for its coming into being. "In print," Warner explains as he discusses the bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth century, "one surrendered one's utterance to an audience that was by definition indefinite" (p. 380). While earlier writers may have felt some anxiety about the level of mediation occasioned by print, Warner claims that "in the eighteenth century the consciousness of an abstract audience became a badge of distinction, a way of claiming a public disposition" (p. 380). It is this process of "self-abstraction" (p. 381) through the medium of print, which began in the eighteenth century and carried on into the nineteenth, that Warner feels facilitates the ostensibly status-free discourse of the public sphere. However, while self-abstraction might be seen as a tool capable of opening up the public sphere to rational-minded individuals whose actual status (whether it be based on class, gender, race, or sexuality) would otherwise have excluded them from public life, Warner argues that, in fact, "the rhetorical strategy of personal abstraction" employed by writers as they enter the public domain "is both the utopian moment of the public sphere and a major source of domination" (p. 382).

While the bourgeois public sphere "claimed to have no relation to the body image at all," it continued throughout its transformation to rely "on features of certain bodies" (p. 382). In fact, the "utopian" principle of negativity when it came to bodies in the public sphere – a principle that said that the validity of one's public statement "bears a negative relation to

[his or her] person” so that an utterance carries force despite and not because of one’s personal status – continued to mark discursively certain features of bodies that were not modes of whiteness, maleness, and wealth “as the humiliating positivity of the particular” (p. 382). In the process of self-abstraction created by the emergence into the public sphere through print, only certain accepted bodily features become abstracted while others continue to be marked as particularities of the body that could not become neutralized without ceasing to exist. As many feminist critics have argued since the publication of Habermas’ *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the particularities of the body associated with femininity constitute key grounds for exclusion from the public sphere.²⁵ The promise of disincorporation, openness, and universality through self-abstraction that the public sphere seemed to offer was not available to women because gender difference is always rendered as a positive, marked particularity in the discursive zone that the public sphere creates. Faced with the possibilities of self-abstraction through print, women writers continued to face an obstacle in that the only way to neutralize the bodily features that contributed to their feminine identity was to deny them altogether. In Warner’s view, while “self-abstraction for male bodies confirms masculinity,” the very same process for female bodies “denies femininity” (p. 383). The result is that the very mechanism of publicity “designed to end domination is a form of domination” (p. 384).

The tendency to mark femininity as a positive, bodily difference is extremely evident in the Victorian discourse on women readers in libraries. This is particularly true, as Hoberman has maintained, in the British Museum Reading Room because it was so closely associated with the literary public sphere, which Habermas believed led directly into the political public sphere: “the British Museum Reading Room, where journalists and political activists did the research that would allow them to take public stands, where they met and talked about books and wrote their articles, was thus a point of convergence between literary and political public spheres” (Hoberman, p. 178). We see the complications of women’s bodies in the noise they make, the food they eat, and especially in the potential desire they elicit in the otherwise abstracted men who use the Reading Room. However, the potential of self-abstraction as a mechanism of domination only reaches its fullest expression in the characterization of the woman writer in the Reading Room, and here *New Grub Street* draws our attention once again to the different assumptions that accompanied the practices of reading and writing in the Victorian period. Keeping Warner’s statements

about the role of print in the public sphere in mind and returning again to Gissing's depiction of Marian's emergence into the literary world, we can begin to see the process of composition that Marian is engaged in as a furtive attempt at self-abstracted publicity. Even though Alfred Yule most often publishes anonymously those articles composed by Marian that are supplied by him to the various journals with which he deals, the "recognisable name" (p. 67) that he has among critical writers of the day and the fact that the "volumes and articles which bore his signature dealt with much the same subjects as his unsigned matter" (p. 67) mean that Marian's publicity is mediated through the masculine identity of her father. To Alfred Yule, whether or not his daughter signs those passages of her writing "which were printed just as they came from her pen" is merely "a matter of business" (p. 67). For Marian, however, the mechanism of her publicity as a woman writer is far more than a mere business matter, but a troubling crisis of gender identity that Gissing uses the public space of the Reading Room to illustrate. Through his depiction of Marian's Reading Room struggles, Gissing gives us a sense of how the assumptions about the position of women in late-Victorian literary market led to painful experiences of constraint, and this constraint corresponds to the restrictions of the public sphere later theorized by Warner and others.

Keeping her relationship with her father in mind, we should examine the specifics of Marian's lament as Gissing expresses her craving for a life that better suits her: "She was not a *woman*, but a mere machine for reading and writing" (p. 88, emphasis mine). Her negotiation of the Reading Room in a productive role and the self-abstraction that ostensibly allows her entrance into the public sphere are processes which have not only dehumanized her (in her transformation from organism to mechanism) but *de-feminized* her as well, thereby illustrating Warner's hypothesis that the self-abstraction of female bodies denies femininity. No wonder then that the discomfort that Marian is faced with is so often portrayed by Gissing as physical discomfort – headaches, problems of sight, physical exhaustion. If inhabiting and making use of a space associated with the public sphere draws attention to the bodies of women readers, at least it does not exert the same destructive influence on those bodies as the use of such a space does on the woman writer as she is depicted by Gissing. In this case we can see Marian's sense of the Museum's burdening gloom as one result of her anxiety about her transgression of Victorian gender boundaries. Her active production of public discourse in a space associated with the public sphere *as a woman* contributes to the blurring of the distinctions between public and private; thus,

Gissing's representation of Marian illustrates the degree to which her very identity is itself becoming blurred through her participation in this process.

In addition, the metaphors of restriction through which Marian comes to terms with the Reading Room further illustrate the dominating aspects of publicity for women writers. The two most prominent metaphors of restriction that Gissing applies make use of the actual layout of the Reading Room for their effect. Marian's sense that the "radiating lines of desks" are but individual threads in a huge spider's web, the nucleus of which is "the great circle of the Catalogue" (p. 90) emphasizes the degree to which she feels herself stuck, trapped amongst other readers and writers in a restrictive system that requires her to write, while at the same time demanding that she efface certain important markers of her identity and her body in the process. Other depictions of the Reading Room contemporary with Gissing's also highlighted the web-like appearance of the dome and desks, and an 1885 illustration in *Punch* shows several men ascending, aided by wings on which are written "Questions," towards shining busts of Garnett, Panizzi, and Bond (Principal Librarian from 1878 to 1888); above the entire scene is a man tangled in a spider's web and adjacent to him the label "The Reading Room Pest."²⁶ Furthermore, in Marian's apprehension that the walls will finally close in for good, that "in a moment the book-lined circumference of the room would be but a featureless prison-limit" (p. 90), Gissing emphasizes the actual panoptical structure of the Museum Reading Room. The radiating lines of low desks, the circular shape of the room, and the elevated centre allowed the mass of Reading Room patrons to be broken up into orderly segments while at the same time facilitating a form of self-surveillance. In this way, the British Museum Reading Room is an illustration of Tony Bennett's claim (with reference to Foucault) that the nineteenth-century museum "embodied what had been, for Bentham, a major aim of panopticism – the democratic aspirations of a society rendered transparent to its own controlling gaze" (p. 101).²⁷ However, for Marian the panoptical restrictions of the Reading Room become more than merely physical. Gissing's woman writer feels herself dominated not just by the dimensions and design of the room, but by her economically-necessitated entrance into the public sphere and the literary market in a position alien to her.

It is important to remember, however, that it is not women's writing in general that Gissing debases in *New Grub Street* – the characterization of Dora Milvain demonstrates this – but women's writing which transcends the private, domestic domain or "women's work" and partakes of the public

sphere open primarily to men, as Marian's composition of non-fiction prose does. The symbolic public sphere takes on concrete form within the physically public space of the Reading Room, thus providing a material setting in which Gissing can fictionalize his concerns about the feminization and democratization of the literary market and of public life in general.²⁸ To be present in the Reading Room as a woman reader could be a troubling position in itself, but to be present and active as a woman writer brought with it an entirely new set of restrictions. Like the struggles of members of the working class, such as Mr Baker, to extend their grasp of writing beyond copying and spelling and into composition, the characterization of Marian Yule shows that Gissing understood both the complexity of reading and writing as practices and the different assumptions made about these practices that existed throughout the Victorian period as they are demonstrated throughout the periodical discourse on women in libraries outlined over the course of this paper. *New Grub Street* both recognizes and perpetuates the widespread Victorian assumptions that link reading to passivity and consumption and writing to activity and production. While the consumption of print through reading is a practice that draws attention to the reader's physical body, a tendency that the strawberry-eating woman reader in the *Saturday Review* reveals, the production of print through writing in a male-dominated field and within a primarily masculine space requires a form of self-abstraction and a denial of the body which Marian finds painful.

In his characterization of Marian Yule and his representation of her writing practices in the Reading Room, Gissing frees the Victorian woman writer from the charge of frivolity and mental promiscuity associated with her counterpart, the woman reader. Marian is allowed to take on an active role in her use of the Reading Room space, and this role is central to her characterization. However, instead of being liberated by her shift from passive reading into active writing, Gissing shows us that the woman writer is pushed into another set of assumptions and restrictions hardly less threatening than those she would have faced as a mere reader, restrictions graphically illustrated by the spider-web and prison metaphors that Gissing uses to characterize the physical space of the Reading Room. In this way, *New Grub Street's* contribution to the discourse of sickness and death through which the late-Victorian Reading Room was often constructed is an indication of Gissing's interest in an economically necessitated form of women's writing in the literary market, and the emergence of women into a public life and a public sphere that is already in decline.

¹In his *The Rise of Popular Literacy in Victorian England: The Influence of Private Choice and Public Policy*, David F. Mitch claims that the ability to write was one of the primary means by which literacy functioned in the workplace, and that along with arithmetic, writing was often sought over reading because potential workers saw the former two skills as more valuable. The ability to write, even more than the ability to read, would increase an individual's opportunities of improving his or her financial position (p. 12). Mitch also reminds us, however, that it was not just the specific skills involved with literacy that made men and women more employable, but that some employers demanded literacy because they "associated literacy and the schooling involved in acquiring literacy with general modes of behavior that they thought workers should possess" (p. 13).

²There are a variety of sources from which to take figures for literacy rates for the late-Victorian period, the most common of which are the General Registry's returns, drawn from the signing of marriage registers. Altick, Mitch, and Vincent all refer to these statistics in their studies of Victorian literacy. For a discussion of registry statistics as a marker of literacy in the context of the nineteenth century, see Barry Reay, "The Context and Meaning of Popular Literacy: Some Evidence from Nineteenth-Century Rural England." Reay argues that "although it will overestimate those able to write with facility, the presence or absence of a signature gives a crude indication of the presence or absence of the ability to write" (p. 111). He also points out that the same figures underestimate the ability to read (p. 113).

³Altick also points out that the 97 per cent literacy rate "takes no account of the millions of older persons who, having less chance to learn to read in their youth, greatly reduced the real percentage of literacy in the population as a whole" (p. 212).

⁴This is the metaphor for reading and writing used by David Vincent in his *Literacy and Popular Culture*. In his introduction to this study, Vincent points out that "literacy is a double-, rather than single-edged tool. The relationship between reading and writing is far from constant over time or between cultures. Different levels of possession and application are determined by a number of factors, including methods of education, availability of raw materials, and the perceived value of each skill" (p. 10).

⁵Henri-Jean Martin claims in his *History and Power of Writing*, for instance, that "the enormous change that the nineteenth century brought was to couple the teaching of reading and writing" (p. 400). Similarly, Joseph Kittler argues that the discourse network of the nineteenth century was one in which "reading and writing were coupled and automatized" for the purpose of universal education (p. 108). Vincent notes that in the eighteenth century, many schools taught reading first, and that writing was often learned up to a year afterwards. It was not until Bell and Lancaster's monitorial schools started up in the early decades of the nineteenth century, Vincent claims, that the two skills were taught together, or at least this was the advice given by the teaching guides. Charity Schools, it seems, continued to teach the two skills separately (Vincent, p. 10).

⁶This view is also expressed earlier in the novel by the substance of one of Marian Yule's Reading Room laments. Sick of contributing to the "trackless desert of print" that constitutes the British Library, Marian inwardly wishes for more suitable work: "Oh, to go forth and labour with one's hands, to do any poorest, commonest work of which the world had truly need! It was ignoble to sit here and support the paltry pretence of intellectual dignity" (p. 89). See also Patrick Brantlinger's reading of *New Grub Street's* views on modern culture in *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*: "The sensitive, cultured souls – Reardon, Biffen, Marian Yule – are just as un-healthy as the vulgar masses, only they are aware of the cultural epidemic that Gissing identifies with too much culture, with excessive reading and writing" (p. 194).

⁷For a discussion of the advent of women readers in the Reading Room, see Kate Flint's *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914*, and Ruth Hoberman's "'A Thought in the Huge Bald Forehead': Depictions of Women in the British Museum Reading Room, 1857-1929" in Badia and Phegley's *Reading Women*. Hoberman cites Marian Yule as an example of lower-middle-class women who work as copying-clerks for literary men (pp. 175-76). For a discussion of Marian as a slave to her literary father, see Robert L. Selig's discussion of *New Grub Street* in his book, *George Gissing*.

⁸On the topic of increased library use, see Harris, who cites an 1884 *Pall Mall Gazette* interview with Dr. Garnett, in which the superintendent claims that although the average daily number of 300 users had remained consistent from 1863 to 1875, daily totals increased to 500 per day by the end of Garnett's tenure in 1884 (p. 21).

⁹Concerns about the sanitary conditions of libraries are also evident in the discourse on libraries within the Library Association of the United Kingdom and its periodical organs. See, for instance, an article under the "Jottings" section of *The Library's* first volume from 1889. Here, the unnamed writer explains to his readers that the journal has been taken to task by a reader for not making sufficient notice of the library infection scare, brought about by concerns that the mixture of people at free libraries would lead to the spread of infectious disease. The respondent, however, claims that such a scare is ridiculous, and that such infection can come from anywhere – theatre, church, railway carriage, etc. That concerns about infection are related to the boundaries between the classes is clear from his remarks on the "the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and from the sweater's den brings havoc and death equally to the lord and the people" (p. 171). Again, although the British Museum was never a popular library, similar concerns seemed to have been voiced about libraries in general.

¹⁰Indeed, it became much easier for some to become readers at the British Museum Library in 1873, shortly after the passing of Forster's Education Act, when an amendment to the rules meant that "admission was granted on application accompanied by a letter from some responsible person recommending the applicant as a fit and proper person to be admitted" (Barwick, p. 124). This is the same process that allows Gissing's Edwin Reardon to get a ticket for the room, even though he lives in a garret and is almost penniless. Barwick points out that in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Gissing's alter-ego professes to having been in a similar state when he first became acquainted with the Reading Room "at a time when [he] was literally starving in London" but did nothing besides read disinterestedly all day (Gissing qtd. in Barwick, p. 130).

¹¹References to this phenomenon can be found throughout descriptions of the Museum. See for instance, Barwick's citation of Fagan's *Life of Panizzi*: "I recollect nothing about the ventilation, but I know that after working some time you found your head very hot and heavy and your feet cold. These were symptoms of the 'Museum megrims' about which there was a good deal of stuff in the papers" (qtd. in Barwick, p. 84). As regards the lighting of the Reading Room, Barwick notes that proposals for gas-light were rejected by the Trustees and that it was not until the 1880s that electric lights were installed, initially with results that Barwick calls merely "satisfactory" (p. 129).

¹²These efforts are discussed extensively in Kate Flint's *The Woman Reader, 1837- 1914*, pp. 171-180.

¹³Abigail A. Van Slyck claims in her study of library use by women during the same period in America that public libraries were one of a select few "places where the interaction between men and women was unmediated by the promise of financial gain or the threat of dismissal" (p. 224).

¹⁴Barwick notes that assumptions about class also contributed to the hiring of these attendants, at least in the 1880s, when boys from surrounding boroughs were enlisted to run books between the Reading Room and the Library: “The appointment of the boy attendants rested with the Principal Librarian, who had a horror of the Cockney accent and invented a sentence which he made each applicant read aloud. It was ‘The lady admired the baby and gave it a piece of cake.’ The smile which greeted ‘lidy,’ ‘bibby,’ and ‘kike’ may have raised hopes which were speedily disappointed” (p. 136).

¹⁵This seems to have been the case in other libraries as well, as a writer in *All the Year Round* points out in an article from 1892 called “A Day at the London Free Libraries.” In a sketch of the Southwark Public Library, the writer claims that although an authority on free libraries once told him that a ladies’ room “means simply gossip,” Southwark’s ladies’ room is in fact empty, and an oppressive silence is felt throughout the library in general: “But even a little gossip is not a bad thing, and would be a relief from the somewhat oppressive silence that pervades the free library in general” (p. 307).

¹⁶Amy Levy also exploits this stereotype in a short story published in 1888, entitled “The Recent Telepathic Occurrence at the British Museum.” Through the character of a young Professor who uses the Reading Room for his research, Levy illustrates both the concerns over women’s use of the room and the unjust assumptions on which these concerns were based. Grumbling about Reading Room distractions, the Professor asks himself, “Why do they always wait to the last moment before lighting up? And what a tramping and a whispering on all sides! It’s the women – they’ve no business to have women here at all,” but as his grumbings end we are told that “a clergyman and a law-student passed by in loud consultation” (p. 432).

¹⁷A note in the next volume of *The Library* claims that the new policies did not diminish the number of visitors, which stayed at about 700 a day. However, people did seem to come earlier in the morning, meaning that attendance was spread more evenly throughout the day (p. 162).

¹⁸See, for instance, volume V of *The Library* (1893), which contains a note concerning a petition at the Middlesbrough Public Library for better accommodation for ladies visiting the Reading Room. It was found that both men and women had written their opinions on the document, showing a reluctance amongst both men and women for a Ladies’ Reading Room. An administrator is said to have remarked that this “could be easily accounted for because there was a number of young girls who, if they had their own way, would prefer to have an opportunity of looking at the men, and being looked at by them” (p. 140).

¹⁹Flint’s study finds this consumptive role for women laid out again and again in the Victorian discourse on women’s reading. For instance, examining the representations of women’s reading in the periodical press, she comments that critical appraisals that focussed on the “susceptibility and moral frailty of the woman reader ... were once again based, at least rhetorically, on the assumption that women would be passive consumers, automatically influenced by what they read” (p. 147). Here, Flint is referring specifically to the work of women reviewers such as Margaret Oliphant and Dinah Mulock.

²⁰Interestingly, there is no mention in this article of the problem of middle-class women mixing with men of the lower classes, even in more predominantly working-class districts such as South London. The reason for this, in the writer’s estimation, is that “the working classes of the population are not much attracted by the library. The silence and good order are a little too much for them; they miss the freedom, the chaff, the jokes of the out-of-doors and the full-flavoured hilarity of the public house” (p. 308).

²¹See Hoberman: “But Fitzgerald’s women are not merely physically incongruous; they are exploited, ‘fair “damozels”’ in need of rescue from a workplace where they do not belong, as they work ‘for some literary man who has cash and position’ – much like George Gissing’s Marian Yule in his 1891 *New Grub Street*, whose work in the reading room for her abusive father makes her pale and cough-prone” (p. 176).

²²Robert Selig points out in his study of Gissing that Marian’s final image of the Reading Room as a “circular prison reflects an historical and architectural oddity. Jeremy Bentham’s 1790s design of a moral penitentiary called ‘the panopticon’ – ‘a circular ... structure’ with the guards’ observation ‘rotunda’ at the centre – influenced the design of the British Museum Reading Room” (62).

²³Marian’s response to the Reading Room also differs significantly from the way some women characterized their own experiences of library use outside of the male dominated periodical press. In an 1877 letter to Samuel Butler from his friend Miss Savage, for instance, the young lady requests happily that Butler save a specific place for her when he meets her in the Reading Room because she is “miserable anywhere else.” She claims to have chosen her special spot on her first visit “because it was an equal distance from Miss Karstens and Miss Andrews, and the furthest pole apart from Miss Pearson” (qtd. in Barwick, pp. 127-28).

²⁴Selig’s reference to Marian as the slave to her literary father (p. 57) clearly under-represents the activity of her role, whether or not she enjoys the process of writing or not.

²⁵For an analysis of the function of gender difference in the bourgeois public sphere see Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*. For an examination of these ideas in the context of the Victorian novel, see Pam Morris’s *Imagining Inclusive Society in Nineteenth-Century Novels*.

²⁶See “The Valuable Collection in the Reading Room, British Museum,” in *Punch*, 28 March 1885. Both Hoberman and Harris reproduce the illustration.

²⁷Bennett also describes how the Crystal Palace, the design of which bore many similarities to the design of the British Museum Reading Room, achieved many of the goals of the panopticon and “exerted a decisive influence on the subsequent development of exhibitionary architecture: first the use of new materials (cast iron and glass) to permit the enclosure and illumination of large spaces; second, the clearing of exhibits to the sides and centres of display areas, thus allowing clear passageways for transit of the public, and breaking that public up from a disaggregated mass into an orderly flow; and, third, the provision of elevated vantage points in the form of galleries which, in allowing the public to watch over itself, incorporated a principle of self-surveillance and hence self-regulation into museum architecture” (p. 101).

²⁸In reference to the dissolution of the public sphere, Hoberman notes that, according to Jurgen Habermas, the “rational civic-minded individual” that constituted the public sphere, “ceased to exist by the 1880s and 1890s” (p. 179). Harry C. Boyte attributes this late-Victorian disintegration to “the growing replacement of a competitive capitalist economy with a monopolized economy dominated by large industrial and financial interest [which] undermined the power and authority of the commercial and professional middle classes,” resulting in the break-down of the public into a “myriad of special interests” (p. 343). Morris, on the other hand, argues that the public sphere was already under such attacks much earlier, and that “the 1840s marked the point where the public sphere was transformed by the explosive pressure upon it of heterogeneous social voices: those of the organized working class, those of self-made industrial entrepreneurs, and, by the end of the decade, by the writing and claims of women” (p. 21).

Bibliography

- Altick, Richard D., *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- , “The Reading Public in England and America in 1900,” *Writers, Readers, and Occasions*, Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1972, pp. 209- 30.
- Barwick, G. F., *The Reading Room of the British Museum*, London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1929.
- Bennett, Tony, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Boyte, Harry C., “The Pragmatic Ends of Popular Politics,” *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: MIT Press, 1992, pp. 340-355.
- Brantlinger, Patrick, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1998.
- “A Day at the London Free Libraries,” *All the Year Round*, 3rd Series v. VII.169 (1892), pp. 305-09.
- Epstein Nord, Deborah, *Walking the Victorian Street: Women, Representation, and the City*, Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1995.
- Flint, Kate, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914*, New York: Oxford UP, 1993.
- Gissing, George, *New Grub Street*, 1891. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962.
- Habermas, Jurgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989.
- Harris, P. R., *The Reading Room*, 1979. Corrected ed. London: The British Library, 1986.
- Hoberman, Ruth. “‘A Thought in the Huge Bald Forehead’: Depictions of Women in the British Museum Reading Room, 1857-1929,” *Reading Women: Literary Figures and Cultural Icons from the Victorian Age to the Present*, ed. Janet Badia and Jennifer Phegley, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005, pp. 168-91.
- “Jottings [British Museum Novel Restriction],” *The Library* I (1889), p. 110.
- Kittler, Joseph, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990.
- “Ladies in Libraries,” *Saturday Review* 62.1607 (1886), pp. 212-13.
- Landes, Joan, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.
- Levy, Amy, “The Recent Telepathic Occurrence at the British Museum (1888),” *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy, 1861-1889*, ed. Melvyn New, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993, pp. 431-34.
- “Library Notes and News (London: British Museum),” *The Library* II (1890), p. 162.
- “Library Notes and News (Middlesborough),” *The Library* V (1893), p. 140.
- Martin, Henri-Jean, *The History and Power of Writing*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane,

- Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Mermin, Dorothy, *Godiva's Ride: Women of Letters in England, 1830-1880*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1993.
- Mitch, David F., *The Rise of Popular Literacy in Victorian England: The Influence of Private Choice and Public Policy*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.
- Morris, Pam, *Imagining Inclusive Society in Nineteenth-Century Novels: The Code of Sincerity in the Public Sphere*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004.
- Reay, Barry, "The Context and Meaning of Popular Literacy: Some Evidence from Nineteenth-Century Rural England," *Past and Present* 131 (1991), pp. 89-129.
- Selig, Robert L., *George Gissing*. Twayne's English Authors Series, ed. Herbert Sussman, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983.
- "The Valuable Collection in the Reading Room, British Museum," *Punch*, 28 March 1885, p. 155.
- Van Slyck, Abigail A., "The Lady and the Library Loafer: Gender and Public Space in Victorian America," *Winterthur Portfolio* 31.4 (1996), pp. 221-42.
- Vincent, David, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture, ed. Peter and Ruth Finnegan Burke, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Warner, Michael, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: MIT Press, 1992, pp. 377-401.
- Wood, Butler, "Three Special Features of Free Library Work – Open Shelves, Woman Readers, and Juvenile Departments," *The Library* IV (1893), pp. 108-14.

"Feeble Idyllicism": Gissing's Critique of *Oliver Twist* and *Ryecroft*

M. D. ALLEN
University of Wisconsin, Fox Valley

Gissing's introduction to the Rochester Edition of *Oliver Twist* (written 1899) sets Dickens' second novel against its relevant biographical, literary, and political background and praises his vivid and concretely realised picture of London's "vile streets . . . bare, filthy rooms [and] the hideous public-house to which thieves resort," a picture so striking that Dickens "taught people a certain way of regarding the huge city, and to this day how common it is to see London with Dickens's eyes." Praise, however, is juxtaposed with criticism: Gissing has no time for the artificial, melodramatic plot, nor for "the two blemishes of the book—on the one hand, Monks with

his insufferable (often ludicrous) rant and his absurd machinations; on the other, the feeble idyllicism of the Maylie group” (Coustillas, “*Oliver Twist*,” p. 92). The Maylies, indeed, have had few defenders: Angus Wilson in the introduction to the 1966 Penguin edition surely records a common response when he writes that “the true kings of the novel [are] Fagin, Sikes, and the gang [not] the genteel ghosts who represent respectable society. . . . Rose Maylie’s country flower picking expeditions seem like the feeble stirrings of the moribund” (p. 19). It is Edgar Johnson’s opinion that “Harry Maylie is cut out of the most heroic pasteboard, and Rose Maylie drips a syrupy sweetness transcending patience” (Vol. 1, p. 281).

The Maylie chapters are 32 to 36, or Book the Second, Chapters the Ninth to the Thirteenth in the 2002 Penguin edition that reprints the *Bentley’s Miscellany* text of 1837-9. The last three chapters in this little group are devoted to the stagey utterances of Harry and Rose, as the former attempts to overcome the high-minded latter’s rejection of his marriage proposal (“There is no pursuit more worthy of me: more worthy of the highest nature that exists: than the struggle to win such a heart as yours” [Chapter 35]). But the first two chapters deal with the pure delights of the countryside and one other matter, and it is these with which I am concerned.

Rose informs Oliver, still recuperating from a gunshot wound and exposure to cold and wet after the failed “crack” of the Maylies’ house, that “We are going into the country, and my aunt intends that you shall accompany us. The quiet place, the pure air, and all the pleasures and beauties of spring, will restore you in a few days.” Dickens’ own descriptions of this significantly unnamed and indeterminately situated country spot are little less generic than the words of Rose. But as Dickens, in the style of a clever schoolboy assigned an essay about “My Summer Holiday,” writes of “the balmy air . . . the green hills and rich woods” and, a little improbably, perhaps, “the clean houses of the labouring men,” he goes on also to make a townsman’s, or a reader’s, insistence on the beneficial effects of the country for those long in city pent, which Keatsian, or Miltonic, phrase, in fact, he echoes (Paroissien points out the literary inspirations for Dickens’ praise of the countryside [pp. 199, 207-10]).

Who can tell how scenes of peace and quietude sink into the minds of pain-worn dwellers in close and noisy places, and carry their own freshness, deep into their jaded hearts! Men who have lived in crowded, pent-up streets, through lives of toil, and who have never wished for change; men, to whom custom has indeed been second nature, and who have come almost to love each brick and stone that formed the narrow boundaries of their daily walks; even they, with the hand of death upon them, have been known to yearn at last for one short glimpse of Nature’s face; and,

carried far from the scenes of their old pains and pleasures, have seemed to pass at once into a new state of being. (Chapter 32. My italics)

If comparisons between the degrading complexities of the city on the one hand and the calm beauty of the country on the other are immemorial, claims that Nature soothes and transforms town-dwelling men near their death are a little less so. Here is the situation of Ryecroft, and here, surely, is a source of the frame within which exist his “private papers.” (Coustillas discusses other probable literary sources in his bilingual edition, *Les Carnets d’Henry Ryecroft*, especially pp. 69-70.) Ryecroft, who “earned his living very much as other men do, taking the day’s toil as a matter of course, and rarely grumbling over it,” is bequeathed an annuity and “enter[s] upon a period of such tranquillity of mind . . . as he had never dared to hope,” a time even of “cordial, gleeful hospitality, rambles . . . in lanes and meadows, long talks amid the stillness of the rural night”—truly a “new state of being” for one who had been “so sternly disciplined” (Gissing, “Preface,” pp. 6, 5). He enjoys not “one short glimpse” but a “lustrum” of “Nature’s face.” Time and again his thoughts stray back to “close and noisy places”; time and again he rhapsodises over the countryside. Indeed, this is the contrast round which the book is constructed. Ryecroft writes of English cooking and class and the effects of democracy and conscription and other matters. But the balancing principle of composition is the town/country contrast, the former associated with dirt, strife, toil, and the commercialisation of literature, the latter with cleanliness, peace, leisure, and the blissful appreciation—even the joyful production—of literary art.

“It was a lovely spot to which he repaired,” writes Gissing of his battered veteran, “and Ryecroft, whose days had been spent among squalid crowds, and in the midst of noise and brawling, seemed to enter upon a new existence there.” Except, of course, that it is not Gissing writing of Ryecroft. These are the words of Dickens about Oliver (I have substituted “he” for “they” and “Ryecroft” for “Oliver”[Chapter 32]). But Ryecroft too has spent time “among squalid crowds and in the midst of noise and brawling,” as, to take but one example, the opening paragraph of Spring XXIII makes clear: “Every morning when I awake, I thank heaven for silence. . . . [The various noises of London awakening] are bad enough, but worse still is the clamorous human voice. Nothing on earth is more irritating to me than a bellow or scream of idiot mirth, nothing more hateful than a shout or yell of brutal anger.”

The mood and tone of the paragraph describing Oliver’s Sundays help inspire much of the mood and tone of *Ryecroft*, all of whose days now are

days of rest. After church and walks, Oliver would on Sunday “read a chapter or two from the Bible, which he had been studying all the week” (Chapter 32); Ryecroft has come to associate Sunday especially with “names that are the greatest in verse and prose,” which names he sacralises: “I open the volume [of Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, or Milton] somewhat formally; is it not sacred, if the word have any meaning at all?” Oliver “studies” the plants in the Maylies’ garden, taught by the village clerk who is “a gardener by trade” and presumably employed in that capacity by Oliver’s friends; “The honest fellow who comes to dig in [Ryecroft’s] garden” is puzzled by the latter’s dislike for formal flowerbeds but apparently has no educative role (Summer XXIV): Ryecroft tries to teach himself about hawkweeds (“I am learning to distinguish and name as many as I can” [Autumn I]).

Perhaps most significantly, Oliver’s experience of literature in the city is confined to a brief conversation in Brownlow’s library that centres on exploitation of authors. (I exclude his horrified reading of *The Newgate Calendar*, lent him by Fagin.) The product of Dickens’ resentment at a contract with his publisher that now seemed inequitable in the face of his rapidly increasing fame, it includes most incongruous comments from both Oliver and Brownlow, a reader, not a producer of literature:

“How should you like to grow up a clever man, and write books, eh?” [asks Brownlow]

“I think I would rather read them, sir,” replied Oliver.

“What! Wouldn’t you like to be a book-writer?” said the old gentleman.

Oliver considered a little while, and at last said he should think it would be a much better thing to be a bookseller; upon which the old gentleman laughed heartily, and declared he had said a very good thing, which Oliver felt glad to have done, though he by no means knew what it was.

“Well, well,” said the old gentleman, composing his features, “don’t be afraid; we won’t make an author of you, while there’s an honest trade to be learnt, or brick-making to turn to.” (Chapter 14)

Brownlow’s remarks will remind the Gissing devotee of many similar comments; indeed, Gissing would eventually express bitterness at the meagerness of his profits from *Ryecroft* itself. And like Brownlow, Ryecroft compares the security of a writer’s life unfavourably with that of “any toiling man” and jeers at the thought of a writer’s “independence” (Spring II). Ryecroft must go to the country for a pure experience of literature; Oliver must go to the country for the further education in reading and writing that will eventually make such an experience possible, although even now the

Maylies give him two quintessential literary Gissing experiences: they “talk of books” and listen to Rose read aloud (Chapter 32).

I wrote above that the first three chapters of the Maylie interlude treat of the blissful peace of the countryside and “one other matter.” That other matter is the sudden illness and equally sudden recovery of Rose. It is widely accepted that this incident, irrelevant to the subplot in which it occurs, which is itself irrelevant to the narrative thrust of the novel as a whole, is the product of Dickens’ undigested pain at the sudden death of his sister-in-law Mary Hogarth in May 1837. The chapter heading is “Wherein the Happiness of Oliver and His Friends Experiences a Sudden Check.”

One beautiful night they had taken a longer walk than was customary with them, for the day had been unusually warm, and there was a brilliant moon, and a light wind had sprung up, which was unusually refreshing. Rose had been in high spirits too, and they had walked on in merry conversation until they had far exceeded their ordinary bounds. (p. 265)

There follow a breakdown, the anguished return to the country of Harry, general distress and tears, and the recovery that Mary was denied in reality. Ryecroft wishes for a quick end: “Most solemnly do I hope that in the latter days no long illness awaits me. May I pass quickly from this life of quiet enjoyment to the final peace” (Autumn V). His putative editor writes in the “Preface” of his demise: “It had always been his wish to die suddenly; he dreaded the thought of illness, chiefly because of the trouble it gave to others. On a summer evening, after a long walk in very hot weather, he lay down upon the sofa in his study, and there—as his calm face declared—passed from slumber into the great silence.” For Rose “a longer walk than was customary with them” on a Summer day that had been “unusually warm”; for Ryecroft “a long walk in very hot weather.” In the case of the latter, “obituary paragraphs” record “the date and place of his birth, the names of certain books he had written, an allusion to his work in the periodicals, *the manner of his death*” (Gissing, “Preface,” p. 5. My italics). Of course, obituaries often do record *cause* of death. “Manner” is perhaps slightly unusual, and I believe the word to be a carry-over from Gissing’s first thoughts about the way in which Ryecroft was to pass away. The MS of the first, still unpublished, version, entitled *An Author at Grass* like the version published in the *Fortnightly Review* (1902-3), reads, “In his end, fate was kind to him. During one of his rambles, a great storm gathered over the hills, & broke: when the sky was clear again, a countryman found him lying dead, stricken by lightning” (Gissing, p. 183). Coustillas suggests that Gissing rejected this “manner” of death as carrying undesired over-

tones: “Sans doute Gissing préféra-t-il en définitive accorder une mort plus paisible à son *alter ego* en raison de la valeur symbolique qu’il ne souhaitait pas voir prêter au foudroiement” (Coustillas, *Les Carnets*, p. 47). Gissing may also have come to see death by lightning bolt as lacking verisimilitude, even as faintly risible. The substitution he made was suggested by his memories of Rose and *Oliver Twist*.

If Gissing damned the Maylie chapters as “feeble idyllicism,” must we condemn *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* in the same terms? There have not been lacking critics prepared to do so, among them Gillian Tindall. After noting manifestations of the “theme of retreat to a rural *idyll*” in earlier works, she observes that *Ryecroft* was written not in the English countryside it celebrates but while Gissing was in exile in France and, moreover, “in the social isolation of a semi-secret alliance” (pp. 40, 126. My italics):

I do not personally admire *Ryecroft*. It contains some fine and memorable passages, but in that it is *not* a novel but a piece of bogus autobiography and blatant wish-fulfilment, it seems to me to display far less real perception, common sense and sophistication of thought than are apparent even in his less good novels. In *Ryecroft*, it is not really the writer speaking but the man—and, at that, the man on his off-days: physically ailing, mentally morbid and self-limiting. (p. 41)

Ryecroft is perhaps Gissing’s most popular book. In a world where stupidity and cruelty cause suffering even in conditions of civilised order and where horrors unimaginable stalk the peripheries of our lives and our consciousness, its meditative charm has brought solace for more than a century. But even its most grateful admirers must catch occasional glimpses of the defeated escapism at its heart. A reading of certain chapters of *Oliver Twist* will, alas, make those glimpses a little more frequent.

Bibliography

- Coustillas, Pierre, trans. and intro., *Les Carnets d’Henry Ryecroft*, Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1966.
- Coustillas, Pierre, ed. and intro., “*Oliver Twist*,” in *Collected Works of George Gissing on Charles Dickens*, Vol. 1, *Essays, Introductions and Reviews*, Grayswood, Surrey: Grayswood, 2004.
- Dickens, Charles, *Oliver Twist*, 1837-9, ed. Peter Fairclough, intro. Angus Wilson, Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1966.
- Gissing, George, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, 1903. Ed. Mark Storey, Oxford: OUP, 1987.
- Johnson, Edgar, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*, Vol. 1, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952.

Paroissien, David, *A Companion to Oliver Twist*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1992.
Tindall, Gillian, *The Born Exile: George Gissing*, New York and London: Harcourt
Brace Jovanovich, 1974.

Book Review

Lise Shapiro Sanders, *Consuming Fantasies: Labor, Leisure, and the London Shopgirl, 1880-1920*, Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2006.

Attractively designed and presented by Ohio State UP, *Consuming Fantasies* sets out to examine “a new identity,” that of “the shopgirl, [which] emerged in the midst of a heated debate about the nature of social, sexual, and moral practice for women employed in the public sphere” (p. 1). However, this female worker is not merely a new social phenomenon in a traditionally male-run world. She is socially ambiguous, as both impoverished middle-class women and aspiring working-class ones took up jobs in shops, and her unsupervised mobility in vast, anonymous London is a challenge to traditional ideas of gendered “separate spheres.” She eventually becomes both avid consumer and subject of the mass-market fiction and, later, silent films that tell stories of shopgirls who marry the owner’s son and return to the previous site of their labour in conditions of conspicuously moneyed power, thus embodying the fantasies of a consumer culture.

Sanders divides her book into five chapters. The first two deal with the exploitative nature of much shop work and humanitarian or trades union attempts to improve the lot of those performing it. Chapter 3 discusses boredom and the consequent need for stimulation, seen as “critical elements in the narrative of the shopgirl’s romantic trajectory” (p. 15). *The Odd Women* and W. Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*, both discussed at some length, have as important characters shopgirls who make failed marriages in response to narrow environments. Sanders claims that Gissing and Maugham critique marriage as “an economic system” and that young women disappointed in it may find solace in the sort of pulp romance that helped make them long for marriage in the first place (p. 16). Finally, Chapters 4 and 5 address the entertainment industries—formulaic fiction, the popular stage and screen—that saw shopgirls as important consumers of their products.

Readers of *The Odd Women* will find helpful an eleven-page section entitled “Working Conditions and Everyday Life,” in Chapter 2. Sanders discusses shopgirls’ working hours, their wages (either she or her publisher

does not know the conventional ways of showing divisions between shillings and pence), the truck system, in which employees were partly paid in board and lodging, and the possible descent into prostitution of bored and under-paid young women living apart from parents and siblings. After these pages one rereads the conversation between Monica Madden and Rhoda Nunn in Chapter 4 of *The Odd Women*, not to mention the talk of Scotcher's female employees and Monica's consequent tears in Chapter 5, with a new understanding. One also feels a new respect for the thoroughness with which Gissing has done his preparation. Sanders here provides good old-fashioned historical background, a compliment for which she will not thank me.

For the aim of *Consuming Fantasies* is not to deepen our understanding of *The Odd Women* and *Of Human Bondage*. An interdisciplinary essay in cultural studies, the book intends, in the words of the critic quoted on the back cover, to show "how literature and language interact with 'real' life in the complex construction of the individual and collective identity of the shopgirl [and thus make] a valuable contribution to studies of modern leisure and consumption." Very well. One understands that Gissing's and Maugham's novels are secondary, that they are there to illustrate a thesis. The problem with Sanders' work is that the thesis is cavalierly imposed upon rather than partly inferred from Gissing's novel. Time and again poor Gissing, or rather poor Monica, is lopped or racked to fit the Procrustean bed of Sanders' theory, which gives the impression of having come into being before she read *The Odd Women*. The most remarkable example occurs on the first page of Chapter 4, which has as epigraph an extract from Gissing's novel: "All her spare time was given to novel-reading. [. . .] The girl's nature was corrupted with sentimentality, like that of all but every woman who is intelligent enough to read what is called the best fiction, but not intelligent enough to understand its vice. Love—love—love; a sickening sameness of vulgarity." The first sentence of the chapter proper is "Gissing's description of the effects of novel reading on Bella Royston, Miss Barfoot's strayed pupil and one of several 'fallen' figures in *The Odd Women*, posits the romance novel as a cause of women's moral, intellectual, and emotional degradation" (p. 126). Sanders' self-conscious sophistication is so evident throughout that one half-wonders if there is something going on here one is too stupid to see. But, of course, it is not Gissing who so describes "novel-reading," it is Rhoda Nunn, not perhaps the most reliable commentator on romantic love one has ever come across. Her name is mentioned and she is identified with the rant seven lines later. But there *is* a

difference between Gissing and his creation. And if Sanders is going to claim that on this occasion Rhoda's and Gissing's opinions are entirely congruent then she might add a sentence or so to justify that claim for the benefit of those of us who are so slow of apprehension that we sometimes use the word "natural" without sneer-quotes.

The main treatment of *The Odd Women* is to be found in Chapter 3, "The Failures of the Romance: Boredom and the Production of Consuming Desires" (pp. 97-125). Sanders' position is that Monica desires "an upward trajectory out of the shop and into the secure position of the middle-class domestic woman." Her marriage fails as (causative not temporal) she shows "an inability to reproduce the moral and social norms of proper femininity, a failure intimately tied to the threat of [her] affiliation with the working classes." This leads to "a lack of domestic influence and industry," hence boredom (Patricia Meyer Spacks has written on boredom), hence "fantasy, here represented by the act of reading," and hence Bevis, not, if memory serves, that a specificity like Bevis is ever mentioned (p. 99). After the first, not one step in this series of claims and interpretations is justifiable, nor does one accept some couple of dozen of the lesser asseverations that buttress them. The failure of Monica's marriage has nothing to do with her alleged "affiliation with the working classes." (Incidentally, Sanders does not convince as a guide to the English class system, although she has read a good many books that see class, along with race and gender, as of the first importance.) Monica does not have to "strive" (p. 100) to differentiate herself from the girls with whom she works: she cannot walk into the room or open her mouth without making the difference manifest. Her marriage fails because she is yoked to the Othello of Herne Hill, a pitifully inadequate man of whose social insecurities Sanders could have made much if she had enough respect for the novel to mention Widdowson more than glancingly and whose views on relations between the sexes are open to reasoned criticism.

Secondly, Monica does not "resist" or feel "frustration" with "the monotony of the conventional marriage bond" (pp. 114-115). She objects to the marriage she is in, which she sometimes, and only sometimes, perceives as typical due to suffering, inexperience, and an imperfect memory of Rhoda's teaching. This particular marriage is portrayed by Gissing with all the telling detail and balanced understanding of a highly talented novelist. Sanders has read one sentence and quotes its last word, "bondage," as representing marriage as a state (p. 116). But the word clearly refers to

Monica's own marriage: "If she had understood herself [when she married Widdowson] as she now did, her life would never have been thus cast into bondage." In fact, there is a case for saying that Monica, who, in her creator's words, has "no aptitude for anything but being a pretty, cheerful, engaging girl," was born for the "conventional marriage bond." She's just married the wrong chap. And, to make an end, Monica is neither Francesca da Rimini nor Emma Bovary. Sanders exaggerates both Monica's reading and its effects, certain sentences towards the end of Chapter 19 of *The Odd Women* notwithstanding.

At one stage Sanders mentions "Colleen McCullough's best-selling 1977 novel *The Thorn Birds*" (p. 140), mostly to show that she is up to date with Cora Kaplan's analysis of it: "The transgressive textual fantasies produced on reading *The Thorn Birds*, [Kaplan] suggests, undermine the book's conservative politics, and demand a critical and careful engagement with the politics of their production." Readers of *Consuming Fantasies*, which began its life as a doctoral dissertation for the University of Chicago, may not learn much about George Gissing but any sort of engagement with it at all will soon reveal much about the politics of its production.

M. D. Allen, University of Wisconsin—Fox Valley

Notes and News

Readers of Gissing's Memorandum Book, edited by Bouwe Postmus and published by the Edwin Mellen Press, will remember that during his stay at the Nayland Sanatorium in the summer of 1901 he met a fellow patient called Miss Althea Gyles (1868-1949), an Irish artist and poet. Now, if Gissing quite naturally lost sight of her after he left the sanatorium on 10 August, she remained a minor figure in W. B. Yeats studies and is not as forgotten as she might be. H. R. Woudhuysen mentioned her in a recent article entitled "Fine editions and the future" (*Times Literary Supplement*, 1 June 2007, p. 29), reproducing a photograph of her with her friend Constance Gore-Booth in a Chelsea bohemian setting in 1898.

Hazel K. Bell, a recent contributor to this journal, reports that she chanced upon a passage on Gissing and *New Grub Street* on page 269 of *The Enthusiasms of Robertson Davies* (Penguin edition, 1990). In this anthology the passage on Gissing was reprinted from an article entitled "The

Writer's Week," originally published in the *Toronto Daily Star* for 28 March 1959.

The same correspondent also reports that Leon Edel wrote in his introduction to *The Princess Casamassima*, first published in 1886, volume X in *The Bodley Head Henry James*, 1972: "It would be left to writers like Gissing and Wells to picture lower-class life from the 'inside.'" Indeed the princess and her world are depicted very much from the outside and Gissing was aware of this, as Gabrielle Fleury wrote in her *Recollections of him*, using the French word "factice." See p. 276 of volume IX of the *Collected Letters*.

Ellipses, the Paris publishers of scholarly books, will be publishing a *Guide to the English novel* before long. It will contain entries on Gissing and *New Grub Street* by Christine Huguët.

Gissing is well known to have been an avid reader of Homer, but the whereabouts of his copy or copies was until recently unknown. We can now report that his copy of *The Iliad*, signed and dated "Xmas 1869" by him, is held by the Lilly Library.

Anyone who visits the Brixton Society Official Website and consults "Six Walks Around Brixton and Stockwell, Brixton Heritage Trails," will find "The Lodge," the home for some time at the end of his life of the music hall star Dan Leno (1860-1904), whom Peter Ackroyd rescued from oblivion a few years ago. A little further on occurs this paragraph: "No. 76 [Burton Road] was the house where the novelist George Gissing lived in 1893/94. He lived with his wife and child in the upper part of this house when he was writing "In the Year of Jubilee" which describes life in the Grove Lane neighbourhood of Camberwell—though for peace and quiet he wrote in a rented room nearby!" At the end of Burton Road was the Minet Public Library given to the town in 1890, which Gissing never mentioned. Rebuilt after the second world war, the Minet Library now houses the Lambeth Archives. A nice illustrated book on Brixton is *Brixton and Norwood in Old Photographs*, by Jill Dudman (Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1995).

Markus Neacey, whose remarkable article on Gissing and Miss Curtis of Eastbourne has filled an important gap in Gissing's biography, has dis-

covered that a letter of her relative Mary Adelaide Walker, dated 1863, is for sale. According to its contents she received 100 guineas from Chapman and Hall for her book *Through Macedonia to the Albanian Lakes*. Is it not ironic, Markus Neacey asks, when one thinks of what Gissing earned in the 1880s? She must have had a decent readership.

Anthony Petyt reports that the Planning Department at Wakefield have told him that a quotation from Gissing about the weather will be set into blocks of granite used in the refurbishment of Crown Court, a small square behind Wood Street, near the Mechanics' Institution and only a short distance from Thompson's Yard. Mr. Petyt was requested to look for the source of the quotation and he found it easily. It comes from section I, paragraph 2, of Winter in the *Ryecroft Papers*.

Last but not least, Mitsuharu Mitsuoka is pleased to say that the new collection of essays he has edited and which is to be published for the commemoration of the sesquicentennial or 150th anniversary of Gissing's birth is now in the last stages of production.

Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *Māriyān va Jāspir* (i.e. Marian and Jasper), Tehran: Donya No, 1998. Persian translation of *New Grub Street* by Mina Sarabi. First edition 1989. 617 pages. Introduction by the translator. Portrait of Gissing in 1895. Brown leatherette on boards with gilt titling. Pictorial dust-jacket.

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi, London: Penguin Books, c. 2007. 27th impression according to the publishers. New cover style. No copy of the 26th has been seen.

George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, ed. Elaine Showalter, London: Penguin Books, c. 2006. 14th impression according to the publishers. New cover style.

Bouwe Postmus, ed., *George Gissing's Scrapbook*, pp. 527. See announcement in this number, pp. 1-2.

George Gissing, *Si ji sui bi* [The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft], Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2007. Translation by Li Jiye. First edition under this imprint. Printed in simplified Chinese characters. Light green and white paperback with grey dust-jacket.

George Gissing, *Si ji sui bi* [The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft], Taipei: Chih Wen Publishing Company, 1997. Same translation as in previous volume. Printed in traditional Chinese characters. Paperback with pictorial covers. No. 340 in the series. Lithograph portrait by William Rothenstein.

Articles, reviews, etc

Diana Maltz, "Book Reviews," *Victorian Studies*, Autumn 2006, pp. 141-43. Review of *Gissing and the City* (ed. John Spiers). The same number also contains a review of *Consuming Fantasies* (Lise Shapiro Sanders) by Maria Teresa Chialant.

Louis James, *The Victorian Novel*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. Entries on Gissing, p. 119 and *New Grub Street*, pp. 192-93.

Mary Pierse, ed., *George Moore: Artistic Visions and Literary Worlds*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006. Contains a few allusions to Gissing, one of which (p. 6) betrays alarming ignorance ("Like Hardy, Gissing had an unvarying style"). On p. 9 Gissing is more rightly said to be one of the six or seven novelists of the period who survive, while on p. 112 a contributor writes that Gissing's prose, like that of Hardy, Haggard and Collins, "seems more balanced, ordered, verbose and sonorous" than that of Moore.

James Campbell, "The Good Woman," *Guardian Unlimited*, 24 March 2007, Saturday Review Section, p. 22. A good article on Gissing and his novels. The works discussed are *Eve's Ransom*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *The Crown of Life* and *New Grub Street*, but not *The Odd Women*. Anthony Quinn regretted this omission in a letter to the editor of the *Guardian* ("The Forgotten Feminist," 31 March 2007, p. 15).

John Spiers, "Book Reviews," *Journal of the Printing Historical Society*, New Series, no. 10, Spring 2007, pp. 64-65. Review of *George Gissing*:

The Definitive Bibliography and George Gissing: Voices of the Un-classed.”

Christine Huguet, “Comptes Rendus,” *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, No. 65, April 2007, pp. 206-10. Review of *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*.

Martin Waller, “Kynaston leaves the Square Mile behind to search for Austerity Britain,” *The Times*, 26 May 2007, p. 69. Review of David Kynaston’s new book, *Austerity Britain 1945-51* (Bloomsbury, 2007), with photograph of him. Kynaston’s vivid interest in Gissing and his novels is glowingly mentioned. He quoted from *The Crown of Life* in one of his volumes on the City. See William Greenslade’s Everyman edition of *The Whirlpool*. Ferdinand Mount’s review of Kynaston’s book in the *Times Literary Supplement* also mentions Gissing (“Ration Book: Distorted memories of the post-war age,” 15 June 2007, p. 7).

Rosemary Gray, ed., *Classic Short Stories*, Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2007. This impressive anthology of English Short Stories, some 1,400 pages long, is obtainable through Amazon.co.uk for £5.99. With three exceptions (Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Crane and Edith Wharton), all the authors are English. Gissing is represented by “In Honour Bound,” “An Old Maid’s Triumph,” “The Scrupulous Father,” “A Victim of Circumstances,” “The Elixir and “The Prize Lodger.” These six stories are preceded by a short biographical notice. Among the writers some of whose work is reprinted are Arnold Bennett, Wilkie Collins, Joseph Conrad, Hubert Crackanthorpe, George Egerton, Elizabeth Gaskell, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Rudyard Kipling, D. H. Lawrence, George Moore, Arthur Morrison, Anthony Trollope, Mrs. Henry Wood, Virginia Woolf and Israel Zangwill.

Scott McCracken, *Masculinities, modernist fiction and the urban sphere*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007. Three of the 17 chapters are devoted to Gissing, one in each of the three parts: 1. George Gissing, urban modernity and modernism; 8. George Gissing and the cultural politics of food; 14. Gissing and eating out.

Persian translation of *New Grub Street*
Front cover of dust-jacket