

How Secure Was George Gissing? A Study of Gissing’s Income between 1889 and 1903

ROGER MILBRANDT

Augustana Faculty, University of Alberta

No feature of the fiction of George Gissing is so notable as Gissing’s careful accommodation of the behaviour of his characters to their economic circumstances. Nor is this simply a matter of destitute characters (like Bill Blatherwick in *Workers in the Dawn* and Slimy in *The Unclassed*) behaving desperately and cruelly, nor of the moneyed characters (like Gilbert Gresham in *Workers* and Lady Ogram in *Our Friend the Charlatan*) exhibiting high-handedness and vanity. Gissing is aware of numerous gradations between impoverishment and riches and is also very sensitive to the way changes in people’s economic circumstances affect their demeanor and actions. For example, in *The Odd Women* Edmund Widdowson’s peculiar combination of pathological insecurity with an authoritarian tendency is appropriate to a man whose £600 annual income is a recent boon that followed bitter years of clerkship. In the same novel, Everard Barfoot’s courtship of Rhoda Nunn becomes more cavalier and evasive as successive legacies widen the economic gulf that separates the two characters. The pathetic gentility of the elder Madden sisters – also in *The Odd Women* – is the logical working out of a family history which twists disastrously from sufficiency to penury when the paterfamilias dies prematurely. *Will Warburton* details the process by which a man reconstructs his own character after a catastrophic loss of fortune and social standing. Gissing understood the human dimension of money and dispenses this painfully acquired understanding shrewdly throughout his fictional canon.

Besides observing the effect of their economic standing upon his characters, Gissing provided his readers with substantial, detailed information about his own always-shifting and often debilitating economic circumstances. His letters and diaries include hundreds of entries about his expenses, his income, his economic prospects and his economic status. Gissing also left four fascinating sheets of data – which may be collectively denominated his “Account” – wherein the payments he received for almost

all of his published writings are recorded.¹ Furthermore, the masterpiece of the Gissing canon is a singularly powerful investigation of the effect of economic factors upon literary composition. The cumulative effect of Gissing's writings – which include, besides his literary works, his letters, diary and other notes – is to invite a careful examination of the economic landscape upon which the literary works were mounted. In “How Poor Was George Gissing?” I examined Gissing's income during the period of twelve years which began with his arrival in London in 1877.² In the present essay, I pursue this investigation through the final decade and a half of Gissing's life – 1889-1903.

Much of the groundwork for this project was done by Gissing himself in the aforementioned “Account.” The documents comprising the “Account” note the exact payments for almost all of the published works, arranging the entries in years and indicating the total receipts for each year. Since the “Account” does not mention Gissing's non-literary income it provides an incomplete picture of his economic situation in the years 1877-1888 when most of his income derived from pedagogy. During the years encompassed by the present study, however, when Gissing's entire income came from writing, the “Account” mentions almost every payment he received.

Nevertheless, while the “Account” is both invaluable and quite remarkably accurate, it cannot be relied upon absolutely. Gissing began constructing this document (which he called a “conspectus”) on 20 September 1895³ – fifteen years after the date of the earliest entries. While we do not know when he inventoried payments in the remaining eight years of his life, it is possible that for some of these years too a considerable interval separates the receipt of payment from its documentation. A predictable vagueness results: some works for which Gissing was paid are not mentioned at all; others are entered for a year other than the year in which the payment was in fact received; there are a small number of cases in which the amount of the payment appears to be inaccurate. While the total number of omissions and errors is not great, they sometimes effect a serious distortion. For this reason, I append to this article a revision of Gissing's “Account,” which preserves the format of the original but incorporates amendments which I believe correct most of Gissing's inaccuracies.

However, even the most careful account of a writer's income leaves a great deal unsaid. Two specific silences merit a comment at this point. First, an account of a writer's income divided into units of one year will not tell us the economic value of the writer's literary production in a given year: there is often a significant lag between composition and payment. In

Gissing's case, the duration of the lag varies considerably. In late November of 1891, Gissing received a cheque for *Denzil Quarrier*, whose composition he had completed only two weeks earlier; on the other hand, a full year separates the composition of the short story "A Victim of Circumstances" (25 Nov. 1891) from Gissing's receipt of his £20 payment (19 Nov. 1892) and more than a decade elapsed between the composition of *The Unclassed* (completed in November of 1883) and its reissue in one-volume form (1895) from which most of the income Gissing derived from *The Unclassed* would accrue. A second, more obvious, limitation to an income record is that it tells us nothing about expenses. Although Gissing's income during the 1890s was dramatically higher than it had been in the previous decade, his feeling of economic insecurity hardly alters. In part, this reflects Gissing's psychology but it is also a function of the hostages to fortune he acquired during these years and of his gently augmenting sense of entitlement to luxuries and comforts.

This study begins with the year 1889 for the obvious reason that from this year forward Gissing would derive virtually all of his income from writing. Still, if we were to seek an exact date which breaks Gissing's career into two approximately equal parts, we could hardly do better than to select 26 September of 1888. It was on this date that Gissing left for Paris for his first extensive continental tour. In doing so, he was leaving behind a lot more than London and Wakefield. Nell Harrison had died earlier in the year, freeing him from a nagging economic obligation. The recently completed composition of *The Nether World* evidently freed Gissing as well from his emotional attachment to the class of which Nell was the most intimately known representative; thereafter, he would rarely write about the lower classes, and never with the painful urgency of the slum fiction he produced between *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and *The Nether World*. This disentanglement from the lower classes coincides with Gissing's long anticipated escape from the alienated labour of tutoring; in July the last of Gissing's many pupils, Walter Grahame, left him. The news, which he received shortly after his arrival in Paris, that Smith, Elder were offering £150 for *The Nether World*, marked a pleasant seal on his new identity. Gissing was justifiably confident that he could write a novel every year and with his obligation to Nell completed, he was certain that £150 would sustain his annual expenses.

When he left England, Gissing had only £6 in the bank account his sister Ellen supervised for him; he likely carried very little cash for within three

weeks (17 October) he asks Ellen to send him £10. However, the £150 deposited in his bank account in early October gave him a balance of £156, the highest balance he had enjoyed since he had depleted the inheritance money received in 1879. Whereas the inheritance money was an unrepeatable boon, at thirty-one years of age, with seven published novels already to his credit, Gissing could look forward to many cheques as large or larger than the recent payment from Smith, Elder. The pleasant recoil from years of economic hardship is apparent as he tells Ellen he is “rolling in money” and records in his Diary “Rose in astonishing health and spirits. The knowledge that I am safe from penury for a year has helped me wonderfully.”⁴

From France, Gissing went to Italy and did not return to England until 1 March of 1889. The long journey had appreciably depleted his resources for although he lived very frugally (the £10 Ellen sent him monthly defrayed all of his traveling expenses) the cost of maintaining his Cornwall Mansions flat (£40 annually as well as charring costs) was nearly as great as the cost of maintaining Nell. After making his quarterly rental payment in March, he likely had less than £80 remaining; by 24 September of 1889 he realized his previous year’s prophecy of being “safe from penury for a year” all too precisely: he had £5 in cash and £5 in the bank.

His situation, however, was far from precarious. Out of his experience as an Englishman living in Italy Gissing had been able to fashion *The Emancipated* which he wrote between 3 June and 13 August of 1889 while staying with his mother and sold to Bentley and Son for £150 in October. Later in the year he would also receive £10 for “Christmas on the Capitol,” based on his Roman Christmas of 1888. Although the total income of £160 for 1889 is less than his income of 1888 – for he had disburdened himself of his pupils – his expenses were now smaller.⁵ When he leaves London for Dieppe on 11 November at the commencement of his second major European tour, his economic position is very much what it had been in September of the previous year and his prospects seem equally bright.

However, the ebullience Gissing exhibited as he commenced his excursion in 1888 does not recur in 1889. For no readily identifiable reason, Gissing falls prey to anxiety. By January 1890, a note of foreboding is evident as he writes to Margaret “But the day of poverty is approaching. ... It is a frightful thing to think of England. To my mind, it is all embodied in the Marylebone workhouse, towards which I am drifting.”⁶ Whereas his journey of the previous year extended to five months, this year he returns after three and a half, explaining to Algernon that he is “groaning at the pecuniary necessity of returning to England” and emphasizing “I should not

dream of returning yet, if it were not for confounded English expenses. The workhouse is before me.”⁷

Back in England at the end of February, Gissing makes a careful measure of his predicament. He has £77 standing between him and the workhouse and he estimates this provides thirty weeks for the composition of the next novel.⁸ He is confident he can finish his next novel well before the £77 is exhausted and feels there is a realistic possibility of obtaining a further £50 for *The Emancipated*.⁹

Things do not go as planned. The £77 does not sustain him until September as he had hoped, partly no doubt because of the two-week vacation to Paris on which Gissing takes his sisters, Ellen and Margaret, at the end of April, likely on the frail hope they would experience something of the cultural emancipation of Miriam Baske in the just-published *The Emancipated*. Gissing resided with his mother between 3 May and 21 August, hoping to complete his new novel as expeditiously as he had completed *The Emancipated* when he stayed at Wakefield the previous summer. This time, however, he was unable to sustain any of his numerous literary commencements and needed to postpone until the following year the reimbursement of his mother for the costs entailed by his residence with her. After returning to London in late August he was forced to sell portions of his personal library to sustain himself. By September of 1890 Gissing was economically and artistically bereft.

Gissing’s notorious solution to his literary/economic problem was to marry Edith Underwood, the daughter of a London artisan. In view of the terrible private misery this alliance would eventually visit, it is tempting to join Morley Roberts in deploring Gissing’s precipitance. But the largely economic rationale for this action which Gissing provides at the time to Ellen is not easy to refute. He had come, he tells Ellen, “to the end of my strength” and his “ceaseless misery of solitude” rendered him unable to earn even the “two or three pounds a week” he feels certain he could earn in circumstances securing him some semblance of emotional well being. Although marriage with an uneducated working girl will isolate him from polite society it will enable him to resume the literary work on which his livelihood depended.¹⁰ It was the least undesirable of Gissing’s several bad options.

A glance at the Diary record for the last four months of 1890 supports Gissing’s dour reasoning rather well. On 23 August he is “on the very verge of despair,” reporting that his brain “seems powerless, dried up.” He

spends much of September toggling hopelessly between a novel to be entitled “Hilda Wolff” and another to be called “Victor Yule.” His 24 September entry contains the first cryptic reference to Edith Underwood – “In evening to the Oxford. E.U.” – and a week later he notes “A fresh beginning, once more. It will be ‘New Grub Street’ after all. Did 4pp. At nine o’clock, Edith came for an hour.”¹¹ After two months of what is for Gissing remarkably clear compositional sailing, he completes his best and best-known novel. It is likely of course that sexual anticipation – which, for Gissing, after the departure of Nell, seems to have been a more profound experience than sexual fulfillment – nourished the successful composition of *New Grub Street*. But Gissing’s six or seven years with Edith, though emotionally tormenting, were years of exceptional application and productivity, as well of years of steadily mounting prosperity. It is unspeakably sad that the only rationale for his marriage with Edith is an economic one; still, candor obliges us to note that this rationale is by no means invalid.

Gissing had no literary income – in fact, no income of any kind – in the year 1890 when he wrote his masterful analysis of the late Victorian literary economy. However, in the following year things would improve greatly. In January of 1891, having been paid £150 for *New Grub Street*, Gissing moved to Exeter, marrying Edith Underwood on 25 February. He was soon at work on *Born in Exile*, which he completed on 17 July, sending it to Smith, Elder three days later. This novel proved somewhat difficult to sell. James Payn of Smith, Elder told Gissing the firm would not offer him more than £150 for the new novel because *New Grub Street* (whose second three-volume edition was already out, with a one-volume edition and a Tauchnitz Continental edition to be issued within the calendar year) had been a “financial failure.” Gissing turned for assistance to the literary agent A. P. Watt, but the best Watt was able to do was to persuade Adam and Charles Black to match Smith, Elder’s offer of £150 (with Watt receiving a £15 commission.) However, on 26 September of 1891 Gissing received some very good news. The newly formed Lawrence & Bullen publishing company (alerted by Morley Roberts’s report on Gissing’s doings) offered him a one hundred guinea advance on a one-volume novel. Gissing set to work almost immediately on “The Radical Candidate” (eventually *Denzil Quarrier*), completing it on the twelfth of November and a fortnight later received a cheque for £105. Before the end of the year Gissing also managed to write two short stories: “A Casual Acquaintance” was never published, but “A Victim of Circumstances” would earn him £20 in 1892.

Gissing's income in 1891 was a quite satisfactory £265 – a considerably greater sum than he had earned through literary endeavour in any previous year.¹² The largest component of this total is of course the £150 he received for *New Grub Street* but *Denzil Quarrier* brought him a £105 advance and he had received £10 from Smith, Elder earlier in the year for the copyright of *Thyrza*. Most of this income derives from writing done in previous years; however, if we were to measure Gissing's economic achievement in 1891 on the basis of the income he would eventually receive for his writings of this year, we would include the entire £132.16s he would receive for *Denzil Quarrier* (advance, U.S. rights, Continental rights, and royalties), the £135 he would receive for *Born in Exile* the following year, and the £20 Blackwood paid him for "A Victim of Circumstances." This total (£287.16s) considerably exceeds the value of Gissing's literary production for any previous year; in his first year of marriage with Edith, Gissing had not only lifted his literary earnings to a new threshold, he had also taken an important step towards diversification through his successful composition of the one-volume novel, *Denzil Quarrier*.

1892 brought a new challenge which temporarily arrested Gissing's march towards economic security. The birth of Edith's and Gissing's first child – Walter – in December of 1891 sank Edith into a prolonged post-partum depression which appears to have permanently ruptured her relationship with Gissing. As a result, the burden of raising Walter was costly, both economically and emotionally, as they frequently paid a near-by farm family to relieve them of the dispiriting drudgery of caring for their son. This is likely the reason that between the completion of *Denzil Quarrier* in November of 1891 and the panic composition of *The Odd Women* during the six weeks beginning in mid-August 1892, Gissing's Diary record of his literary work is a mere litany of false starts. On the last day of 1892 Gissing described the year as "profitless," relieved only by "one piece of work, 'The Odd Women,' scribbled in 6 weeks as the autumn drew to an end, and I have no high opinion of it."¹³

His earnings in 1892 were not, however, alarmingly low. Besides receiving £135 for *Born in Exile*, he received £13.2s.6d for Continental rights to *Denzil Quarrier*, £20 for "A Victim of Circumstances" and (almost certainly) £52.10s as the first half-payment on *The Odd Women*.¹⁴ This produces a total income of £220.12s.6d for 1892 – less than his income of the previous year, but considerably more than his literary income for any year prior to 1891.¹⁵ The only work of 1892 to be published – *The Odd*

Women – eventually earns Gissing £163.9s.11d; again this is less than the economic value of his production of the previous year but it again exceeds the economic value of his production in any year before 1891.

Was Gissing now more secure? None of the 1892 documents tell us how much money he had on hand. But a complaint in his Diary on 2 January 1892 that £8 have disappeared in a fortnight, along with frequent assertions during these years that even with considerable frugality he needs £200 per annum to survive, suggests that he likely spent all or most of the £220 he earned in 1892 and that by year's end he likely held about the same amount – £100 – as he would have possessed at the end of the previous year.

1893 was a decisive year for Gissing – but a somewhat deceiving one for the analyst of his economic situation. If we were to measure Gissing's achievement in 1893 only through an examination of his income, we would suspect he was flirting with disaster. Besides obtaining £6.11s.9d for U.S. royalties on *Denzil Quarrier* and £70.17s.6d for the second half-payment and Continental royalties for *The Odd Women*, Gissing earned only £50.5s – for four short stories, “Lou and Liz,” “Fleet-footed Hester,” “The Day of Silence,” and “The Muse of the Halls,” written, published and paid for within the calendar year. The total income of £127.14s.3d. for 1893 is the smallest Gissing had experienced since 1885 (apart from 1890) and is lower than he will experience in any future year. When he transferred his bank account from Exeter to Brixton (to which he and Edith moved in June) he found a balance of £116.4s.9d; however, payments received during the remainder of the year for four short stories and Continental rights for *The Odd Women* amount to only about £70 – considerably less than he would need to defray living expenses. These numbers, however, belie Gissing's real achievement in 1893: amidst these rather grim circumstances, he reconfigured himself as a writer in a way that would have a distinctly positive effect on his economic future.

The decisive event in this reconfiguration was Gissing's receipt on 30 March 1893 of a letter from Clement Shorter, editor of the *English Illustrated Magazine*, asking him to write a short story “like the Bank Holiday scene in ‘Nether World.’”¹⁶ Although he waited two weeks before beginning “Lou and Liz” and did not begin “Fleet-footed Hester” until late July, before the year was over Gissing had written fourteen short stories for publication. The total receipts for these stories (most of which arrive in 1894) add up to £184.16s.5d, more than he had received for any novel he had published before this date.¹⁷ Furthermore, the mental torture, the false starts and the constant revisions which make the Diary record of Gissing's

composition of his novels such painful reading are entirely absent from the brief, matter-of-fact, and workmanlike notations on the commencements and completions of his short stories. Short story writing was lucrative and almost painless.

Although Gissing's career as a writer began with the short stories he wrote and published while he lived in the United States, it was not easy for him to reconcile himself to the notion of earning money at this genre after he had established himself as a novelist. Between his arrival in London in October of 1877 and his receipt of Shorter's letter in March of 1893, he had published twelve novels but only four stories. When the *Weekly Dispatch* offered him fifty guineas for a ten-week series in September of 1888, Gissing refused, evidently because he feared everyone would "take it for granted that I was writing merely for money."¹⁸ Shorter's suggestion, as we have seen, met with a much different response. In a letter to Clara Collet later in the year he would reflect on the earlier incident and explain his changed attitude: "I once refused money offered for a story to be published in the *Weekly Dispatch*. Idiiotic, doubtless. How the comfortable man who pockets every procurable penny would laugh at me! And isn't it better to enjoy one's life – one's short life – mocking at all such nonsense as self-esteem?"¹⁹

The full benefits of Gissing's diversification at this juncture – which involves not only his condescension to the short story genre but also his willingness to compose single-volume fictional works – become apparent in 1894, which was a highly satisfactory year for Gissing whether we measure his success by quality of production or quantity of remuneration. In the early months of the year Gissing turned to the composition of a novel which he had earlier called "Miss Lord" but became *In the Year of Jubilee*. He completed it on 13 April and a few days later began work on a shorter work intended for serial publication for which he had made arrangements with Shorter in January; he completed *Eve's Ransom* at the end of June. He and Edith moved to Epsom in early September and by the end of the month Gissing directed his attention to the composition of short stories. Before the end of the year he had written seven, one of which ("A Merry Wooing") was never published.

Of the stories written in 1894, three ("The Tyrant's Apology," "Humphrey Snell," and "An Inspiration") were published and paid for within the calendar year, bringing Gissing £37.16s. He also received £105 as the advance on royalties for *In the Year of Jubilee*, a single payment of £150

from the *English Illustrated Magazine* for *Eve's Ransom*, and a royalty cheque of £26.5s from Lawrence & Bullen. As well, in 1894 Gissing received combined payments of £119.5s.5d for nine short stories written in the previous year. Gissing's income for 1894 was £438.6s.5d – his highest annual income to date and nearly twice the amount of the previous high of £220.12s.6d in 1892.

Two comments on this *annus mirabilis* are in order. First, although more than one third of Gissing's income for 1894 accrues from writing done in previous years (£145.10s), he would receive substantial future payments for works written in 1894: *In the Year of Jubilee* would bring royalties of £31.8s; stories written in 1894 but published in the following year would bring him £32.11s.1d; *Eve's Ransom* would earn Gissing £52.10s when it was published in volume form in 1895 and £42.13s.1d in royalties. The economic value of Gissing's 1894 production was £452.18s.2d – even greater than his record high income for the year. The second point to be made about this *annus mirabilis* is that only 30% of Gissing's earnings in 1894 accrued from full-length novels (£105 for *Jubilee* and £26.5 for *The Odd Women*). His remarkable rise in earnings is entirely a result of his having learned from Jasper Milvain to regard literature as a trade and to provide the wares – at this point, short stories and novellas – the market demands. The collapse of the three-volume novel in 1894 – of which Gissing took immediate advantage with *Eve's Ransom* – is just the kind of contingency Milvain would have relished and exploited.

1895 was an even better year for Gissing, quantitatively. In fact, if we were to measure Gissing's literary production on the basis of published titles, 1895 would be his most productive year. He wrote two novellas, an article, eleven short stories and twenty-six pieces of short fiction he called "sketches." None of these works were very long – the novellas were each about 30,000 words, the stories about 4,000 words and the sketches typically a mere 1,500 words – but Gissing's steady production during this year was extremely lucrative, especially during the weeks following his highly enjoyable weekend at Aldeburgh where he was the guest of Edward Clodd. One of the other guests on the occasion was Clement Shorter, who invited Gissing to contribute six stories to the *English Illustrated Magazine* and twenty sketches for the *Sketch* – Shorter edited both. As soon as the weekend was over, Gissing set to work. Before the end of June, he had completed four short stories – "Our Learned Fellow Townsman," "A Despot on Tour," "The Firebrand," and "The Justice and the Vagabond" – for which he eventually would receive £64.1s. During the first two weeks of July he

wrote *The Paying Guest*, which would earn him an additional £75 and during the months of August and September he completed all twenty of the sketches to which he had committed at Aldeburgh, obtaining an additional £63. In less than four months, Gissing produced writing with a market value of more than £200.²⁰ Earlier in the year he had written four short stories which would sell for an additional £32.2s, six sketches he sold for £21.4s.7, and *Sleeping Fires*, for which Fisher Unwin paid £150 almost immediately. Near the end of 1895 Gissing wrote three more short stories that would sell for a total of £50.8s. Including the article “The Place of Realism in Fiction,” for which the *Humanitarian* paid Gissing £1.11s.6d, and the article “Who Should be Laureate?” for which the *Idler* provided a guinea, the economic value of Gissing’s 1895 writing amounts to about £460.

Of course he was not paid for all of these items in 1895 and during this year he also received income from previous writings. Lawrence & Bullen paid Gissing £52.10 to publish a revised version of *The Unclassed* and a total of £75.12s.1d for royalties on the book version of *Eve’s Ransom* – including an advance of £52.10 in April and a subsequent payment of £23.2s.1d. Royalties on other novels brought Gissing £7.12s. When these amounts are added to the payments he received in 1895 for writing done within the calendar year (*Sleeping Fires*, *The Paying Guest*, eight short stories, twenty-six sketches and two articles), Gissing’s total income for 1895 reached £519.9s.2d, his highest income to date. Almost all of this derives from short works of fiction: money paid for full-length novels barely accounts for 10% of this total.

Gissing was not only earning more money than he had previously earned, he was also accumulating some savings. On 29 April 1895 he notes in his Diary that his bank balance is £436. By this point in the year, he had received £216 in payments; he would receive an additional £305.16s.5d before the end of the year. It is not surprising therefore that by 4 January 1896 he finds himself with a bank balance of £560 – the largest bank balance Gissing was ever to enjoy. It is somewhat surprising, though, to note that on 31 January of 1896, he tells Clara Collet he has enough money to go on for a year and a half.²¹ Provided he continued to live with Edith, his expenses were not likely to be higher than the £239 he had calculated for 1894 and he knew he could count on future payments for works he had already written. Had he intended to remain with Edith, he would have told Collet he had enough money to carry him for three years, not one year and a half. Was Gissing saving money for a rainy day, or for the sunny day in

which he would share his affections with someone other than Edith Underwood?

Although Gissing's family grew by one member in 1896, this year really marks the start of its disintegration as Gissing, left to take care of Walter alone after the birth of Alfred in January, decides in April to send the elder son to live with his mother and sisters in Wakefield. As his family begins to disintegrate, Gissing seems also to abandon the economic pragmatism which he had exhibited in the previous few years. During the exceptionally lucrative years of 1894 and 1895, only about 20% of Gissing's income came from full-length novels; the remainder came from novellas and short stories. In 1896, however, he wrote no novellas and only five short stories – “Joseph,” “A Yorkshire Lass,” “Spellbound,” “One Way of Happiness,” and “The Hapless Boaster.” The year was dominated by the composition of *The Whirlpool*; he began to think out the novel in January, turned to serious work upon it in early May, and completed “the hardest bit of work I have done yet”²² on 18 December. This novel – wherein Gissing gives substantial attention to speculative investment at the one time in his life in which he had enough available cash to consider a speculative investment of his own – is itself something of a speculation. Gissing was likely betting that the success of his subsidiary operations in shorter fiction would favourably valorize the stock of the parent company – his full-length novels. Such was not the case: although *The Whirlpool* is an impressive novel, the £179.10s it would earn for its author was hardly more than he had received for *The Nether World* in 1888 when his literary reputation was far less commanding; this is considerably less than Gissing could likely have earned had he invested his time in shorter works. When the £67.5s he would earn for the five short stories is added to this amount, we see that the total economic value of Gissing's production in 1896 was £247 – which is rather low when one considers that in each of the two previous years it was greater than £400.

Gissing's income for 1896 was approximately £289 – comprised of £25 for the U.S. copyright on *The Paying Guest*, a £78.12s.6d advance on *The Whirlpool*, £130.5s for nine short stories, and £55.16s.1d for royalties and translation rights.²³ This is significantly less than his income for either of the two previous years. Furthermore, a substantial part of this total (£107.4s.3d.) derives from works published in previous years and at the end of 1896 Gissing could anticipate no income from already completed works, apart from the second half payment of £78.12s.6d on *The Whirlpool* and whatever royalties this novel might yield.²⁴ By redirecting his attention to

the composition of a more substantial work, Gissing likely repaired any depletion of self-respect which the focus on short stories and novellas had occasioned during the previous three years. The economic cost, though, was considerable – whether we measure it in actual receipts or the economic value of his literary work for the year – and it meant that Gissing entered the year 1897 with no stock in hand.

1897 was a very strange year for George Gissing – it included much that was appalling but no little that was auspicious. During the summer of this year Gissing wrote *The Town Traveller* – a light novel which would bring him £304.12.11d in the following year, more money than he would ever receive for any work apart from *The Crown of Life* and *Our Friend the Charlatan*. Late in 1897 Gissing wrote his critical masterpiece, *Charles Dickens, A Critical Study*, which would bring him £70.3s. in 1898 and an additional £50 in 1901 when the copyright was acquired by Blackie & Son for use by their subsidiary the Gresham Publishing Co. During this year he also proofread the twenty-nine previously written (and paid for) stories which Bullen would publish in November as *Human Odds and Ends*, bringing Gissing an immediate payment of £78.15s and a trickle of royalties later. These sums add up to more than £500 – showing once again how economically advantageous it was for Gissing to devote attention to genres other than the novelistic. But besides writing and proofreading, Gissing also travelled; his six-month journey included a six-week trek through *Magna Græcia*, an experience he presciently told Bertz was “A glorious journey, & it will make a good little book.”²⁵

Despite these substantial achievements, in his “Account” Gissing labels 1897 the “Year of Terror.” In the private realm, this was certainly the case. Gissing’s health began to fail and his marriage collapsed. He parted from Edith temporarily in early February, attempted a reconciliation by spending a holiday with her and the boys between late July and late August, but left her definitively in September. He arranged to have Edith and Alfred stay with Eliza Orme at a cost of £50 a quarter, while continuing to pay £10 a quarter to have Walter stay with his mother and sisters. When one factors in Gissing’s own living expenses, which would surely reach at least £100 and notes that his “Account” indicates a total income of £101.13s.4d for 1897, it is evident why “Year of Terror” would have seemed to the author an appropriate designation for this particular year.

However, the £101.13s.4d Gissing indicates as his income for 1897 is clearly less than his actual receipts. Gissing arrives at this figure by adding

the £17.10s.9d he received from Lawrence & Bullen for royalties, the second half-payment of £78.12s.6d for the advance on royalties he received during 1897 for *The Whirlpool*, and the £5.17s.1d the *Idler* paid him for “Simple Simon.” (The 7s. difference between the sum of these figures and the amount Gissing indicates is likely an insignificant arithmetic error.) He does not include the £78.15s he received as an advance on royalties for *Human Odds and Ends* which was published in October, although he mentions the receipt of this cheque in two of his letters.²⁶ As well, although the “Account of Books” indicates that he received £26.5s for “A Despot on Tour” in 1898, it is clear both in his Diary entry for 26 December 1897 and in a letter to the literary agent William Colles of the same date that he was paid £23.10 for this story in late December of 1897.²⁷ When these payments are added to the amounts listed in the “Account” we find that Gissing’s income in 1897 was £204.5s.4d. Given his mounting expenses during the year, 1897 was indeed a “Year of Terror” for George Gissing but it was not quite so terrifying economically as his “Account” reports.

If 1897 was Gissing’s “Year of Terror,” 1898 was a year of recovery and renewed hope. After completing his somewhat harrowing excursion to Magna Græcia by mid-December of 1897, Gissing lingered in Italy, principally Rome, until late April, socializing with old friends, acquiring new, recuperating from the terrifying illness he had suffered at Cotrone, and no doubt bracing himself for re-entry into English life where he knew a scorned and furious Edith awaited him. In February, he received the good news that Methuen offered £250 for *The Town Traveller* while Stokes offered £100 for U.S. rights to the work – twice their payment for *The Whirlpool*. Gissing wrote very little during these months, but his physical health and emotional well being were restored. Upon returning to England, he took up residence at Dorking in order to hide himself from Edith. In early July, he met Gabrielle Fleury who would be a defining presence for Gissing through the remainder of his life and the inspiration for the most hopeful of his novels – *The Crown of Life* – to which he dedicated the latter half of 1898.

Gissing had written only one story while in Europe – “The Ring Finger” – but would write four more in May and June, after establishing himself at Dorking – “The Peace Bringer,” “At Nightfall,” “The Elixir” and “Fate and the Apothecary.” All five would eventually be sold for a total of £71.15s.11d, though Gissing received payment only for the first two in the year of composition. *The Crown of Life*, which he had all but finished at the end of 1898 (he would send the last three chapters to his literary agent,

James Pinker, on 16 January 1899) likely earned Gissing £354.9.4. So, Gissing wrote more than £400 worth of fiction in 1898.

In his “Account of Books,” Gissing enters £524.14s.6d as his earnings for 1898. This total is misleading, as Gissing includes income for “A Despot on Tour” (£26.5s) and *Human Odds and Ends* (£78.15) in his 1898 income whereas, as noted above, he received payment for both in the previous year. (One suspects that Gissing’s under-representation of his income for 1897 and his corresponding inflation of the numbers for 1898 reflects an inclination to present the final year of his cohabitation with Edith in the grimmest possible terms while magnifying the positive transformation Gabrielle brought to his life.) The actual receipts for 1898 are the following: £304.12s.11d for *The Town Traveller*; £70.3s for *Charles Dickens, A Critical Study*; payments for “The Ring Finger” and “The Peace Bringer” totaling £35.1s.7d; royalties from Lawrence & Bullen of £6.14s and £3.3 for a short prose work done in Italy, “At the Grave of Alaric.” His total income of £419.14s.6d, though considerably below what he records in the “Account,” is still substantial.

After his brief stumble during the 1896-97 period, Gissing clearly recovered his earning capacity. As we shall see, he preserves this capacity until illness curtailed his earnings during the final two years of his life. It is doubtful, though, that his bank account was ever as robust during the years with Gabrielle as it was during the economic heyday of his years with Edith. When Gissing returned to England in April of 1898, he noted that £200 awaited him in his bank account. This notation is significant for two reasons. 1897 had been a costly year – he maintained two residences for most of the year and at the end of September began to pay Eliza Orme £50 a quarter to take care of Edith and Alfred – and although he likely entered the year with something very near the £560 he had on hand in January of 1896 his resources obviously depleted quite rapidly. The second reason why this notation is significant is that it marks the last time Gissing ever recorded the magnitude of his worldly treasure either in his Diary or in an extant letter. During the Edith years a quiet relish in his acquisitive powers is frequently evident in Gissing’s letters and Diary; during the Gabrielle years we find instead the desperate boasting that somewhat disfigures his love letters and frequent tactful hints to his agent Pinker that early payment for whatever work has been most recently sold would be greatly appreciated. Gissing in fact became rather closed about money during the Gabrielle years, perhaps because he did not want Gabrielle to know how

much money he had – it is regrettably easy to imagine Gabrielle snooping in his diary – but more likely because money was no longer a subject which gave him the miser’s pleasure it provided during the Edith years.

In 1899 Gissing unites his fate with that of Gabrielle Fleury – leaving Dorking on 22 April and formalizing his extralegal union with Gabrielle on 7 May in Dieppe. He had agreed in the previous year to write prefaces to a series of Dickens novels that were to be published by Methuen and had hoped to complete six of these before leaving for France. It appears, though, that he only wrote two or three at this time: those to the *Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist* and, perhaps, *Nicholas Nickleby*. After a month of traveling with Gabrielle, however, Gissing set down to serious work. He completed three further Dickens prefaces in the last week and a half of June – *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Barnaby Rudge* – and rapidly wrote *By the Ionian Sea* between 29 June and 9 August. In the course of 1899 Gissing also wrote four short stories – “A Poor Gentleman,” “The Scrupulous Father,” “Humblebee” and “Snapshall’s Youngest” – and an article entitled “Tyrtaeus” which was a prose retort to Swinburne’s poetic celebration of the commencement of Boer War hostilities. The total value of what Gissing wrote in 1899 is £331.17s. (the £227.1s.8d he received for *By the Ionian Sea* over the next two years being the largest amount). Almost all of this accrues from writing done after he had joined Gabrielle: this union, as was the case with his union with Edith, seems to have steadied and concentrated Gissing’s literary focus.

One other effect of this union merits a comment. Although Gissing wrote four short stories in 1899, this is really his swan-song to the genre. In the years he spent with Gabrielle he wrote a total of only ten short stories (fewer than the fourteen he wrote in the last half of 1893) and no novellas. He supplemented his income during these years through the composition of works he considered more serious – the Dickens work, *Ryecroft*, and *By the Ionian Sea* – reconfiguring himself again, this time as an integral man of letters.

Determining Gissing’s income for the year in which he united himself with Gabrielle is somewhat difficult. Of the works he wrote in 1899, Gissing would receive payment within the calendar year for only two – “Tyrtaeus” (£2.8s.) and “A Poor Gentleman” (£14.7s.1d.). He received payments totaling £24.14s.4d. for two stories written earlier (“The Elixir” and “Fate and the Apothecary”), £3.12s. for his article about didactic fiction, “The Coming of the Preacher,” £18.9s. for two of his Dickens Prefaces (*The Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby*) and a total of £9.17s.

in royalty payments from Lawrence & Bullen. Most of Gissing's income in 1899 came from the sale of *The Crown of Life*, for which the record of payment is rather hazy.

It is clear that James Pinker negotiated agreements by which Methuen would advance £300 for English rights and Stokes would advance £100 for U.S. rights. This negotiation occurred in mid-March of 1899, at which time Gissing asked Pinker if Methuen would advance one half of their share by the end of the month. Methuen was apparently unwilling to do so, and when Gissing replied to Pinker's bad news on this subject he wrote "No, I don't think any more than the £100 will be necessary." This otherwise incomprehensible sentence makes sense if we suppose that Pinker had offered to advance £100 of his own money to compensate for the £150 half-payment on which he knew Gissing had been counting. On 27 September, Gissing notes in his Diary that he had received a cheque for £254.9s.4d from Pinker, money he assumes is "balance, after deduction, of advance on English and American Royalties on 'Crown of Life.'"²⁸ The word "balance" suggests he had received an earlier payment and it is likely that the early payment was £100. If this is so, it means that the total payment Gissing received for *The Crown of Life* was £354.9s.4d, a credible amount which allows for Pinker's £40 commission and a few expenses, which in this case includes the cost of retrieving the manuscript from the hold of the "Paris" which had run aground near Falmouth, on the southern coast of England, on its way to America.²⁹ (Gissing learned on 2 October 1899 that as of this date none of the money owed by Methuen and Stokes had been disbursed and that all of the payments he had received were from Pinker.)

Assuming Gissing in fact received £354.9s.4d for *The Crown of Life*, his total income in 1899 was £427.16s.9d.³⁰ It was, again, a rather lucrative year. Furthermore, he could look forward to the future sale of three short stories, four Dickens prefaces and *By the Ionian Sea*, all of which were written but not sold in 1899.

During the last few months of 1899, Gissing had been at work on two novels which he called at the time "Among the Prophets" and "The Coming Man." The first of these was completed in February of 1900 but destroyed at Gissing's request; he resumed work on "The Coming Man" as soon as he had finished "Among the Prophets," completing it on 29 August and eventually re-titling it *Our Friend the Charlatan*. By 1 September he was at work on "An Author at Grass," which he composed rapidly and completed on 23 October. In the meantime, he wrote three short stories in 1900 – "The

House of Cobwebs,” “The Pig and Whistle,” and “A Daughter of the Lodge.” Measured in economic terms, Gissing’s output in 1900 was the highest of his career. *Our Friend the Charlatan* would bring him £393.18s.5d. in 1901; *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (the volume title of “An Author at Grass”) would bring him £301.3s.6d during the next two years; the three short stories – all strong and substantial – earned him £76.3s.1d. These numbers total £771.5s.

His income for 1900 was substantially smaller than this, mostly accruing from work he had done in the previous year. Much of this came from *By the Ionian Sea*; in 1900 Gissing received £103.11s.8d in two installments from the *Fortnightly Review* for the serial edition of this work and an additional £58.10s. from Chapman and Hall, the first half payment for the volume version. He also received £147.17s.6d for six short stories, £7.17s in royalties from Lawrence & Bullen and about £12 (300 francs) for the translation rights to *The Unclassed*. This produces a total of £329.16s.2d.³¹ Compared to those of immediately previous years, this figure is rather low; still, Gissing had every right to feel pleased with what he had written in 1900. The literary value of *Ryecroft* greatly surpassed the “mouldy nut” to which Jasper Milvain once compared his produce and both *Ryecroft* and *Our Friend the Charlatan*, as we have seen, would soon be convertible into what Milvain called “coin of the realm.”

In 1901 the ill-health which had threatened Gissing over the past few years assaulted him frontally. Apart from one short story, he was too ill to write in the early months of the year; he was obliged to prolong what was supposed to be a brief excursion to London at the end of May into a two-month stay, most of which was passed in the East Anglian Sanatorium; when he returned to France he could spend only two hours per day at his desk. In the course of the year, Gissing managed to produce two short stories – “A Charming Family” and “The Riding Whip” –, to amplify *Ryecroft*, to write an article on Dickens entitled “Dickens in Memory,” to compose a Preface to *David Copperfield*, and to fulfill his commitment to Chapman and Hall to construct an abridgment of John Forster’s *Life of Dickens* (which he began late in the year and completed in mid-January of 1902). Many writers in blooming health would consider this an excellent performance: for Gissing it was a sub-par year and his payments for it would barely reach £200.

Gissing’s income for 1901 was, however, exceptionally high: the highest, in fact, in his life. The entire payment for *Our Friend the Charlatan* arrived in 1901, likely amounting to £393.18s.5d. The final half-

payment of £58.10³² for the volume form of *By the Ionian Sea* arrived in 1901, as did a £50 payment from Blackie for the copyright to *Charles Dickens*. Three short stories brought in an additional £50.6s.2d. He received £82.8s.6d for nine Dickens Prefaces, £6.6 for an article on Dickens and £75 as the first half payment for his abridgment of Forster's *Dickens*. This produces a total income of £716.9s.1d.³³

When Gissing finished his abridgment of Forster's *Dickens* in mid-January of 1902, he wished to turn to the composition of a novel. The request he makes to James Pinker on 22 January for a book called *Commercial Knowledge* suggests that the novel to which he would turn was *Will Warburton*. The composition of this novel does not appear to have begun until 10 July and would not be complete until March of the following year. Gissing did compose two short stories early in 1902 – “Miss Rodney's Leisure” and “Christopherson” – and wrote two articles on Dickens: one of these was his notice of a *Quarterly* article by Swinburne; the other was a review of F.G. Kitton's *Life of Dickens*. There is no record of what Gissing or his executors would receive for “Miss Rodney's Leisure,” which was published at the time of Gissing's death, in Christmas of 1903. He did receive £23.12s.6 for “Christopherson” and the articles on Dickens brought £9.9s. *Will Warburton* would eventually earn £400, but there is no record of this money arriving in Gissing's lifetime.³⁴ His total literary output in 1902 – two short stories, two articles and most of one novel – is, again, rather slight but only if it is measured by Gissing's own daunting standard. When we consider the precarious state of his health – he wrote most of *Will Warburton* propped in a chaise longue – this output, with a market value of more than £400 is astounding.

Gissing's income for 1902 was likely only £242.4s. On 20 April he received a cheque of £68.3s.7d from Pinker which combined the second payment for the abridgment of Forster's *Dickens* (less commission and expenses) with payment for the article “Dickens in Memory,” which he had written in the previous year. During 1902, the *Fortnightly Review* published the first three of the four installments of “An Author at Grass”; Gissing received a payment for each installment and these add up to £102.1s.2d in 1902. Two short stories – “The Riding Whip” and “Christopherson” – brought him an additional £46.15s.3d and the two Dickens articles he wrote in 1902, as noted above, obtained £9.9s. Gissing also received a cheque from George Sproul for the introduction he had written to the Autograph edition of *David Copperfield*. The amount of this cheque is nowhere

indicated; however, since Gissing had asked for fifteen guineas and lamented later to Bertz that he should have asked for more, it is likely that £15.15s. is what he received.³⁵

Gissing's health was delicate throughout 1903 and he died on 28 December. In the last year of his life he managed to complete *Will Warburton*, to write one short story ("Topham's Choice") and to write over three-quarters of his never-completed historical novel, *Veranilda*. Since Gissing was too ill to make note of the payments he received for "Topham's Choice" and "Miss Rodney's Leisure" – both published in December – we cannot know the amount of his income for 1903. Payments for which a record exists – £30.10 as the final installment for the serialization of "An Author at Grass," £166.12s.4d from Constables for *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (the book version of "An Author at Grass"), £12.15s in royalties from Lawrence & Bullen, and £6 from Sproul for signing 300 copies of his "Introduction" to *David Copperfield* – total £215.17s.4d.

The dreary denouement of Gissing's life should not distract us from the defining pattern of his career as a provider of wares for the late Victorian literary market. This pattern is one of slow, unspectacular, but steady growth in earning power. Gissing achieved this growth mostly through perseverance, but partly through increasing nimbleness at capitalizing on such opportunities as the vagaries of the market and his own experiences provided him.

Two sub-patterns should be distinguished here: the increase in the price individual novels commanded and the rise in Gissing's overall income. Looking first at the prices of individual novels, one notes that Gissing had to accept £30 for the first edition of *The Unclassed* in 1884, but sold *The Nether World* for £150 in 1888 and in 1899 received £400 (less commission and expenses) for *The Crown of Life*. These advances were mostly the result of perseverance. Between *The Unclassed* and *The Nether World* Gissing published four novels and mastered the art of naturalistic presentation of the London working classes by dint of unremitting application. It took him a full decade to climb from the £150-per-novel plateau he had reached with *The Nether World* to the £400-per-novel level he establishes with *The Crown of Life*. Perseverance again appears to be the principal reason for the advance: the force and originality of such novels as *New Grub Street*, *Born in Exile* and *The Odd Women* which had been written in the meantime could not go unnoticed; his prodigious production of short fiction widened his reputation; and Gissing's unflagging dedication to his

literary work constrained the respect of publishers, agents and fellow craftsmen.

The second sub-pattern, the increase in Gissing's overall earnings, does not correspond as closely to the rise in individual payments as one might expect. Between *The Nether World* (1889) and *The Crown of Life* (1899) Gissing saw no significant advance in the amount he could expect for composing a novel: *The Whirlpool* (1897) – the major novel preceding *The Crown of Life* – earned Gissing only an advance of £157.10s and some royalties. However, as we have seen, his income leapt suddenly in 1894 to exceed £400 – more than doubling the earnings from any previous year and establishing a threshold from which he would never seriously falter until the last two years of his life. This rise was entirely a result of Gissing's ability to take advantage of newly emerging opportunities and of his willingness to embrace literary tasks he had previously eschewed. His successful completion of the one-volume novel *Denzil Quarrier* in 1891 positioned Gissing for a lucrative exploitation of the collapse of the three-volume novel in 1894 through the composition of such works as *Eve's Ransom* (with total receipts of £246.3s.1d), *Sleeping Fires* (£150) and *The Town Traveller* (£304.12s.11). His newfound willingness to write short stories enabled him, from 1893, to significantly supplement his income through this genre. Later on, he would take advantage of his thorough knowledge of Charles Dickens, his voyage through Magna Græcia, and his capacity for intimate observation and self-revelation to produce additional readable and remunerative works. Whereas perseverance enabled Gissing to raise the prices he received for individual works, his ability to adapt to market demands and to capitalize on the opportunities his own abilities and experiences provided were also important to his survival in the late Victorian literary world.

The sad fact remains that economically Gissing achieved little more than survival and the end result of his sustained effort to join the leisured classes is a tragedy of proletarian character. While Gissing's "Account" tells us what his literary works paid him in economic terms, it does not tell us their physiological cost, which was exacted in privation, hunger, and illness. As Gissing was gaining ground in the literary market the strain of his constant application was silently telling on his body. Though his frame was evidently resilient, it could only hold out for so long.

[I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Dylan McConnell – my research assistant during the summer of 2008 – for his diligent and competent assistance in the preparation of this article and its appendix.]

¹ The exact titles Gissing used for these records are “Account of Books, 1880-1892,” “Account of Books, 1893-1898,” “Account of Books, 1899-1901,” and “Account of Literary Work, 1902 –.”

² “How Poor Was George Gissing? A Study of Gissing’s Income between 1877 and 1888,” *Gissing Journal*, XLIII, 4, October 2007, pp. 1-17.

³ Diary, pp. 388-89.

⁴ *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, eds. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 9 vols., 1990-1997), III, p. 263; *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978), p. 46.

⁵ Gissing’s “Account” records an income of £150 for 1889, based on payment for *The Nether World*. In fact, Gissing was paid for this novel in the previous year; however, payment for *The Emancipated*, which was entered in Gissing’s account for 1890, was in fact received in 1889, as was payment for “Christmas on the Capitol,” which is unmentioned in the “Account.”

⁶ Letter to Margaret Gissing, 22 January 1890, in *Letters*, IV, p. 188.

⁷ Letter to Algernon Gissing, 22 January 1890, in *Letters*, IV, pp. 188, 190.

⁸ Letter to Ellen of 2 March 1890, in *Letters*, IV, p. 198.

⁹ Bentley had promised in October of 1889 that if 850 copies of *The Emancipated* were sold, Gissing would receive an additional £50.

¹⁰ Letter to Ellen Gissing of 7 October 1890, in *Letters*, IV, pp. 239-240.

¹¹ *Diary*, pp. 224, 226 and 227.

¹² Gissing’s “Account” is rather misleading in its entries for 1891. He includes the £150 he receives for *New Grub Street*; but he mistakenly includes the £6.6s. he had received years ago for “Letty Coe” (which was published in 1891) and does not include either the payment for copyrights of *Thyrza* or the advance he received in November for *Denzil Quarrier*.

¹³ *Diary*, p. 293.

¹⁴ Neither the *Letters* nor the *Diary* mention when the first half-payment for *The Odd Women* arrived. We know, however, that by 22 October 1892 Bullen, having read and praised the novel, offered Gissing an advance of £105, that the second half-payment arrived on 7 February of 1893, and that Bullen was prompt in his payments to Gissing. It is unlikely, therefore, that the first payment would not have arrived in 1892, although Gissing’s “Account of Books” indicates that the entire advance of £105 arrived in 1893.

¹⁵ Only one of the four entries Gissing makes for 1892 in his “Account” is accurate. He enters £150 as his payment for *Born in Exile* (ignoring Watt’s 10% commission), he places the advance on royalties for *Denzil Quarrier* in the 1892 column although it was received in the previous year and he includes the U.S. copyright to *Quarrier* although the money would not be received until the following year. Also, as indicated above, he does not include the first half-payment for *The Odd Women*, though it almost certainly arrived in 1892.

¹⁶ *Diary*, p. 300.

¹⁷ Paul Delany calculates that the three guineas per thousand words for which Gissing was often paid for his short stories would be the equivalent of six hundred guineas for a full-

length novel. Paul Delany, *George Gissing, A Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008), p. 216.

¹⁸ Letter to Elizabeth Gausson of 6 October 1888, in *Letters*, III, p. 256.

¹⁹ Letter to Clara Collet of 26 October 1893, in *Letters*, V, p. 155.

²⁰ Perhaps this number should be even higher as the sketches formed the bulk of *Human Odds and Ends* which was published in November of 1897, eventually earning Gissing £79.2s.

²¹ *Letters*, VI, pp. 93-94.

²² *Diary*, p. 429.

²³ I use the word “approximately” because the calculation of this total is confusing. When Gissing added up his individual payments for 1896 he obtained a total of £289.13s.7d. However, when we look at the individual royalty payments he reports having received in 1896 from Lawrence & Bullen for July–December 1895, we find they total £31.1d, although A. H. Bullen’s letter of 7 February 1896 accompanying this royalty cheque mentions the amount of £29.8s.3d and in his *Diary* entry of the same date Gissing writes “Recd Bullen’s Accounts for July–Dec 95. Balance due to me £29.” It is possible that Gissing made an error in the entry of one of the individual amounts in the “Account” and that the £29.8s.3d of Bullen’s letter is correct. If this is the case, then Gissing’s income for 1896 was £288.1s.9d.

²⁴ The £107.4s.3d total of receipts for works written in previous years is comprised of £34.14s.3d for royalties received from Lawrence & Bullen, £9.10s for the sale of the plates of *The Unclassed*, £9 for translation rights of *Eve’s Ransom*, £1 for translation rights for “The Day of Silence,” and £53 for the sale of four short stories written in the previous year.

²⁵ Letter to Eduard Bertz of 18 December 1897, in *Letters*, VII, p. 14.

²⁶ Letter to Margaret Gissing of 26 November 1897, in *Letters*, VI, p. 389; Letter to A. H. Bullen of 7 December 1897, in *Letters*, VII, p. 5.

²⁷ *Diary*, p. 477; *Letters*, VII, p. 20.

²⁸ *Diary*, p. 519.

²⁹ Gissing’s “Account of Books” indicates £360 as the amount he received for *The Crown of Life*. This of course is 90% of the combined £400 to be paid by Methuen and Stokes. It allows for no deductions (though his *Diary* entry of 27 September 1899 indicates there was at least one and likely other deductions) and is less likely to be accurate than the £354.9s.6d I have suggested.

³⁰ This is nearly the same as the £427.5s.1d Gissing records in his “Account.” However, Gissing makes a £10 error in addition: the total should have been £417.5s.1d. The difference between Gissing’s total and the total I suggest reflects three further differences: Gissing does not include the £15.2s.4d he received for “The Elixir” (*Diary*, 10 June 1899); he indicates payment of £9.12s for “Fate and the Apothecary” instead of the £8.12s which I think is more likely in view of his 6 June 1899 letter to Pinker and his 6 June 1899 *Diary* entry; he indicates an income of £360 for *The Crown of Life* rather than the £354.9s.4d, which is more likely.

³¹ Gissing’s total is £297.06.02. Gissing did not include the £12 for the translation of *The Unclassed* or the £20 for “Snapshall.” Evidently he also made a calculation error of 10s.

³² In his “Account,” Gissing in fact indicates a payment of £65 – half of the £130 Chapman and Hall paid for this publication. This excludes commission, although his entry of £58.10s for the first half-payment in 1900 allows the standard 10% commission. I think it

more likely Gissing forgot about the commission as he constructed this account than that Pinker waived this deduction.

³³ This differs slightly from Gissing's own total of £722.19s.1d, only because I have used a different amount for the second payment for *By the Ionian Sea*, as explained in the previous footnote.

³⁴ See Pierre Coustillas, *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography* (High Wycombe, England: Rivendale Press, 2005), p. 372.

³⁵ Gissing's "Account" does not mention the cheque from Sproul, and so Gissing indicates a total income of £226.9s for 1902 – £15.15s less than his likely income.

Gissing mentions the small Sussex village of West Dean in the last chapter of *Thyrza*: "The desire to stop was simultaneous in Mrs. Ormonde and her companion [Annabel Newthorpe]; their eyes rested on as sweet a bit of landscape as can be found in England, one of those scenes which are typical of the Southern counties. It was a broad valley, at the lowest point of which lay West Dean. The hamlet consists of very few houses, all so compactly grouped about the old church that from this distance it seemed as if the hand could cover them."

Art and Money: George Gissing, D. H. Lawrence and the Literary Marketplace

ANDREW HARRISON
Technische Universität Darmstadt

I

On 2 December 1910, D. H. Lawrence, aged 25, put an advance copy of his first novel, *The White Peacock*, into his mother's hands. She was desperately ill with cancer. Lawrence told a teaching colleague that she "just glanced at it":

'It's yours, my dear,' my sister said to her. 'Is it?' she murmured, and she closed her eyes. Then a little later, she said, 'What does it say?' – and my sister read her the tiny inscription I had put in. Mother has said no more of it.¹

She died a week later. According to an account Lawrence wrote in 1924, his father did not show any interest in *The White Peacock* until after her funeral, on 12 December:

[Then he] struggled through half a page, and it might as well have been Hottentot.

"And what dun they gi'e thee for that, lad?"

"Fifty pounds, father."

"Fifty pound!" He was dumbfounded, and looked at me with shrewd eyes, as if I were a swindler. "Fifty pound! An' tha's niver done a day's hard work in thy life."²

The figure Lawrence reported to his father was the advance Heinemann promised Lawrence on publication of his novel, £15 of which he had already received.³ Arthur Lawrence's dumbfounded response to it is understandable when we think that his own career as a miner was winding down in 1910—it seems likely that his annual income at this time would not have exceeded £75. In 1908 Lawrence had secured his first job as a certified assistant teacher in Croydon at £95 per annum.⁴ He was receiving half of his annual teaching salary for the novel; a very satisfactory figure in itself, but only a modest return for the four years and more it took to produce it.

By this time Lawrence was already familiar with the work of George Gissing, whom he initially held in high esteem.⁵ In her memoir, Jessie Chambers (the closest companion of Lawrence's youth) recalls him as a young man bringing a "paper-covered edition" of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* to her family home, Hagg's farm: she notes how "my

parents enjoyed it so much.”⁶ Gissing was one of the writers on English provincial life whom Lawrence later read under the guidance of Edward Garnett. In a letter to Garnett of January 1912 he responded somewhat guardedly to the short stories in the posthumously published collection *The House of Cobwebs*, which his mentor had reviewed for *Speaker* back in May 1906.⁷ In October 1913 Lawrence declared that he had read “most” of Gissing; evidence in the letters suggests that he was by this time familiar with both *New Grub Street* and *The Odd Women*.⁸ One work that he almost certainly did not read, however, was Gissing’s first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, published by Remington & Co. in early June 1880 (when the author was 22). The extraordinary story of Gissing’s struggle to get this novel into print has been recounted in several reliable sources.⁹ Gissing had written and discarded a full-length novel, and also abandoned a 300-page manuscript before starting work on “Far, Far Away” (the initial title of *Workers in the Dawn*). It took him just six months to write. Unlike Lawrence, he did not have an experienced editor like Ford Madox Hueffer to advise him on how he might place his first novel.¹⁰ He suffered rejections from several commercial publishers (Chatto & Windus; Smith, Elder; Sampson Low; and Kegan Paul & Co) and finally opted to use the last of a small inheritance from his paternal great-aunt to fund the private printing of the novel via a reputable printer and publisher. He paid £125 in three instalments for the production of 277 copies of the three-volume novel. The terms of his contract were extremely inauspicious: “After deducting from the produce of the sale of the Book any expenditure which may have been incurred in the advertising thereof, the amount remaining is to be divided in the proportion of two thirds to you, the other one third to belong to us.”¹¹ It sold just 49 copies at the cost of 21 shillings each; he received a single royalty cheque for 16 shillings.¹² He kept the disastrous financial details of the book’s publication from his mother and brothers, warning them: “I by no means wish you to conceive great hopes concerning the financial part of the business.”¹³ The process of sending on one of his valuable advance author copies to his youngest brother Algernon on 28 May 1880 was, then, similarly overshadowed by the spectre of the literary marketplace, and, like Lawrence, Gissing did not expect his family to like it all that much, anticipating mild disapproval: “Much of the book I can hardly expect you to approve, & I feel you will think the tendency very gloomy.”¹⁴

II

The very different situations of the two young debutant novelists nonetheless reveal a common negotiation of aesthetic and monetary values. Arthur Lawrence's immediate referral of *The White Peacock* to cash equivalence is often used to illustrate the gulf in education and aspiration separating him from his youngest son, but it also articulates in stark terms a common perplexity over the financial valuation of literary works. You cannot weigh or measure literary work as you can coal. Sales figures and marketability might dictate the terms of a contract at the popular end of the publishing business, but for aspiring literary novelists the issues of financial and aesthetic valuation are determined by more complex considerations. According to Pierre Bourdieu, the field of literary production reverses the terms of the normal economic world, since here economic success may well constitute a barrier to wider cultural success or "consecration." For the young novelist it is important (in Lawrence's own words) to "break ... an entrance into the jungle of literature"—to achieve "a small and individual name":¹⁵ the accumulation of symbolic capital, through (for instance) exposure to a specific readership and good reviews, might be equally (if not more) important than financial capital in the long term.

The process of establishing one's authorial identity as a novelist and writer means positioning oneself in a literary marketplace serviced not only by publishers and readers, but by advisory readers, editors, literary agents, printers, advertisers, reviewers, libraries, booksellers, dealers and collectors. In such a field, the concept of self-fashioning is at best a relative term. For Bourdieu, the literary field is an autonomous structure shaped by powerful social and financial forces. The field operates on principles perceptible to individual agents through the *habitus*, or acquired (and partial) understanding of its formation and values (its "system of dispositions"). The *habitus* defines the basis on which individuals act in the literary field, but the objective, relational structures of the field itself operate in what Bourdieu terms a "quasi-mechanical" manner. Authors can position themselves in relation to the marketplace through their decisions and choices, but they are also inevitably positioned by the field they enter and by the way their writings are marketed and received; indeed, Bourdieu goes so far as to say that "position-takings arise ... almost independently of the agents' consciousness and wills."¹⁶

For Gissing and Lawrence, confronting the mass market for novels necessarily entailed a conflicted interaction between their strong senses of authorial vocation and the shaping editorial and market demands of the literary publisher. For both writers it was important to maintain the belief in, or illusion of, self-fashioning, even while the literary world went on shaping and influencing them. Gissing's response to numerous rejections was to re-conceive literary value as determined by a select readership accessible through small-scale private publication. He wrote of his first novel: "I fear very much that the book is far from *popular* in character. Its circulation—if it attain to one—must be among the strictly intellectual classes,—such people, for instance, as read George Eliot."¹⁷ Lawrence's third and breakthrough novel, *Sons and Lovers*, was judged and shaped in very striking ways during its composition, by a range of professional and non-professional readers, and it was finally taken from him and edited by Garnett to meet the demands of the literary marketplace; Lawrence's response was to continually assert his right to a readership which needed his writing without really knowing it. He claimed to "have inside [him] a sort of answer to the *want* of today: to the real, deep want of the English people, not to just what they fancy they want"; he felt that his latest writings "might find a good public among the Meredithy public."¹⁸ Lawrence needed to write an explanatory Foreword to *Sons and Lovers*, even if the publisher (Duckworth) would never print it; he wanted also to write a blurb for the book—not just to satisfy Garnett's demand for a cover design.¹⁹ It is as if for these two writers the illusion of autonomy and self-fashioning is essential to their very sense of vocation as authors. Their need to adapt and to understand the literary market as young novelists is met by an equally powerful need to believe that they are able to encounter it on their own terms.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the angst-ridden issue of the artist's position in the marketplace should form a central theme in works of fiction produced by Gissing and Lawrence at key moments in their transition from being published writers to full-time professional authors. In the remainder of this essay I want to draw out and reflect on this theme through a comparison of the careers of the two artist figures, Nathaniel Pendle and Paul Morel, in Gissing's early short story "The Artist's Child" and Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*.²⁰

III

The details of composition of “The Artist’s Child” take us back to the single most significant event in Gissing’s early life: his conviction for theft in June 1876, resulting in a one-month prison term, and his subsequent one-year exile in America. It was during his time in Boston, Chicago and New York that Gissing took to writing to earn some money. In Chicago, he managed to support himself by publishing short stories anonymously or under a pseudonym in various newspapers and journals including the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Daily Post*, the *National Weekly*, and the *Alliance*. The first version of “The Artist’s Child” was written some time between March and June 1877 and published in the *Alliance* on 30 June under the pen name “G. R. Gresham.” It was the only one of his American stories that he revised and republished on his return to England in October 1877; indeed, in spite of his efforts to exploit the lucrative market for short stories, it was the only one he would get into print in England for over six years.²¹ In January 1878 it appeared in a substantially revised version, published under his own name (“G. R. Gissing”) in *Tinsleys’ Magazine*. Its publication date coincided with his first attempt at writing a novel; it was the first piece of published fiction to carry what Gissing would go on to term (with some pride) his “auctorial signature.”²²

I wish to focus here on the second version of the story, primarily because of my interest in the transitional moment in Gissing’s career when it was written, but also because it has to my mind been unduly criticised in comparison to the first version. In his editorial notes on the two versions of the story in *Lost Stories from America*, Robert L. Selig criticises the revised text for its “idealised elevation” of its characters and its “sentimental idealism.”²³ I hope to demonstrate that Gissing’s treatment of the theme of the struggling artist in this second version shows him not simply succumbing to sentimental idealism, but self-consciously *using* sentimentalism as a key formal and thematic aspect of his tale.

The revised version of “The Artist’s Child” tells the story of Nathaniel Pendle, an artist of real ability whose career path is effectively ruined by a combination of personal circumstances and his “dreamy and indolent disposition,” native vanity and lack of application. The son of an indulgent mother who dies when he is still a boy, at the age of twenty-one Nathaniel inherits seven hundred pounds from an uncle; a figure which funds several

years of study at art school, but also reinforces his illusion that he can afford to avoid profitable employment: "He could not be brought to fix upon any profession. He owned property, he asserted, and lucrative pursuits were needless to him" (p. 69). When comfortable he is hopeful and ambitious, but "the greater part of his life [as an artist is spent] without handling the brush, painting pictures upon the air" (p. 72). He acquires "employment in making designs for an illustrated paper," but it is only on marrying a woman still poorer than himself that he is really forced to realise his financial responsibilities: "To starve himself was one thing; to sit by and see one he loved starving was a far other thing" (p. 70). For a brief time he applies himself to his art with some success and over two years has four pictures hung at the Academy Exhibition. However, his commitment to fashioning a career for himself, exploiting his new-found fame, is insufficiently strong and he lapses back into his habitual dreaminess.

The story of his subsequent professional and personal demise is dealt with in the most sentimental manner. Nathaniel's wife dies of consumption, leaving him with a young daughter, Barbara. She grows up with an unusual and precocious appreciation of art, which her father indulges to the extent of teaching her for four years until, at age sixteen, one of her paintings is noticed by a leading art critic and she attains the fame which her father had once (very briefly) enjoyed. This too is cut short when she contracts small-pox, affected by the cramped London dwellings she is forced to endure with her indolent father, who now scrapes together a living through photography. Barbara is blinded and dies young as a consequence of a weak constitution worn down by grief and malnutrition. The irresponsible artist has indirectly brought on the early deaths of the two women who meant most to him; he sinks into imbecility and becomes "an object of charity to those who knew him" (p. 76).

This brief plot synopsis might cause one to dismiss the story as slight, generic and overly sentimental, but its significance for my purposes resides in the very anxious, conflicted way in which it stages the figure of the dreamy, non-commercial artist. Importantly, the narrative is framed in a manner which stresses the ongoing centrality of art dealing. The narrator is an art collector who speculates in the work of more obscure painters; his latest acquisition is Nathaniel Pendle's final piece, and his only work of genius, a painting of his dear daughter Barbara, produced immediately after her tragic death. The implied reader is a viewer at the collector's gallery, where the painting occupies a central position. The narrative of Nathaniel's

life, and of the deaths of his wife and daughter, are offered as a snare to capture and sustain the interest of the viewer. It is never clearly stated whether the implied reader is being manoeuvred into position as a potential purchaser of the painting, but the narrator's sycophantic insistence on its "genius" (criticised by Selig as a substantive flaw in the story)²⁴ actually suggests an unspoken subtext of critical approval leading to potential investment. In a self-reflexive move, the story presents sentiment as a commodity; the painting and the story are commercial objects cashing in on emotional appeal.

The story's form, then, suggests that the artwork and the narrative are similarly bound up in the inescapable structures of the marketplace, and sentiment is a tool one might use to secure a sale. As if to underline the omnipresence of commerce, Nathaniel and his daughter are described as regularly visiting art shops during their walks together around the streets of London. They will occasionally enter and browse for half an hour (without, of course, making a purchase). At each shop the young Barbara has a favourite picture, and when she finds it is sold she is afflicted "with an almost inconsolable grief" (p. 72). Her own fame is later secured when the critic notices her painting in a shop window, "where it was exposed for sale" (p. 74—the wincing verb is, of course, deeply suggestive).

However, the story does not simply resolve itself into a critique of Nathaniel's injudicious refusal to embrace the inescapable structures of the artistic marketplace; it is slightly more ambivalent than this about commercial matters. For all the implicit moralising over the consequences of Nathaniel's hopeless indolence and artistic idealism, there is also a significant underlying suggestion of authorial sympathy with his subjection to financial structures. Nathaniel's indifference to financial matters is not purely, or straightforwardly, irresponsible; it is also expressed in acts of benevolence: "In his visions he often pleased himself with projects of princely munificence; in the streets he had not seldom halved his last penny with a beggar" (p. 70). Indeed, the story itself seems to eerily echo its protagonist's otherworldliness in its painful, even evasive, sensitivity to financial matters. The word "money" is used only once in the story, and that in its final sentence; the narrative seems constrained to find equivalent terms for it. For example, at the height of his Academy fame, Nathaniel paints "several portraits which acquired him a certain reputation, and reputation's concomitant." The euphemistic phrase "reputation's concomitant" is interest-

ing in this sentence. Who is suppressing the word “money” here? Is it the wily narrator, the art collector who seems to have his own hidden financial motives in telling Nathaniel’s story? Alternatively, does the narrative perhaps reflect (in free indirect style) the shrinking sensitivity of Nathaniel himself, wary of cash values even when cash is readily offered and accepted? Or can we detect in the term an association of reputation with cash attributable to another source—to the shadowy figure in the carpet?

The story’s anxious portrayal of money matters is underscored by our sense of Gissing’s own position as he reworked it from its earlier form, published in Chicago. Like Pendle, Gissing was living in dingy lodgings off Tottenham Court Road in central London; he was describing the ruin of Pendle’s career (sat in his old studio amidst “indiscriminate heaps” of half-finished paintings, nostalgically re-touching old pieces [pp. 68, 71]) at the very moment when he was himself re-writing one of his American stories (revising it for immediate sale), having moved to London with the aim of making his name—and his living—as a professional writer.

IV

Turning now to *Sons and Lovers*, I think we can helpfully consider Lawrence’s treatment of Paul Morel’s career path as an artist—and his art—in the same light: as predominantly a critique, masking elements of identification.

The famous scene between Lawrence and his father which I invoked at the start of the essay is reworked in this novel, but given a significant twist. Walter Morel comes home one night from the pit having heard that his son has “got first prize for his picture, and sold it to Lord Henry Bentley for fifty pound.” The truth is that he has won first prize for a landscape painting at Nottingham Castle’s winter exhibition, and the painting has been sold to Major Moreton for twenty guineas:

“Twenty guineas! Tha niver says!” exclaimed Morel.

“Yes, and it was worth it.” [says Mrs Morel]

“Ay!” he said. “I don’t misdoubt it.—But twenty guineas for a bit of a paintin’ as he knocked off in an hour or two—!” he was silent with conceit of his son. Mrs Morel sniffed, as if it were nothing. (p. 296)

Lawrence had earned fifty pounds for his first novel; Paul earns twenty guineas for the first major sale of his art. There is a deliberate reduction of scale here. From the winter of 1911, Lawrence had hoped to make a living

from his writing—he resigned his teaching post at Croydon due to ill health on 28 February 1912, and from this point on he would support himself solely by his writing. This is a transition which Paul Morel seems poised to make, but never quite manages in *Sons and Lovers*: from being Spiral Overseer at Jordan’s surgical appliances factory to achieving his ambition of becoming “a painter, the real thing” (p. 114), “a painter that they’ll attend to” (p. 345).

The key factor in Paul’s failure to make his living from art certainly is *not* a lack of application, or an inability to accommodate himself to the structures of the marketplace. On the contrary, the novel tells us that Paul is actually rather adept at marketing himself. He is a diligent student who takes evening classes in art and wins two first prizes for an exhibition of student work at the Castle (a landscape and a still life); he later studies design, and almost immediately makes a valuable contact at the Liberty store in London. They take “several of his painted designs on various stuffs, and he could sell designs for embroideries, for altar-cloths, and similar things, in one or two places ... He had also made friends with the designer for a pottery firm, and was gaining some knowledge of his new acquaintance’s art” (p. 345). When the landscape painting sells to Major Moreton, he even starts to socialise with the wealthy set surrounding his employer, Thomas Jordan, whose daughter is a painter too and supportive of Paul’s art, but like much else associated with the practical side of his art in the novel, this networking happens (as it were) offstage. Paul’s diligent efforts to make a living from his art are handled rather awkwardly in the novel: it is far more concerned to trace the nature and significance of Paul’s vision—“the lad’s impersonal, deliberate gaze of an artist” (p. 293); his ability (or tendency) to visually transform his surroundings; and the cruelty and objectivity of his approach to people and situations.

The novel connects Paul’s failure as an artist to his failure as a man so completely that the sudden collapse of his professional ambitions as a painter are silently passed over at the end of the novel; his professional demise is treated as a simple offshoot of the failure of his vision as an artist. The criticisms levelled at Paul by his two lovers, Miriam Leivers and Clara Dawes, apply equally powerfully to Paul as man and painter: “He had no fixity of purpose, no anchor of righteousness that held him” (p. 265); “There was something evanescent about Morel, she thought, something shifting and false” (p.450). Paul’s styles shift in the course of the novel

from his Pre-Raphaelite portrait of his workmate Connie at Jordan's (p. 137) to the apparent realism of his sketch of "a colliery at work" (p. 170) to his "passion for conventionalising things" through his interest in design (p. 240). We need only compare his explanation to Miriam of the "shimmering protoplasm in the leaves and everywhere" in one of his landscape paintings to his later attempt to defend his design work as embodying a theory of the "force of gravitation" to realise one of the numerous sea-changes in his art (cf. pp. 183 and 240).

The novel does not point a critique of Paul's individual styles *per se*; in fact, there is a good case for arguing that *Sons and Lovers* is itself a novel shaped by stark changes in its author's informing vision over the long course of its composition. This has even been discussed by critics as one of the novel's strengths.²⁵ But in Paul's case the constant shift in styles does seem to pinpoint an increasing problem with his motivation to produce his art, and with the value he places in it. Mrs Morel's proud assertion that Paul's first prize landscape painting is "worth" twenty guineas is very significant. If it is Miriam who excites Paul into articulating his informing artistic vision and validating its wider human significance, it is his mother who confirms its value in the world. Mrs Morel's pride in her son's early artistic success compensates her for the difference she feels from the artistic circles in Nottingham—from, for instance, the "well-dressed ladies" at the Castle gallery where Paul's prize paintings are shown (p. 222). Responding to his mother's pride in his success, it is only natural that Paul should come to conceive of his artistic career as a means of creating and displaying upward mobility: of actually *making* his mother "swanky" (p. 345).

With the loss of Paul's relationship to Miriam, his mother's valuation of his art seems all the more decisive, dominating his own vision and revealing the paucity of his artistic efforts. In a very telling moment after he has shown Miriam a curtain or portière design he has produced, "with its wonderful reddish roses and dark green stems," he tells her that he intends to send it to Liberty: "I did it for my mother—but I think she'd rather have the money" (p. 241). Paul's own attitude to his art, like so much else in his life, follows the attitude of his mother—his flippant artistic commercialism in the later stages of the novel is comically revealed in an exchange with Mrs Radford, the mother of Clara Dawes:

Mrs Radford was evidently fond of him. He began to talk of his painting.

“What’s the good,” exclaimed the mother, “of your whittling and worrying and twistin’ and too-in’ at that painting of yours? What *good* does it do you, I should like to know? You’d better be enjoyin’ yourself.”

“Oh but,” exclaimed Paul, “I made over thirty guineas last year.”

“Did you!—Well—that’s a consideration, but it’s nothing to the time you put in.”

“And I’ve got four pounds owing. A man said he’d give me five pounds if I’d paint him and his missis and the dog and the cottage. And I went and put the fowls in instead of the dog, and he was waxy, so I had to knock a quid off. I was sick of it, and I didn’t like the dog.—I made a picture of it.—What shall I do when he pays me the four pounds?”

“Nay, you know your own uses for your money,” said Mrs Radford.

“But I’m going to bust this four pounds. Should we go to the seaside for a day or two?”

“Who?”

“You and Clara and me.”

“What—on your money!” she exclaimed, half wrathful.

“Why not?”

“*You* wouldn’t be long in breaking your neck at a hurdle race,” she said.

“So long as I get a good run for my money—!—Will you?”

“Nay—you may settle that a-tween you.”

“And you’re willing?” he asked, amazed and rejoicing.

“You’ll do as you like,” said Mrs Radford; “whether I’m willing or not.”

(p. 385)

Paul is, of course, in a good position to patronise Mrs Radford and Clara, having previously witnessed their reduced circumstances, and having helped Clara to work at Jordan’s. His cocky pose here reflects his acute awareness of his position as a solvent young man in an all-female household (we might recall Lawrence’s boastful outburst to Jessie Chambers, made when he was first being introduced by Hueffer to London literary circles in 1909: “I’ll make two thousand a year!”).²⁶ Mrs Radford is sceptical and arch, but also fondly indulgent of his posturing, and of his attentions to her daughter. Their banter is good-natured, and Paul uses hard cash as a defence of his art because it is the only currency that Mrs Radford is likely to understand. But the offhand description of the commissioned portrait *does* suggest that Paul’s art is now becoming predominantly commercial. It is bringing him 30 guineas, or £31/10/-, per annum; if we recall that at age 19 Paul was earning 20 shillings (or £1) per week at Jordan’s, we realise that his art work is amply supplementing his annual wage: indeed, it is *almost* providing a second wage. However, he is treating his artistic earnings here as disposable income. He rents rooms “at a little cottage near Theddlethorpe”

on the Lincolnshire coast; he goes there with Clara, and “Mrs Radford sometimes [goes] with them” (p. 400). Shortly afterwards he goes to Blackpool for four days with a male friend (p. 412). When he visits his sister Annie on his return and finds his mother seriously ill, he is said to have “practically no money in the world” (p. 417); he has to borrow in order to pay Dr Jameson his fee of 8 guineas for travelling from Nottingham to Sheffield to examine her.

Paul’s profligate use of his artistic earnings perhaps indicates his lack of real ambition to make it his sole source of income; we might contrast it to Lawrence’s own acute sense of financial necessity and responsibility as *Sons and Lovers* was being edited for publication by Garnett.²⁷ Certainly Paul’s motivation to keep up his art seems rather tenuous at this point in the novel, and on the death of his mother it simply ceases. We are told that the last painting Paul produces is finished on the day of his mother’s death: “Everything seemed to have gone smash for the young man. He could not paint” (p. 454). If his early works, however restless in style, attempted to express a unified vision of life, in the end, having lost the mother who underpinned his latest attitude of financial pragmatism, he also loses any sense of value in his art. He decides to abandon his painting because “Painting is not living” (p. 456); his feeling of desolation at the end of the novel is reflected in the “few meaningless lines” which Miriam finds on his drawing board in his bleak lodgings on Holme Road.

V

It is striking that these failed artists feature so prominently in fictional works produced by Gissing and Lawrence at the pivotal moments in their early professional lives as writers. Why should they be analysing the *failure* of artists to construct careers for themselves at the very time when they were most active in working to fashion their own? By way of addressing this question, I will conclude by offering a few reflections arising from my earlier analyses.

Nathaniel Pendle and Paul Morel both attract powerful elements of authorial identification, but as visual artists they are also distanced and objectified by their authors. To some degree the process of partial identification may be said to serve a broadly cathartic purpose, allowing the authors to explore in a controlled context their own fears as aspiring professional writers. Nathaniel is insufficiently commercial; Paul becomes too

commercial—they represent the two negative extremes of a young artist’s “position-taking.” In the first version of “The Artist’s Child,” Gissing alludes to this cathartic subtext in a telling aside early in the story: “The thoughts of such a man—thrown upon the world to make his own living—may well cause one to tremble” (p. 60).

The texts function, then, as cautionary tales—and cautionary tales addressed by the writers *to themselves*. In both cases the identificatory element is contained in a critical framework whose assumptions about the artistic marketplace may seem strangely consolatory to a young novelist. Nathaniel and Paul operate as artists in receptive and relatively transparent commercial contexts. The elements of chance, uncertainty and insecurity are virtually eliminated from their professional careers as artists; their failure to make their way as full-time artists is a consequence not of the structure of the artistic field, but of their own personal shortcomings and the way they position themselves in relation to a knowable and graspable commercial world.²⁸ The texts, then, reflect their authors’ dogged belief—contra Bourdieu—in the young artist’s professional self-responsibility: his capacity for self-fashioning. We might also note that the narrative critique of the characters’ artistic failures ultimately reinforces and validates the authors’ own emerging strategies of approach to the commercial sphere. Nathaniel’s distaste for all things commercial is ironically contained in a narrative that cashes in both formally and literally on his hopeless but also eminently picturesque sentimental appeal. Paul, in contrast to Nathaniel, attains commercial success but at the cost of losing any sense of personal involvement in his art; his situation reveals the dangers inherent in the failure of the artist’s desire to wrest back some sense of art’s value from the commercial arena where it is sold and appreciated.

¹ D. H. Lawrence to Arthur McLeod, 5 December 1910. *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, p. 194.

² D. H. Lawrence, *Introductions and Reviews*, pp. 73-78, 75.

³ Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: A Literary Life*, p. 14.

⁴ Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years, 1885–1912*, p. 202.

⁵ For a useful listing of all the references to Gissing in Lawrence’s published letters, see Korg, “Gissing in D. H. Lawrence’s Letters,” *Gissing Journal*, January 1997, pp. 26-27.

⁶ Chambers, *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record by ‘E.T.’*, p. 110. The extent of Lawrence’s fondness for *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* is confirmed in a letter of 20 January 1909 to Blanche Jennings (“a tour de force the *Times* calls it – I agree”), and in a

specific allusion to the book in a letter of 15 December 1910 to his fiancée Louie Burrows. *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, pp. 107, 203.

⁷ *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, pp. 353-54 (“Gissing hasn’t enough energy, enough sanguinity, to capture me. But I esteem him a good deal”). For Garnett’s review of *The House of Cobwebs*, see *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Coustillas and Partridge, pp. 498-500.

⁸ *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, II, p. 96. In a letter of 24 July 1910, Lawrence listed *The Odd Women* among the “Nelson Sevenpenny” novels he recommended to Louie Burrows; on 5 March 1913, he told Arthur McLeod to send him “one or two books,” asking “Is *New Grub St* cheap?” See *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, pp. 172, 524.

⁹ See, in particular, Pierre Coustillas’s introduction to the Harvester Press edition of *Workers in the Dawn*, pp. xi-xxxii, and his entry on the novel in *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*, pp. 1-9.

¹⁰ After reading Lawrence’s first novel (then entitled “Nethermere”) Hueffer had recommended that he send it to Heinemann. He even sent Lawrence a letter of recommendation, dated 15 December 1909, which Lawrence copied and forwarded with the manuscript to the publishing company. Hueffer’s letter is reproduced in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, VIII, pp. 2-3.

¹¹ I am grateful to the staff of the Beinecke Library, Yale University, for allowing me access to the signed contract for *Workers in the Dawn* (George Gissing Collection, GEN MSS 286, Series 3 Box 7 Folder 139).

¹² For details of the composition and publication of *Workers in the Dawn*, see Coustillas, *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*, pp. 3-5.

¹³ *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, I, p. 240.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

¹⁵ *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, p. 222.

¹⁶ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 59.

¹⁷ *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, I, p. 240.

¹⁸ *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, p. 511. As advisory reader for Chapman and Hall, the novelist and poet George Meredith was influential in securing that company’s acceptance of Gissing’s *The Unclassed* in 1884, following the fiasco with George Bentley and the non-publication of *Mrs Grundy’s Enemies*. Lawrence’s reference to “the Meredith public” may seem somewhat ironic given Meredith’s own rather bitter feeling of neglect by British readers.

¹⁹ Lawrence sent the Foreword to Garnett around 20 January 1913; it is now printed in the Cambridge Edition of *Sons and Lovers*, pp. 467-73. Garnett’s request for a dust-jacket is alluded to by Lawrence in a letter to the artist Ernest Collings, provisionally dated 22 March 1913; on the same day Lawrence told Garnett that he had “also written the brief notice for the wrapper”. Neither the requested dust-jacket, nor the brief notice, was used by Duckworth. See *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, pp. 528, 529.

²⁰ I will refer to the two texts of “The Artist’s Child” established in George Gissing, *Lost Stories from America*, ed. Selig, pp. 55-76, and to the Cambridge Edition of *Sons and Lovers*. All page references for quotations from these primary sources will be indicated in parentheses in the main text of the essay.

²¹ His next published short story, “Phoebe,” appeared in *Temple Bar* in March 1884. See Coustillas, *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*, p. 463.

²² *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, I, p. 241.

²³ See *Lost Stories from America*, p. 57.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

²⁵ See, in particular, Jack Stewart, "Forms of Expression in *Sons and Lovers*," in "*Sons and Lovers*": *A Casebook*, ed. Worthen and Harrison, pp. 155-88.

²⁶ Chambers, *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record by 'E.T.'*, p. 168.

²⁷ On 11 March 1913, Lawrence wrote to Edward Garnett: "I don't mind if Duckworth crosses out a hundred shady pages in *Sons and Lovers*. It's got to sell, I've got to live." *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, p. 526.

²⁸ In the first version of "The Artist's Child," the artist figure (Julius Trent) attempts to sell his paintings, but meets with very limited success: "Poor fellow! He soon discovered that his paintings were far from possessing the charm for others that they had for himself" (p. 60). In the revised story, Gissing removed his protagonist's failed efforts to market himself, thus shifting the blame for his tragedy more squarely from the structure of the marketplace to his own lack of incentive and the flaws in his character.

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Notes and News

The volume of Gissing short stories translated by Vincenzo Pepe for Marlin Editore, the enterprising publisher of Cava de’ Tirreni, near Salerno, like the collection of short stories edited by Christine Huguet for the equally enterprising Dutch Equilibris, will easily be remembered as one of the most attractive volumes of strong Gissing interest published in the first decade of this century. Different though the bindings look, they are both models of good taste and sound originality. But, more importantly, they have a notable point in common: they do justice to Gissing as a writer of short stories, which he himself doubtless never hoped might be some day collected, as is likely to be the case before the end of the present decade.

The recent purchaser of a copy of the first American edition of *The Nether World* sends a tiny correction to the entry on the book in *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*. On his copy the spine has a short rule between World and By. Also unmentioned in the entry is the word Extra in the top left-hand corner beneath the start of the second 11.7 cm rule on the front cover. The word is just visible in the illustration showing two early American editions on the third page of illustrations in the Bibliography.

The Eighth Annual Louisiana Conference on Literature, Language and Culture, hosted by the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in the heart of French Louisiana, will take place March 5-7, 2009. The conference is organized specifically with the emerging scholar in mind. To this end the conference includes professional development plenary sessions: in 2009 these will focus on turning the dissertation into a book, and on teaching. This year’s conference theme? “Beyond Pleasure: The Force of Desire in Text and Culture.”

Of interest to Gissing scholars is the Gissing panel which was invited for the 2009 conference. The panel, led by Christine Huguet of the University of Lille, organizer of the 2008 Gissing conference at that university, will feature presentations by Constance Harsh, Malcolm Allen and Lewis D. Moore. The panel's title is "Desire in the Fiction of George Gissing," and as Christine Huguet writes, will focus on ways in which "Gissing's fiction contributes to the construction of profoundly new notions of masculinity and femininity in the final years of the Victorian age," a period of what Gissing himself would describe as "sexual anarchy." "His fiction," Christine Huguet continues, "may be seen in particular to entail an elaboration of the complexities of desire—a concept central to the writer's understanding of life itself."

Christine Huguet has also been invited to join the panel of experts who will participate in a plenary roundtable session on teaching literature. For more information about the conference go to the website at

<http://english.louisiana.edu/laconference>

A new book on Wakefield by Kate Taylor was recently published by Wharncliffe Books of Barnsley, South Yorkshire. It is entitled *The Making of Wakefield 1801-1900*. It is a major source of information on the town in which Gissing's father lived from 1856 until his death and where Margaret Gissing and her two daughters stayed until the early years of the twentieth century. Divided into six chapters, the book includes 93 figures, most of which had not been reproduced before. The author is a native of Wakefield, where she has always lived.

The *Times Literary Supplement* for 28 November 2008 carried an article on Alan Clodd and a catalogue just published by Maggs of some more of the books in his fabulous library.

John Spiers, the former founder and proprietor of the Harvester Press, has drawn our attention to the novels of Patrick Hamilton which are mainly concerned with life in London in the days of World War II. In their introductions to a paperback reissue of *The Slaves of Solitude*, both Michael Holroyd and Doris Lessing write that this novel has affinities with Gissing's works.

Recent Publications

Books

George Gissing, *Il giorno del silenzio*, Cava de' Tirreni (SA), Italy: Marlin Editore, 2008. Translation and Translator's Note by Vincenzo Pepe. Introduction by Pierre Coustillas. This 204-page volume, as announced in our October number, pp. 48-49, contains ten short stories by Gissing. Pictorial cover with detail of Whistler's "Symphony in White" on front cover and a photograph of Gissing by Alfred Ellis (1893) on the back cover. Below Gissing's portrait are three quotations about him from George Orwell, Virginia Woolf and the Italian writer Corrado Augias. ISBN 978-88-6043-053-3. €12.90.

Lewis D. Moore, *The Fiction of George Gissing*, Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland, 2008. Pictorial soft cover. Gissing's portrait on the front cover is one of those taken by Russell & Son in 1895. ISBN 978-0-7864-3509-8. \$39.95.

Martha S. Vogeler, *Austin Harrison and the English Review*, Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2008. This brown cloth hardback with gilt titling is abundantly illustrated. The front of the jacket shows Austin Harrison in 1915. A few of the photographs were reproduced in Gissing's *Collected Letters*. ISBN 978-0-8262-1815-5. £36.71.

Articles, reviews etc.

Christine Huguet, "George Gissing: New Grub Street," a chapter in *Guide de la littérature britannique des origines à nos jours*, edited by Jean Pouvelle and Jean-Pierre Demarche, Paris: Ellipses, 2008, pp. 231-34.

Marta Salís, editor, *Cuando se abrió la puerta (Cuentos de la Nueva Mujer (1882-1914))*, Barcelona: Alba Editorial, 2008. This attractively produced anthology of English short stories on the New Woman contains twenty-five stories by writers of the period. Miguel Temprano García, who translated *New Grub Street* recently for the same firm, has translated "A Daughter of the Lodge" under the title "La hija de los guardeses."

