

The Gissing Journal

Volume XLIX, Number 1, January 2013

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

Irony, Narrative Hybrids, and Genre Theory: The Dramatic Monologue and Gissing’s Short Fiction¹

TOM UE
University College London

Introduction

In *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (1898), Gissing writes of Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1853):

One wishes that Esther Summerson had not been allowed to write in her own person—or rather to assume, with such remarkable success, the personality of Charles Dickens. This well-meaning young woman, so blind to her own merits, of course had no idea that she was a great humourist and a writer of admirable narrative But for the occasional “I” one may easily enough forget that Miss Summerson is speaking. (54)

If, as Gissing suggests here, first-person narration—when author and character are not sufficiently separated—can weaken a work’s believability, then his infrequent use of this narrative strategy in his own fiction merits closer attention regardless of whether he is fair in his judgment of Dickens’ novel.

For Dino Felluga, “all Victorian poems could be read more fully for their access to and self-conscious questioning of the performative nature of Victorian ideology, especially as that ideology gets articulated in the dominant genre of the realist novel” (496). So too, reversing his terms, can we gain a fuller understanding of and appreciation for Victorian prose by analysing the profound impact that poetry has on it. In what follows, I will explore how Gissing borrows from the dramatic monologue, and how his use of the first-person narrator characteristically emphasises the ironic distance between the way in which his narrators view themselves and the way Gissing as author, and we as readers, view them. The cases examined are two of his short stories in which the speakers are clearly individualized: “My First Rehearsal” (1880) and “The Tyrant’s Apology” (1895). In the former, Richard Morton confides to us that his “position was the (literally) elevated one of clerk in a solicitor’s office, somewhere in the midland

counties” (4), and that “there is no telling to what dignity [he] might not have attained in time had it not been for [a] romantic element in [his] disposition” (4). Gissing undermines his narrator’s optimism by gesturing towards Richard’s occupation as one of potentially many clerks working in one of many solicitors’ offices in one of many British counties, just as in the latter he spurs us—through the heavy hint in the title—to be more critical of the narrator of “The *Tyrant’s Apology*” (emphasis added).² This article argues that Gissing’s characterization of these first-person narrators carefully stages his reader’s expectations, and that his use of this narrative strategy in these two unjustly neglected stories contributes to, as much as it compromises, his stories’ realism. Its conclusion examines some wider implications for thinking about the relation between sympathy, perspective, and Victorian literature.

Scholarship on the dramatic monologue has long recognized its debt to different genres. Robert Langbaum identifies the influence of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, “for in the Shakespearean soliloquy as they read it, nineteenth-century poets thought they had found the form by which they could objectify and dramatize their essential subjective and lyrical impulse” (160). Herbert Tucker goes back further when he writes: “We would be hard pressed to prove that Wordsworth’s ‘The Thorn,’ Pope’s ‘Eloisa to Abelard,’ Milton’s ‘L’Allegro,’ and Chaucer’s prologue to *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* are less dramatic monologues than are scores of poems by Browning, a double handful by Tennyson, and memorable essays in poetic impersonation by Arnold, Meredith, Swinburne, and others” (122). E. Warwick Slinn follows this tradition and moves still further back in time when he argues that “the genre is confounded by uncertain parameters, and attempts at tight formalist definition have usually foundered on a series of necessary qualifications” (82), and when he writes of monologues’ and lyrical poems’ origins: “The *prosopopoeia*, or impersonation, is a long-standing rhetorical form where a historical or imaginary person is presented as actually speaking; the idylls of Theocritus and Ovid’s *Heroides* contain dramatic speeches and epistles; and the tradition of complaint often imitates specified speakers other than the poet” (87).³

However, Langbaum, Tucker, and Slinn all see the genre as being revitalized in the nineteenth century. For Langbaum, the speaker of the dramatic monologue differs from “the character in traditional drama [who] cannot be wholly absorbed in his particular perspective, but keeps one eye on the general perspective from which he must take the judgment of his actions” (163).⁴ Tucker identifies the genre, “for all its fresh emphasis upon the

historicity of the interplay of consciousness and circumstance (as against Romantic ambitions to attain the universality of nature and myth), [as] a lineal descendant of the lyrical ballads, conversation poems, and odes in which Wordsworth and Coleridge, and later Byron, Shelley, and Keats, had first broached this philosophical problem and tried to solve it” (130). Meanwhile, Slinn sees the dramatic monologue as an advance in both style and content: “[T]he move towards a poetry that overtly separated speaker from poet was a step away from the Romantic tendency to emphasize lyrical modes that indulged solitary self-expression—the ode, the hymn, the sonnet. A dramatized speaker is a way of avoiding the excesses of authorial self-absorption—or eluding gender constraints” (81).

Readers of the dramatic monologue can productively think of it as a response to what W. Jackson Bate has identified as the burden of the past. For Bate, the artist is constantly pressured by the question “What is there left to do?” and this question is more pressing for him or her working under the shadow of a generation of literary and artistic greats: “Whatever he may say, or not say, about his predecessors, the poet from Dryden to Eliot has been unavoidably aware of them, and never so much as when he has tried to establish a difference; and he has been keenly and very personally aware of them in a way that he was not, for example (if he was writing in the early eighteenth century), of Newton, Locke, or Shaftesbury” (3-5). With developments in technology, “the means of preserving and distributing the literature (and more recently the other arts) of the past have immeasurably increased, and to such a point that we now have confronting the artist—or have *in potential*—a vast array of varied achievement, existing and constantly multiplying in an ‘eternal present’” (Bate 4).⁵ Glennis Byron has persuasively argued for the dramatic monologue’s tendency “to disrupt rather than consolidate authority, drawing upon speakers who are in some way alienated from, rather than representative of, their particular societies” (100). This, Byron suggests, makes the dramatic monologue “a particularly appropriate form for the purposes of social critique” (100). If the dramatic monologue enables poets to make use of and to respond to their literary inheritances, and simultaneously to write about their current social and cultural conditions, the same could be said of Gissing’s use of the first-person narrator in his short stories.

“My First Rehearsal” and Allusion

The speakers of both “My First Rehearsal” and “The Tyrant’s Apology” occupy what Byron would recognize as marginal positions in society. In the

former, a short story that was first published in *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* in 1966, Richard quits his job to pursue an acting career in London. On the way there, he meets a recently-dismissed actor, who calls himself Mr. Bradford, and who claims to be the actor-manager of a London theatre. He offers Richard the opportunity to read a prologue that he had written for *Hamlet*. While Richard rehearses it in Mr. Bradford's room, he returns to Richard's and robs him of his clothes, money and possessions. Richard begins his story by confiding to us: "Be it premised that, in the days I am about to speak of, I was very youthful, very romantic, and—fitting climax—very poor" (4). The accumulated weight of Richard's and Mr. Bradford's eight references to youth throughout the short story brings to the forefront the fact that this narrating Richard is now older and wiser—if no better off financially. Wayne Booth reminds us that the first-person narrator's "views of the experience will come between us and the event" (*Fiction* 152), and as Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg have suggested for the eye-witness as a narrative device, two levels of irony are at work: "[T]o the extent that the narrating character is differentiated from the author one ironic gap opens up, and to the extent that the narrating character is differentiated from himself as participant in events another ironic gap appears" (256). Our experience of reading this story is strikingly similar to that of reading a dramatic monologue, which similarly overlays what was happening then with the now. The unmistakable "trace of good-humoured banter in the smile which played about his lips" (5) that Richard claims that he had detected initially, and his conclusion that Mr. Bradford's "appearance . . . was eminently reassuring" (5) disclose a contest between the viewpoints of the unsuspecting and the more experienced Richard. Still, both Richards are strikingly romantic, and this characteristic circumscribes his ability to read. "I had read with enthusiasm numberless stories," Richard confides to us, "of men who, drawn on by visions of future greatness, had set out in youth for the city which is paved with gold, yet, from the illustrious Whittington downwards, I could not call to mind one who had been dragged thither behind a steam-engine" (4).⁶ Here, Gissing may have been inspired by Dickens, whose Richard Carstone similarly refers to Dick Whittington when he, Ada, and Esther first embark for Bleak House, and whose David Copperfield describes the early stages of his married life when he kept a page as follows: "The principal function of this retainer was to quarrel with the cook; in which respect he was a perfect Whittington, without his cat, or the remotest chance of being made Lord Mayor" (697). While Dickens circumvents our reading of Richard's

and the page's narrative as straightforward rewritings of the folktale by having the former travel *away* from London and on a coach and the latter as not a cat-owner, Gissing's Richard remains sufficiently inspired to make the eighty-mile journey on foot.

The implied author further distances and ironizes Richard the narrator by showing his limited understanding of Shakespeare. The first four lines of the prologue that Mr. Bradford gives Richard suggest that Shakespeare's strength and universality derive from his ability to mirror and to intensify his audience's feelings:

When ancient Thespis on the primal stage
First showed the art to mimic love or rage,
How glowed the heart of each beholder then,
Taught by his voice the brotherhood of men! (8)

However, the potentially helpful images of a porous and mutually-informative relationship between the stage and the world and of art as mimicry and deception, evoked here, escape Richard, who habitually transposes and reads allusions out of the context in which they were spoken originally. Richard meets Mr. Bradford after he overhears Richard recite some lines from Byron's *Manfred* "in a voice half choked with feeling":

Fare thee well!
I ne'er shall see thee more. As my first glance
Of love and wonder was for thee, then take
My latest look: thou wilt not beam on one
To whom the gifts of life and warmth have been
Of a more fatal nature. (5)

Richard recognizes the inappropriateness of his utterance, but Mr. Bradford flatters him with an answering allusion: "I may claim to be something of a judge in these matters, and I may say with Polonius, 'Fore God, well spoken; with good accent, and good discretion'" (5). As readers of *Hamlet*, we might recognize that Polonius is not the most discriminating of judges and, moreover, his possible complicity in Claudius' usurpation or, at the very least, his unquestioning support and encouragement of that king lends a sinister overtone to our reading of Mr. Bradford.⁷ These suspicions are intensified by his subsequent allusion to *Macbeth*. Mr. Bradford quotes from the first murderer when he tells the third one, as they are waiting for Banquo and his son Fleance: "The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day" (5). The most apparent suggestion of this allusion—that of murderers waiting for their unsuspecting victims—eludes Richard, who happily completes the quotation without considering who the victimizers and who the

victims are. Gissing's comic disposition is revealed since Mr. Bradford, while deceptive, is not murderous. Richard's recognition of the incongruence of his earlier allusion to Byron and to the experience of looking at the sun "sinking amid unutterable glories" (5) is telling, as he is not more perceptive as a reader of Shakespeare than he is of Byron. Richard's comic extravagance colours his narrative, and this manifests itself most clearly through a plot ambiguity that Gissing introduces. Although Richard claims that Mr. Bradford lives in the bedroom one floor below his, and corroborates this fact by revealing how, from this bedroom, he mounted a flight of stairs to return to his own, he identifies Mr. Bradford, to the landlord and his audience at the end of the story, as "the gentleman who has the room upstairs" (9). In favour of giving an entertaining account, and possibly under the influence of the disturbing memory of his costume—"a long coat of eighteenth-century pattern" (3) and "a pair of very wide white trousers" (3)—Richard jeopardizes reliability, and yet this is at one with his character, whom Barbara Rawlinson quite rightly identifies "as an incurable romantic, who thinks and speaks as did the poets of a bygone age" (144). Still, the wall that separates this bygone age from the Victorian present seems precariously thin even without Richard's contribution: Shakespeare's greatest hit is open for revision; Shakespeare, Byron, and Dickens creep into late-Victorian language; and Richard inherits a vintage eighteenth-century costume.

Rhetorical Strategy in "The Tyrant's Apology"

If the oscillation between the more mature storyteller and his younger self is apparent in "My First Rehearsal," it similarly informs our reading of "The Tyrant's Apology." In this story, completed on 13 October 1894, and first published in the monthly *English Illustrated Magazine* on July 1895, Gissing offers a more sustained reflection of a married woman's markedly limited rights, which is in keeping with his and many of his contemporaries' writing in the mid-1890s.⁸ Twenty-eight of Gissing's short stories were published in 1895 and five of these in the *English Illustrated Magazine*.⁹ For "The Tyrant's Apology," Gissing received £12.12s, a sum that he received for many of his stories published in this periodical (*Bibliography* 274). The magazine published stand-alone pictures, stories, poems, short plays, and sketches of many kinds, and it "capitalized on the popularity of photographs" (Primeau 212).¹⁰ The monological I-narrator of "The Tyrant's Apology" describes, to Jameson, his unhappy marital experiences with the extravagant Jenny, with whom Jameson was once in love before he had left

England for unexplained reasons. These experiences derive principally from his attempt to re-educate his wife. The narrator's story serves a dual purpose. First, he intends to lessen Jameson's seemingly-undiminished concern for Jenny, as we may infer from his jealous outburst and barely-veiled threat near the beginning of the story: "How can *that* give you a right [to meddle in my private affairs]? For all I know, a dozen other men were in love with her. You had your chance, I suppose, and made what you could of it. That's an old story. It happens that *I* married her, and if any man has the astounding impudence—" (297). Second, the narrator intends that his story challenge his wife's: "I'm well aware that Jenny wants people to pity her; who ever knew the woman that didn't? You won't like what I've got to say, but I can't help that; I didn't begin on the subject. I'm a man talking about his wife—that's to say, I see facts as facts, and not through a mist of sentiment" (297). Clearly, the narrator's account is not impartial: he is a discordant narrator, one "who is biased or confused, inducing one to look, behind the story he or she tells, for a different meaning from the one he himself or she herself provides" (Cohn 307).¹¹

E. Warwick Slinn describes the centrality of "process and enactment" to the dramatic monologue's rhetorical effects: "It is not a matter of writing directly about cultural problems, which might as easily be done in polemical prose, but of displaying the fundamental act of utterance that grounds subjectivity and speech in cultural contexts and processes" (91). Gissing's story makes use of this strategy and we are encouraged to decode Jenny's story, which the narrator markedly strives to conceal from Jameson and from us. Before her marriage, Jenny was a New Woman, as the narrator confides to Jameson: "Her cigarette-smoking, her night rambling, her talk about forbidden things—pah! She wished to be thought a fast girl, and it's rather wonderful, when one comes to think of it, that the limits of the possible weren't passed" (298). Such limits, as Maria Teresa Chialant has argued, are precariously undefined for "the new female inhabitants in the city" (53) that we find in Gissing's novels: these characters occupy "an ambiguously liminal position between the streetwalker—the public woman *par excellence*—and the emancipated woman, the one occupied by working girls, shop assistants, shopping ladies or other women who enjoyed loitering about the city, going to theatres or exhibition halls by themselves" (53). The reformed Jenny avoids cigarettes, doubtful talk, and company that the narrator sees as being of ill-repute. He tells Jameson: "How on earth she got together such a menagerie of friends I never understood. To this day I have a suspicion that some of the men one met there on Sunday were

shop[-]walkers; yet we know that some were *not*” (298).¹² Unsurprisingly enough, this better sort includes himself, as he makes clear: “Jenny married me because there seemed no hope of marrying anyone else of equally good social position. She was fastidious; she knew a gentleman from a gent, and only tolerated the sham when he helped to fill a room and applaud her comic songs” (298). With her marriage, Jenny exchanges this company for none except a domestic, a subscription to Mudie’s, clothes, and occasionally, the narrator’s society.

However, as the story’s title suggests, the narrator is not the essentially kind but ignorant Arthur Golding from *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and he does not aspire, as Arthur does, to enhance Jenny’s circumstances out of sympathy. The narrator’s narcissistic impulses are suggested to us in the course of his lengthy monologue and indicated to its first readers in the *English Illustrated Magazine* by William Douglas Almond’s four pictures to accompany the short story.¹³ Almond’s first illustration shows Jameson smoking and sitting on a chair while he pensively watches the narrator as he tells his story (with the help of some dynamic hand movements) (see fig. 1). The narrator’s decision to marry Jenny has much to do with his career ambitions, and this is apparent through his description of her as one about whom “[n]o one could find vulgarity in her face—or in her ways either, when she wasn’t acting up to her ideas of fashionable freedom” (298)—and how she “made [him] proud when [he] walked with her along the streets” (300). It is no coincidence that Almond selected this latter passage as inspiration for the second and the largest of his illustrations (fig. 2). In it, we see Jenny arrayed in a smart outfit as she walks beside the slightly sinister looking narrator and as they win the admiration of a female vendor in the streets: the narrator’s vanity is shown, thus, to be as ridiculous as his snobbery towards shop-walkers. The next illustration displays a full party in the company of which Jenny and the narrator are hardly distinguishable (fig. 3). While the picture’s inscription says “Oh! the gaping fools we gathered about us! I have sat listening to their talk until my jaw dropped and my eyes grew fixed in an idiot stare” (302), Almond clearly encourages us to recognize that the narrator is angered not only, as he claims, by the quality of the conversations, but also because he is not the focus of attention despite his being the host.¹⁴

THE TYRANT'S APOLOGY



WHAT the deuce do you mean?
What right have you to meddle
in my private affairs? It's confounded

were
stand
We
way,
explai
to, th
in m
peopl
"brutal behaviour,
part against me, I
rough. I'm well a
people to pity her
woman that didn't
I've got to say, b
didn't begin on th
talking about his
see facts as facts, a
of sentiment. You

Fig. 1. Almond's drawing of Jameson and the narrator for "The Tyrant's Apology," *The English Illustrated Magazine* (July 1895; print; 297).



SHE MADE ME FEEL PROUD WHEN I WALKED WITH HER ALONG THE STREETS.

X 2

Fig. 2. Almond hones in on the narrator's admiration of the vendor's attention (Jul. 1895; print; 301).



OH! THE GAPING FOOLS WE GATHERED ABOUT US! I HAVE SAT LISTENING TO THEIR TALK
UNTIL MY JAW DROPPED AND MY EYES GREW FIXED IN AN IDIOT STARE.

Fig. 3. The narrator and Jenny fit in all too well in Almond's drawing (Jul. 1895; print; 303).

The selfishly-inclined narrator is committed to enhancing his prospects as he tells Jameson: "My prospects had to be considered; I was feeling a bit anxious about things, and saw the necessity of keeping in with a certain class of people" (298). This desire for assimilation to a class ostensibly beyond the reach of his modest earnings informs his every choice, including his marriage to Jenny, and even the house that he rents: he confesses to Jameson that he "hadn't the courage to take as cheap a house as [he] ought

to have done” (299) because he “secretly hoped that a year or two would make a good deal of difference in [his] position” (299). These ambitions are at odds with the image of servitude that he evokes when he describes how “Jenny had beaten [him]; [and that] she led [him] along like a pet dog with a collar round its neck” (301). In times of prosperity, the narrator indulges and does not seem particularly discontented with Jenny’s increasingly expensive housekeeping: “We lived like everyone else: had a swarm of acquaintances; gave dinners now and then; went to places of amusement because we were ashamed not to be seen there; dressed extravagantly; did everything that public opinion demands” (301). One would most certainly not have gathered from this jocular description, punctuated by no fewer than one colon and three semi-colons, that it captures two years of an unhappy marriage.

The narrator appreciates society as much as Jenny, and it is only the recognition of the “tolerably contemptible figure [he] must have cut” (302) as her husband, and the pressures of an attack of influenza, of her increasing expenditures in keeping up appearances, and of their worsening finances, that he recognizes that “[t]he social circle to which [he] belong[s] won’t allow [him] to spend a farthing on [him]self” (303), and he quickly shifts his anger towards society to the much easier target of Jenny. While the narrator encourages us to connect the influenza to the fact that he was unable to “insure [his] life, though it’s [his] duty to do so, because the premium goes in keeping up appearances” (303), we infer that his illness also circumscribes his level of participation in their hosted social events. “What sort of people are they who impose this slavery on me?” he asks her: “Wretched curs living a life like my own, slaves each of the other, secretly miserable because they spend beyond their means, and aping a social rank altogether above them. Out of regard for *their* opinion, I condemn myself to a squalid hell of toil and sham pleasure. Does this strike you as reasonable?” (303-04)¹⁵ The narrator could have asked himself these very questions: he conspicuously erases his personal, even if slightly less active, responsibility in driving up expenses and their mutual desire for society. That Jenny’s father had suffered a “smash” (298), and that he “had cut and run before his family did” (298), that Jenny asks the narrator what her allowance was to be if she leaves him, and that she subsequently attempts, in the narrator’s words, “to renew the quarrel” (304) only go to show how limited her means and prospects of subsistence are, how insufficient this conspicuously undisclosed sum is, and how she has no choice but to stay in a marriage with this tyrant.

Conclusion

Barbara Rawlinson demonstrates that Gissing's short stories are invaluable both "as a source of autobiographical detail" (53) and "as a proving ground for some of the material that recurs in revised form in his later work" (53). Pierre Coustillas' reading of "My First Rehearsal" in relation to Gissing's exposure, at an early age, to theatricals produced by his family's friend Matthew Bussey Hick who had founded 'the Tragedians of Wakefield,' to the speech-nights of his schooldays at Lindow Grove School, and to his Chicago experiences among actors in a Wabash Avenue boarding-house ("Theatre" 6) would lend support to Rawlinson's argument. So too is it supported by Gissing's approach to teaching: Gissing, according to his pupil George A. Stearns, "would roll out the lines [of Greek and Latin] with the zest of an actor on the stage, striving by intonation to bring out the meaning" ("Tuition" 28). However, Gissing's stories are equally valuable, I believe, for their individual merits and their own psychological complexities, as well as for the light they shed on Gissing as a reader. Gissing's subsumption of the dramatic monologue within the form of the short story speaks to his aspirations for a new aesthetics, one that he describes in a letter to Algernon on 19 July 1885. Gissing distinguishes his and his contemporaries' writings from those of their predecessors:

Thackeray & Dickens wrote at enormous length, & with profusion of detail; their plan is to tell everything, to leave nothing to be divined. Far more artistic, I think, is this later method, of merely suggesting; of dealing with episodes, instead of writing biographies. The old novelist is omniscient; I think it is better to tell a story precisely as one does in real life,—hinting, surmising, telling in detail what *can* so be told, & no more. In fact, it approximates to the dramatic mode of presentment. (2: 320)¹⁶

Gissing may be influenced by Henry James' "The Art of Fiction" (1884). Gissing's reading of James dated back as early as 14 March 1882 when, in a letter to his sister Ellen, he described reading a life of Nathaniel Hawthorne with great interest (2: 76)—probably James' (1879) for the *English Men of Letters* series (2: 77; n. 2). To Eduard Bertz, Gissing writes, on 17 March 1892:

Yes, I am inclined to think that the purely impersonal method of narrative has its advantages. Of course it approximates to the dramatic. No English writer that I know (unless it be George Moore) has yet succeeded in adopting this method. Still, I shall never try (& you do not wish me) to suppress my own *spirit*. To do that, it seems to me, would be to renounce the specific character of the novelist. Better, in that case, to write plays. (5: 22)

Philip Horne, in his discussion of Henry James' short stories in relation to the marketplace, emphasizes the two meanings of the term "economy":

“One is artistic and metaphorical, elevating the literary object above the market; the other commercial, calculating the cost of time spent and the value of money to be earned” (“Short Story” 6). The same could be said of Gissing’s short stories: he too relies on them to supplement his income, and yet his knowledge of late-Victorian publishing does not diminish the psychological depth and artistry of his work. This conflict between the concerns of the market and the metaphorical is written into the very texture and meaning of Gissing’s “The Fate of Humphrey Snell,” published in the October 1895 *English Illustrated Magazine*, and shortly after “The Tyrant’s Apology.” While Humphrey’s elder brothers delight in “profit and loss, the theatres, and music-halls, the pleasures of the street” (4), Humphrey “would [in their view] walk himself to death for the sake of gathering a few flowers, which he pressed in sheets of paper and stored away as if they were worth money” (4). And yet, if Gissing’s narrator is critical of these elder Snells, he does not, as I showed in endnote 15 below, necessarily side with Humphrey.

Throughout “The Tyrant’s Apology,” we get suggestions of the interlocutor Jameson’s responses, in Browningsque-implied stage directions when the narrator makes two requests that he waits (297, 298) and when, after the narrator tells Jameson that he “at all events, still ha[s] a future” (298) since he is not married to Jenny, the narrator responds to Jameson’s reaction: “I, too? Heaven only knows” (298).¹⁷ Jameson’s response is registered most clearly when the narrator presses: “I’m glad to see you smile. Just as well to keep that side in view. There’s more comedy than tragedy in the whole affair, if you only see the truth of it. Thanks to *me*, you know. If I had been a different sort of man—” (299).¹⁸ The dramatic potential of Gissing’s stories and the inwardness of his characters are central to his aesthetics, and he effectively makes psychology as it developed in the nineteenth century into a tool for a new creative method. Henry James argues for Browning’s achievement in “The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*,” “[I]t takes a great mind, one of the greatest, we may at once say, to make these persons [in Browning’s verse-novel] express and confess themselves to such an effect of intellectual splendour. He resorts primarily to *their* sense, their sense of themselves and of everything else they know, to exhibit them, and has for this purpose to keep them, and to keep them persistently and inexhaustibly, under the fixed lens of his prodigious vision” (799). Gissing understood Browning and the complexity of his novel-poetry project. It is precisely the gaps, the incongruities, the omissions, the emphases, and the evocations of these narrators—imbued with

their very individual psychologies, worldviews, and narrative goals—that make them exist as characters and their stories come alive, and for Gissing, it seems, we will be less inclined to believe in these stories if the voices of their narrators, like Esther, resemble those of their creators too closely.

Robert Langbaum sees the dramatic monologue's genius in the effect "created by the tension between sympathy and moral judgment" (85): "[W]e understand the speaker of the dramatic monologue by sympathizing with him, and yet by remaining aware of the moral judgment we have suspended for the sake of understanding. The combination of sympathy and judgment makes the dramatic monologue suitable for expressing all kinds of extraordinary points of view, whether moral, emotional or historical . . ." (96).¹⁹ John Maynard makes the case that "the reader is driven to create a position for himself as listener":

[T]he listener in the poem, the second point of a triangle, offers not a fixed reference point but an unsettling vantage point, which can attract the overhearer, repel him, or set him off in a complicated arc as he seeks a listener position where he can be comfortable. The activity thus created in the reader provides much of the excitement in the experience of a dramatic poem and directs the process of interpretation as a dialectic one, in which viewpoint leads to interpretation, which in turn may lead to a repositioning of the viewpoint. (108)

The interplay between sympathy and judgment is central, similarly, to our experience of Gissing's short stories: we are attracted to these narrators, though we are encouraged to question Richard's narcissistic impulse, to doubt the unnamed narrator's reliability, to sympathize with Jenny even if we do not condone her extravagance and, finally, to place our loyalties where we—and not the narrators and/or, at times, their authors—see fit.²⁰ Gissing's borrowings from the dramatic monologue in these two stories are indicative of his wider interests in subjectivity, in perspective, and in psychology. These threads make him important both as a successor to Shakespeare's example (strong in Browning's work) and as a predecessor to the emergent first-person works of Conrad and Ford—and they manifest themselves more fully in his novels.

¹ The narrator of "The Tyrant's Apology" begins his monologue by asking Jameson: "What the deuce do you mean? What right have you to meddle in my private affairs?" (297). I thank Philip Horne, Tyler Shores, and Peter Swaab for their incisive reading; Pierre and H el ene Coustillas for their help; and audience members at the Fourth International George Gissing Conference 2011: "Gissing's World within the World: Art and the Artist," and the University College London English Department Research Seminar, especially Charlotte Mitchell and Michael Sayeau, for their suggestions. I am grateful to the Social Science and

Humanities Research Council of Canada, Canadian Centennial Scholarship Fund, and University College London for their generous support.

² The title “The Tyrant’s Apology” is heavily reminiscent of those of dramatic monologues, for example, Robert Browning’s “Bishop Blougram’s Apology.” For Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, “This device [of the unreliable eye-witness] lends an especially ironical cast to an entire narrative, laying on readers a special burden of enjoyable ratiocination, as they seek to understand what the character telling the story cannot himself comprehend” (263). The ironies of both stories necessitate, as Wayne Booth puts it, “a required rejection of the surface meaning; a consideration of alternatives; a decision about the author’s position; and a reconstruction in harmony with what we infer about that position” (*Irony* 147).

³ Ina Beth Sessions identifies, in “The Dramatic Monologue,” a perfect example as one with “the definite characteristics of speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present” (508). A. Dwight Culler’s “Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue” sees the poem arising out of prosopopoeia and monodrama (368).

⁴ Langbaum elaborates on this change: “[C]haracter has always given way to general meaning; whereas the nineteenth century preferred to weight the view and the inclination to be interested in it to have their way against the general meaning. That is what the nineteenth century did with its reading of Shakespeare, where it may not have had the right to, and what it did where it undoubtedly had the right—with its own literature, as in the dramatic monologue” (180).

⁵ Compare Gissing’s first published novel *Workers in the Dawn* (1880). In it, the artist Gresham meets Arthur after seeing his artwork displayed in a printer’s shop’s window:

Glancing up by chance into the printer’s window, he saw a neatly-framed water-colour picture hanging there for sale, marked at the modest figure of five shillings. The execution of the drawing was in some respects remarkable, but this would hardly have sufficed to detain him without some other source of interest. This, however, he found in the picture itself, its subject and outline; for it was a copy of a picture of his own which had recently been exhibited in London, and had attracted some attention. (1: 225)

This picture is of a scene from *Cymbeline*. Arthur’s painting, more specifically, his copy of an engraving of the Shakespeare-inspired painting printed in a newspaper mark the transfer from an art gallery to a printer’s window, and from the reception of a presumably more socially privileged context to one that is underprivileged. It is no coincidence that the painting is displayed in a printer’s shop, an important site that bridges the production and distribution of literature and of culture. Gissing invites us to contrast the socially- and financially-underprivileged Arthur, who paints from natural observation, with the privileged and schooled Gresham, who would not have noticed Arthur’s work had it not been a copy of his own.

⁶ These ironies would not have escaped Gissing, who questioned, in a letter on 15 June 1880 to his brother Algernon, the *Athenaeum* reviewer’s characterization of Gresham: “[W]hat in the name of conscience does the fellow mean by calling Gresham a ‘Skimpolian Cynic’? I imagine the likeness between him & Harold Skimpole, in ‘Bleak House,’ is something which it requires special critical acumen to discover” (1: 282). Gissing sees Richard as *Bleak House*’s central character: “In Richard Carstone, about whom the story may be said to circle, Dickens tried to carry out a purpose he had once entertained with regard to Walter Gay in *Dombey and Son*, that of showing a good lad at the mercy of

temptations and circumstances which little by little wreck his life; but Richard has very little life to lose, and we form a shadowy conception of his amiably futile personality” (“*Bleak House*” 174-75). Gissing referred to the novel in letters to Algernon throughout May and June 1878 when Gissing sent him instalments published in the *Household Edition of Dickens* series by Chapman and Hall (1: 95; n. 1). Gissing read selections from *Bleak House* on July 15 (*London and the Life of Literature* 36), and it remained in his thoughts throughout February and March 1879 when he wrote to tell his brother that the only store that carried the novel’s first parts had closed and he is unsure when it will reopen. Gissing returns to Dick Whittington in the opening of *New Grub Street* (1891), as John Sloan has made explicit: “It is telling that Milvain’s account of his first journey to London should follow his justification of careerism. Milvain’s success is presented as a form of Dick Whittington-like progress in the London literary marketplace” (“Gissing and Hogarth” 255-56). See Patrick Parrinder’s “‘Turn Again, Dick Whittington!’: Dickens, Wordsworth, and the Boundaries of the City” for an interesting account of the authors’ use of the folktale.

⁷ See also Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone” (1921), in which Sherlock Holmes—in a move evocative of Polonius—uses his bedroom’s second door, which leads behind a curtain, to hide behind it and to listen in on Count Sylvius and Mr. Merton.

⁸ See, for instance, Gissing’s *Eve’s Ransom* (1895) and *Sleeping Fires* (1895). Lieutenant-Colonel George F. White’s short story “Twice Told,” the next story but one after “The Tyrant’s Apology,” shares its concerns. In it, the sisters Muriel and Hester live with their three brothers and their widower father, a reverend who struggles to make ends meet: “To Hester, possessing but a dim reflex of her sister’s loveliness, life jogged on comfortably enough at home, despite village troubles and impostors—for somehow all the parish work had fallen upon her shoulders. With beauty-dowered Muriel, out-of-the-way Showcombe and its dingy, ill-furnished Rectory was, in her own words, ‘simply hateful’” (309).

⁹ Throughout his career, Gissing published twenty stories in the *English Illustrated Magazine*. See figures 4 and 5 in my Appendix, which show when and where Gissing’s short stories were published.

¹⁰ John Sloan identifies the influence of photography on the illustrations of Gissing’s short stories from the 1890s when he describes them as being “essentially naturalistic and photographic in style” (“Gissing and Hogarth” 250).

¹¹ Ralph W. Rader suggests, in his writing on the dramatic monologue, that this is part of its style: “Although in all dramatic monologues we are ignorant of the final outcome of the actor’s act as it develops in relation to its dramatized object, our understanding of the actor himself and his motives is always superior or inferior, as it is with real people. We either do not understand the actor’s purposes as well as he does himself, his knowledge or power exceeding ours . . . , or we understand him better than he understands himself . . .” (139).

¹² A shop-walker is “an assistant exercising general supervision over a department of a shop; [or] an attendant who directs customers to that part of the premises where the goods they wish to inspect or purchase are to be found” (“Shop-walker,” def.).

¹³ Gissing referred to the completed manuscript as being five and a half pages long in his diary (351). The published work, at eight pages, is about average for the *English Illustrated Magazine*.

¹⁴ Pierre Coustillas observes in a personal message: “Gissing rarely commented on the illustrations of his short stories and apparently never on those of Almond, but he liked Fred Barnard’s to ‘The Fate of Humphrey Snell,’ as his correspondence shows. He duly noticed the reproduction by C. K. Shorter of the picture of Humphrey.” Shorter was the editor of the

English Illustrated Magazine. Gissing referred to Barnard in a number of letters. Gissing wrote to Algernon on 4 August 1894: “Barnard is a good man; he has illustrated some of Dickens fairly well” (5: 224). Gissing did not appreciate his renderings consistently. On 4 August 1894, Gissing recorded, in his diary: “Shorter sends a letter addressed to him by Fred Barnard, who is illustrating ‘Eve’s Ransom’, and who wishes to know whether I like the sketches of heads which he encloses. Dengate and Hilliard won’t do; wrote to Barnard with suggestions” (343). Barnard was eventually replaced because his alcoholic problems prevented him from meeting deadlines. Coustillas’ reference to Gissing’s correspondence above is to two letters about Barnard’s picture for “Humphrey Snell.” On 28 September 1895, Gissing wrote to Barnard: “I must really let you know how very much I am pleased with the full-page drawing you have done for my story in the new *English Illustrated*. I think it very beautiful, & excellent as a presentment of my thought. It shall be framed for my study-wall,—for indeed the picture is symbolical, & has more significance than the ordinary eye will discover in it” (6: 33). Gissing describes, in a letter to his sister Ellen on 15 November, “Did you see Fred Barnard’s beautiful illustration to ‘The Fate of Humphrey Snell?’—a favourite story of mine—symbolical of much, as Carlyle says” (6: 58). Gissing’s enthusiasm for the picture manifests itself also in his diary, in which he writes on 2 October, that Barnard promises to give him the original drawing (390). Whether or not Barnard kept his promise, Gissing liked it well enough to save a copy of the published piece and this is now in the Coustillas’ collection (6: 33; n. 2).

¹⁵ Gissing’s 1895 stories in the *English Illustrated Magazine* are often critical of individuals living and working alone. The titular character of “The Poet’s Portmanteau” (February) returns to London from a “Devon hermitage” (5). He pays a week’s rent for and leaves his belongings at a rented lodging without even getting a receipt. Moreover, as he reflects back on his tour de force, a poem written while he was living in Devon, eight years later, “on the whole he was glad he had never been published. To be sure, no publisher would have risked money on it. In his vague recollection, the thing seemed horribly crude; he remembered a line or two that made him shut his eyes and mutter inarticulately” (7). While this writer character learns that he had romanticized about the quality of previous work, the reclusive philologist of “In Honour Bound” (July) mistakenly thinks that his landlady, a widow, is in love with him when her kindness prevents her from confessing that he is in the way of her remarriage. The titular character of “The Fate of Humphrey Snell” (October) falls in love with and decides to marry Annie Frost just because she—in an allusion to *Julius Caesar*—“willingly lent ear” (9), and his previously-solitary existence led him to overread her attention: “He imagined she understood him, that her mute attention meant sympathy” (9). Gissing ends the story by punning on Annie’s kisses at the end of the letter in which she agrees to marry him: “There followed a row of crosses, which Humphrey found it easy to interpret. A cross is frequently set upon a grave; but he did not think of that” (10). Finally, it is only by dining and by conversing with a stranger, that Laurence Nangle, in “An Inspiration” (December) gains the courage to declare his affection for the woman he loves and who loves him in return, and thus averts miserable lives for them and, quite possibly, his own death in a workhouse.

¹⁶ James’ essay forms part of a larger conversation about fiction, as Adeline R. Tintner writes:

The entire literary controversy on the nature of fiction was started by Walter Besant on the occasion of his lecture, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ delivered at the Royal Institution, April 25, 1884. . . . which was followed by a short essay in the *Pall Mall Gazette* by Andrew Lang, also called ‘The Art of Fiction.’ This was followed by

'The Art of Fiction' by Henry James in *Longman's Magazine* for September 1884. This in turn called forth Stevenson's 'Humble Remonstrance' in the same magazine for December, 1884. (4)

Gissing wrote to Algernon on 2 May 1884: "Walter Besant has been instructing the Royal Institution how to write novels—*la belle idée!* All precept in such matters is useless" (2: 212). Tintner calls attention to the writer characters Harold Biffen's and Edwin Reardon's discussion about the art of fiction in *New Grub Street* (4). In response to Reardon's suggestion that "[t]here may surely exist such a thing as the art of fiction," Biffen asserts: "It is worked out. We must have a rest from it. You, now—the best things you have done are altogether in conflict with novelistic conventionalities. It was because that blackguard review of 'On Neutral Ground' clumsily hinted this that I first thought of you with interest. No, no; let us copy life" (176).

¹⁷ Critics have used the term "interlocutor" to describe the audience member in a dramatic monologue, a term that "acknowledges this active presence, pointing to the inherently intersubjective feature of what is otherwise too easily read as a merely intrasubjective drama" (Slinn 81).

¹⁸ Henry James would read Jameson's smile as a narrative act: "All writing is narration; to describe is simply to narrate things in their order of place, instead of events in their order of time" ("Miss Prescott's 'Azarian'" 27). As would Booth, "In a sense, every speech, every gesture, narrates" (*Fiction* 152).

¹⁹ Ralph W. Rader goes further when he argues for the need to recognize "the poet's creative and controlling role in the dramatic monologue" (136), that is, how he or she "simulates the activity of a person imagined as virtually real whom we understand as we would an 'other' natural person, inferring from outward act and expression to inward purpose" (150).

²⁰ Langbaum acknowledges the advantages that the dramatic monologue offers "the poet who is not committed to a religious position, or who is addressing readers not committed and not wanting to be ... The use of the speaker enables him to dramatize a position the possibilities of which he may want to explore as Browning explores the 'impossible' case. The speaker also enables him to dramatize an emotional apprehension in advance of or in conflict with his intellectual convictions . . ." (104).

Appendix

I have taken as Gissing's short stories all of those listed by Pierre Coustillas in *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*. Coustillas, as does Barbara Rawlinson in *A Man of Many Parts Gissing's Short Stories, Essays and Other Works*, includes, as Gissing's stories "The Death-Clock," "The Serpent-Charm," and "Dead and Alive," the authorship of which Coustillas and Robert Selig have debated in two issues of *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* in 1987. Figure 5 includes reprints of Gissing's stories. I thank Pierre and Hélène Coustillas for their help with both graphs.

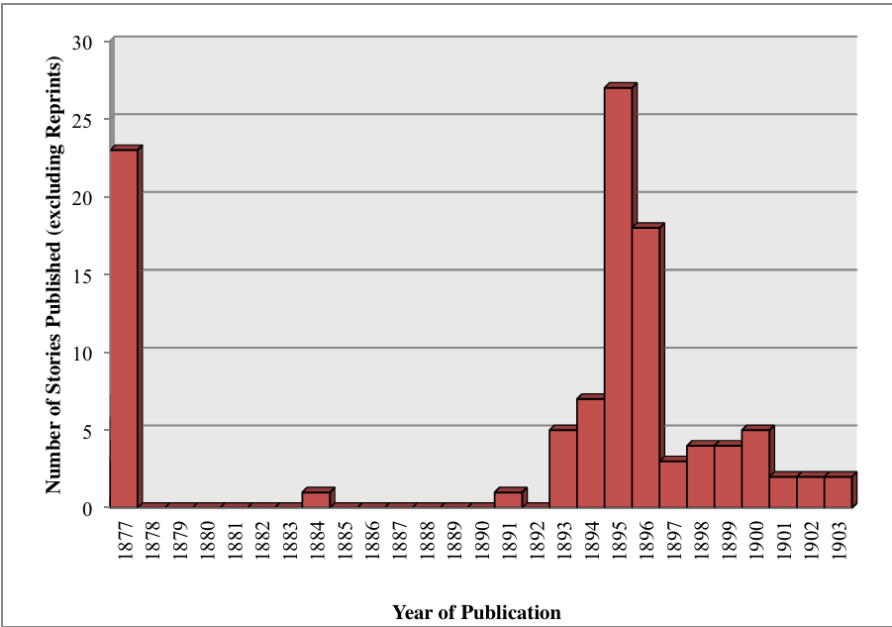


Fig. 4. Gissing's published stories year by year during his lifetime.

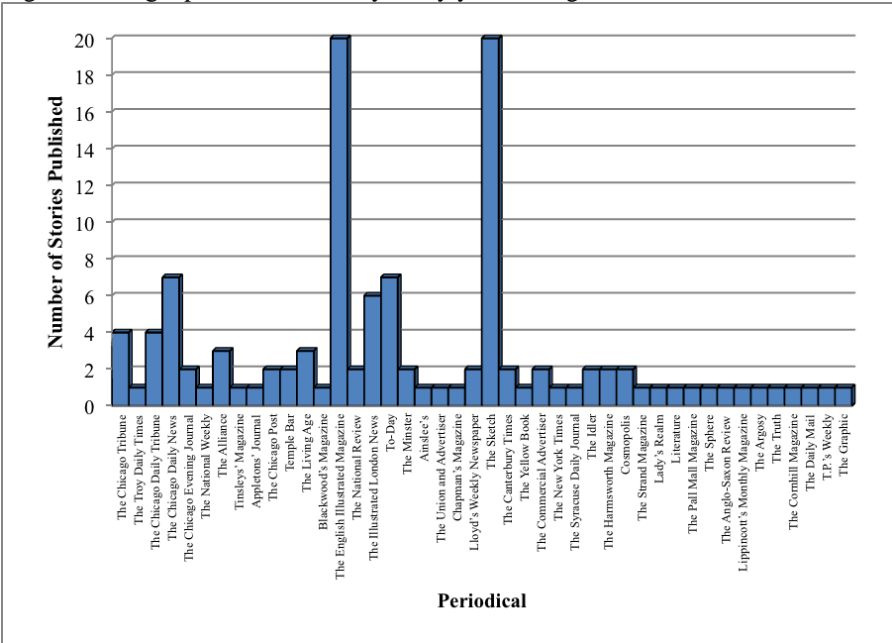


Fig. 5. Periodicals where Gissing's stories were published.

Bibliography

- Almond, William Douglas. Illustrations for "The Tyrant's Apology." *The English Illustrated Magazine* 142 (Jul. 1895): 297- 304. British Periodicals. Web. 6 Apr. 2011.
- Bate, W. Jackson. *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999. Print.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Second Edition. Chicago and London: The U of Chicago P, 1983. Print.
- . *A Rhetoric of Irony*. Chicago and London: The U of Chicago P, 1975. Print.
- Byron, Glennis. *Dramatic Monologue*. London: Routledge, 2003. Print. The New Critical Idiom.
- Chialant, Maria Teresa. "The Feminization of the City in Gissing's Fiction," in *A Garland for Gissing*. Ed. Bouwe Postmus. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi P, 2001, 51-65. Costerus New Series 138.
- Cohn, Dorrit. "Discordant Narration," *Style* 34.2 (Summer 2000): 307-16. Academic Search Complete. Web. 10 Feb. 2010.
- Coustillas, Pierre. *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*. High Wycombe: Rivendale P, 2005. Print.
- . "Gissing and the Theatre: A Lucid Outlook on 'The Drama in the Doldrums,'" *Gissing Journal* 37.3 (July 2001): 3-16. Web. 26 May 2011.
- . Message to the author. 10 Apr. 2011. E-mail.
- . "Private Tuition: A Burdensome Phase in Gissing's Life," *Gissing Journal* 43.1 (Jan. 2002): 25-36. Print.
- , and Robert Selig. "Unconvincing Gissing Attributions," *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 9.3 (Sept. 1987): 275-77. Oxford Journals. Web. 15 May 2011.
- Culler, A. Dwight. "Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue," *PMLA* 90.3 (May 1975): 366-85. JSTOR. Web. 2 Apr. 2011.
- Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. Ed. Nicola Bradbury. Pref. Terry Eagleton. London: Penguin Group, 2003. Print.
- . *David Copperfield*. Revised Edition. Ed. Jeremy Tambling. London: Penguin Group, 2004. Print.
- Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*. Introd. and Ed. Kyle Freeman. 2 vols. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003. Print.
- The English Illustrated Magazine* 142 (July 1895): 283-376. British Periodicals. Web. 6 Apr. 2011.
- Felluga, Dino Franco. "Novel Poetry: Transgressing the Law of Genre," *Whither Victorian Poetry?* Ed. Linda K. Hughes. Spec. issue of *Victorian Poetry* 41.4 (Winter 2003): 490-99. JSTOR. Web. 4 Apr. 2011.
- Gissing, George. "Bleak House," in *Essays, Introductions and Reviews*. Ed. and Introd. Pierre Coustillas. Grayswood: Grayswood P, 2004. 171-79. Print. Collected Works of George Gissing on Charles Dickens 1.

- . *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*. Ed. and Introd. Simon J. James. Grayswood: Grayswood P, 2004. Print. Collected Works of George Gissing on Charles Dickens 2.
- . *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*. Ed. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas. 9 vols. Athens: Ohio UP, 1990-97. Print.
- . "The Fate of Humphrey Snell," in *The English Illustrated Magazine* 145 (Oct. 1895): 0, 3-10. British Periodicals. Web. 26 May 2011.
- . "In Honour Bound," in *The English Illustrated Magazine* 139 (Apr. 1895): 79-88. British Periodicals. Web. 26 May 2011.
- . "An Inspiration," in *The English Illustrated Magazine* 147 (Dec. 1895): 268-75. British Periodicals. Web. 26 May 2011.
- . *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*. Ed. Pierre Coustillas. Hassocks: The Harvester P. Limited, 1978. Print.
- . "'My First Rehearsal' by George Gissing: An Unpublished Short Story." Introd. Pierre Coustillas. *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 9.1 (1966): 2-10. JSTOR. Web. 7 Mar. 2011.
- . *New Grub Street*. Ed. Bernard Bergonzi. London: Penguin Group, 1985. Print.
- . "The Poet's Portmanteau," in *The English Illustrated Magazine* 137 (Feb. 1895): 3-10. British Periodicals. Web. 26 May 2011.
- . *Three Novellas*. Ed. and Introd. Pierre Coustillas. Grayswood: Grayswood P, 2011. Print.
- . "The Tyrant's Apology," in *The English Illustrated Magazine* 142 (July 1895): 297-304. British Periodicals. Web. 6 Apr. 2011.
- . *Workers in the Dawn*. Ed. Pierre Coustillas. Brighton: Harvester P, 1985. Print.
- Horne, Philip. "Henry James and the Economy of the Short Story," in *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace*. Ed. Ian Willison, Warwick Gould, and Warren Chernaik. Houndmills: Macmillan P Ltd., 1996. 1-35. Print.
- James, Henry. "The Art of Fiction," in *Literary Criticism, Volume 1: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*. Ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson. New York: The Library of America, 1984. 44-65. Print.
- . *Collected Stories*. Selected and Introd. John Bailey. 2 vols. New York: Everyman's Library-Alfred A. Knopf, 1999. Print.
- . "Miss Prescott's 'Azarian,'" in *Notes and Reviews*. Cambridge: Dunster House, 1921. 16-32. Internet Archive. Web. 2 Apr. 2011.
- . "The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*," in *Quarterly Review* 217 (July 1912): 68-87. Rpt. in *Literary Criticism, Volume 1: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*. Vol. 1. Ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson. New York: The Library of America, 1984. 791-811.
- Langbaum, Robert. *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1957. Print.
- Maynard, John. "Speaker, Listener, and Overhearer: The Reader in the Dramatic Poem," in *Meeting the Brownings*. Ed. Adrienne Auslander Munich and John

- Maynard. Spec. issue of *Browning Institute Studies* 15 (1987): 105-12. JSTOR. Web. 18 May 2011.
- Parrinder, Patrick. "'Turn Again, Dick Whittington!': Dickens, Wordsworth, and the Boundaries of the City," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32.2 (2004): 407-19. JSTOR. Web. 11 May 2012.
- Primeau, Ronald. "Longman's Magazine," in *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837-1913*. Ed. Alvin Sullivan. Westport: Greenwood P, 1984. 209-13. Print. Hist. Guides to the World's Periodicals and Newspapers.
- Rawlinson, Barbara. *A Man of Many Parts: Gissing's Short Stories, Essays and Other Works*. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi P, 2006. Print.
- Scholes, Robert, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. Fortieth Anniversary Edition. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. Print.
- Selig, Robert. "Unconvincing Gissing Attributions: 'The Death-Clock,' 'The Serpent-Charms,' 'Dead and Alive,'" *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 9.2 (June 1987): 169-72. Oxford Journals. Web. 15 May 2011.
- Sessions, Ina Beth. "The Dramatic Monologue," *PMLA* 62.2 (June 1947): 503-16. JSTOR. Web. 2 Apr. 2011.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. Ed. Stanley Wells et al. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. Print.
- "Shop-walker." Def. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Web. 15 May 2011.
- Slinn, E. Warwick. "Dramatic Monologue," in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*. Ed. Richard Cronin. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002. 80-98. Print.
- Sloan, John. "Gissing and Hogarth," in *A Garland for Gissing*. Ed. Bouwe Postmus. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi P, 2001. 249-59. Print. Costerus New Series 138.
- Tintner, Adeline R. "Some Notes for a Study of the Gissing Phase in Henry James's Fiction," *Gissing Newsletter* 16.3 (July 1980): 1-15. Web. 18 June 2011.
- Tucker, Herbert F. Jr. "Monomania to Monologue: 'St. Simeon Stylites' and the Rise of the Victorian Dramatic Monologue," *The Dramatic "I" Poem*. Ed. Linda M. Shires. Spec. issue of *Victorian Poetry* 22.2 (Summer 1984): 121-37. JSTOR. Web. 2 Apr. 2011.
- White, Lieutenant-Colonel George F. "Twice-Told," in *The English Illustrated Magazine* 142 (July 1895): 309-14. British Periodicals. Web. 26 May 2011.

The Othello of Herne Hill

M. D. ALLEN
University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley

Literate readers of *The Odd Women* will inevitably think of Othello when they reach that stage of the novel in which Edmund Widdowson's jealousy- and rage-fueled degradation is recounted. David Grylls has some lines on the subject:

Widdowson is cast throughout the novel as a kind of ignoble Othello. Requiring "ocular proof" of his wife's movements, he tells her he would rather she died than ceased to love him and broods on a "tragic close" to his life—"he would kill himself and Monica should perish with him"; convinced that he has proved her unfaithful, he even pores over her sleeping form, "muttering savagely under his breath." "The Othello business won't do," his former sister-in-law eventually tells him. By this time, though, the symptoms of sexual jealousy have also broken out in Rhoda, and when Everard identifies himself with Othello by resolving that "He would whistle her down the wind," he unwittingly aligns himself with Widdowson. (175)

Grylls' endnote (215, n. 83) refers us to what in the edition I have to hand is *Othello* III.iii.261-63 and 360 ("Though that her jesses were my dear heartstrings,/I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind/To prey at fortune" and "Be sure of it; give me ocular proof." Gissing uses the latter phrase when Widdowson lingers to see that Monica actually is going where she says she is: "[He] did not turn away until he had ocular proof of his wife's admittance to the house where Miss Vesper lived" [166]). Grylls' endnote points out another allusion: "cf. also Widdowson's, 'What? You go time after time to the private chambers of an unmarried man . . . and it means no harm?' [. . .]; with Iago's, 'What,/To kiss in private? . . . Or to be naked with her friend abed,/An hour, or more, not meaning any harm?'" (257; IV.i.2-5).

There is a little more to say. The novel's climactic Chapter 24 ("Tracked") is a suburban rewrite of *Othello* V.ii, with a nod to IV.ii. In particular, Monica's utterances are influenced by words of Desdemona and Iago in ways and places that have hitherto escaped notice.

Act V, scene ii begins with Othello bringing artificial light in the form of a candle into Desdemona's bedroom and examining his beautiful young wife with a mixture of anguish and inextinguishable love (1-22). Widdowson, at the beginning of "Tracked," turns up the gaslight and steadily regards Monica ("her lips were just apart, her eyelids lay softly with their black fringe of exquisite pencilling, and her hair was arranged as she always prepared it for the pillow") but self-righteous indignation is his

primary emotion, nor, an “ignoble Othello,” will he in this or later scenes ever rise above his personal and class limitations (252).

The next day, unaware that she is being followed by a hired detective, Monica attempts to see Bevis, fails, and wretchedly returns home. She tells her husband that she has been out to see Miss Barfoot. He throws her to her knees (“the desire of crushing out her life [was] for an instant all his consciousness”) and accuses her of being an “adulteress.” On three occasions she denies the accusation without being able to repeat the word: “I am not! I am not that! . . . I am not guilty of what you believe . . . I am not what you called me” (256, 257, 258). Gissing here remembers Desdemona’s shocked and incredulous inability to get the word “whore” past her teeth after Othello has repeatedly flung it at her.

EMILIA: Alas, Iago, my lord hath so bewhored her,
 Thrown such despite and heavy terms upon her
 As true hearts cannot bear.

DESDEMONA: Am I that name, Iago?

IAGO: What name, fair lady?

DESDEMONA: Such as she said my lord did say I was. (IV.ii. 115-19)

Four times Monica refuses to answer Widdowson’s accusations. Immediately after saying, “I am not guilty of what you believe” she remarks, “But I shan’t try to defend myself,” later repeating “I shall answer no question whatever,” “I shall answer no question,” then “I will explain nothing” (257, 257, 258, 258). Here Gissing, his mind drenched in the Shakespearean scene, remembers Iago’s final words: “Demand me nothing. What you know, you know./ From this time forth I never will speak word” (V.ii.303-304). It is perhaps worth noting that after Monica’s third refusal to explain, Gissing writes of Widdowson, “He took a step forward, the demon in his face.” This is possibly a memory of Othello’s description of Iago, a mere two lines before the latter’s refusal to speak, as “that demi-devil.”

Tragic grandeur is no part of the world of this lower-middle-class Othello. The scene between Widdowson and his wife ends when Monica successfully makes a run for it: “[Monica’s] will was stronger than his. Only by homicide can a man maintain his dignity in a situation of this kind; Widdowson could not kill his wife, and every moment that he stood there made him more ridiculous, more contemptible” (259).

Widdowson has ludicrously “begun to esteem [Monica] a mistress in craft and intrigue” (258), as Othello had pitifully made the same mistake

about the pure and good Desdemona. The focus of Othello's jealousy is his lieutenant Cassio; Widdowson suspects Everard Barfoot. There is a generic similarity between Cassio and Everard, if not between Othello and Widdowson. Both are manifest gentlemen and successful ladies' men, suave and poised. Cassio gallantly and eloquently (and, of course, innocently) praises Desdemona's beauty as he waits for her to land in Cyprus (II. i. 61-64, 67-73, 82-87); when Iago crassly tries to start a man-to-man, coarsely appreciative conversation about that beauty with his officer, Cassio coolly slaps him down four times (II.iii.13-23). Presumably Cassio has won the promotion that Iago claims so to resent in part because, unlike the "ancient," he will not offend the susceptibilities of the officers' mess, so to speak. The sources of Widdowson's jealousy of Everard are made clear: "Possibly the ease of Everard's bearing, the something aristocratic in his countenance and his speech, the polish of his manner, especially in formal converse with women, from the first gave offence to Widdowson's essentially middle-class sensibilities" (245).

These admittedly minor borrowings do not necessitate a radical re-reading of what seems presently to be Gissing's most widely taught novel. They do, however, constitute yet more evidence of Gissing's magpie readiness to let his constant and omnivorous reading inspire and shape his own works.

Gissing, George. *The Odd Women*. 1893. Ed. Arlene Young. Peterborough, ONT: Broadview, 1998.

Grylls, David. *The Paradox of Gissing*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1986.

George Gissing and Edgar Allan Poe – Part Two

GEORGE GORNIAK

Part One of this essay on Poe and Gissing surveyed the impact of Poe on the early short stories of George Gissing.¹ Five short stories were particularly singled out as bearing unmistakable influences of Poe: "The Death-Clock," "The Serpent-Charm," "Dead and Alive," "Cain and Abel" and "The Quarry on the Heath." Part Two now looks at the influence of Poe on the novels of Gissing – specifically his first published novel *Workers in the Dawn*.²

The previous essay discussed in detail the major Poe-esque content of "The Quarry on the Heath," written in 1881, and concluding that this was

the last major influence of Poe to be found in Gissing's writing. Extracts were presented showing how Gissing had closely modelled his story on Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." One extract was omitted from that selection as it was deemed rather minor, but the Poe-esque influences to be found in *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) are undeniably connected with it.

In "The Fall of the House of Usher"³ Poe sheds light on Roderick Usher's dark, foreboding and hypochondriac nature by describing, through the words of the narrator, his library and his choice of reading. These are set forth in the following list of esoteric, occult and mystical works:

... the books which for years, had formed no small part of the mental existence of the invalid – were, as might be supposed, in strict keeping with this character of phantasm. We pored together over such works as the Ververt et Chartreuse of Gresset; the Belphegor of Machiavelli; the Heaven and Hell of Swedenborg; the Subterranean Voyage of Nicholas Klimm by Holberg; the Chiromancy of Robert Flud, of Jean D'Indaginé, and of De la Chambre; the Journey into the Blue Distance of Tieck; and the City of the Sun of Campanella. One favourite volume was a small octavo edition of the Directorium Inquisitorum, by the Dominican Eymeric de Gironne; and there were passages in Pomponius Mela, about the old African Satyrs and Ægipans, over which Usher would sit dreaming for hours. His chief delight, however, was found in the perusal of an exceedingly rare and curious book in quarto Gothic – the manual of a forgotten church – the Vigiliæ Mortuorum secundum Chorum Ecclesiæ Maguntinæ. (328)

Despite some of the outré titles all these works described by Poe are genuine. In "The Quarry on the Heath"⁴ Gissing uses the same technique, although here in a pared down version without mentioning any specific titles. His object is to highlight the Rev. Lashmore's narrow outlook on life by describing his library as consisting of "nothing but works of controversial theology" and censoriously observing, "in literature he took no interest whatever." (250)

In *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing resorts more fully to Poe's technique to shed light on the character and philosophy of Samuel Tollady, the benefactor of Arthur Golding, the hero of the novel, by describing in lengthy detail the books he kept on his shelves:

One side of the parlour was occupied by a large book-case, which contained the whole of Mr. Tollady's library. It was not extensive, but select in the choice of works. Here were the principal English classics, most of them evidently having been purchased second-hand, and also a few French and German books. The library was evidently that of a man who had known how to cultivate judiciously the emotional side of his nature; the only books

really bound with any degree of richness were the poets. Theological works there were none, and natural science was alone represented by a few works on botany; but the collection of histories was complete and good. The lowest shelf was occupied by the Penny Cyclopædia, an old folio edition of Johnson's Dictionary, and a number of large volumes laid flat, one on the other, the contents of which could not be guessed at. (86-87)

In a later chapter Gissing again makes use of this technique to describe in detail the character and reading of Will Noble, the leader of an early working men's club:

Noble had drawn a little deal-topped table near to the fire, apparently with the intention of reading. At his elbow lay open a volume of Mill's 'Political Economy,' and on the table were also volumes exhibiting the names of Ricardo and Malthus. On one side of the room was a small book-case, containing some thirty or forty books of a very substantial appearance, a closer examination of which would have shown them nearly all to be works bearing on social problems. The library was an index to its owner's mind... Though tender-hearted as few men are, he knew little of literature in its more humanising products; poetry and all the sweet and tender off-shoots of the imagination he cared nothing for.⁵ (438-439)

Helen Norman, the heroine of the novel, has characteristics of many of Poe's tragic heroines. She is a virginal girl full of ethereal beauty, kindness and delicacy, and is fated, like many of Poe's heroines, to die young, of consumption. The first signs of the disease are presented in an ominous Poe-esque fashion. Note also the use of the Poe-esque word for the bedroom:

On reaching home she at once sought her own chamber. The excitement of the evening had brought on a severe headache, and this, combined with her cold, made her feel so ill that she was glad to extinguish the light and seek rest at once. It was some time before her thoughts would allow her to become sufficiently composed to sleep, and when at last her eyes closed it was only in a troubled slumber, broken by shapeless dreams. These at length assumed the form of a terrible nightmare, in which she seemed to be struggling for her life with some fearful monster which had encircled her throat and was stifling her. Just as the agony was becoming intolerable it awoke her. She was coughing with dreadful violence, each gasp causing her excruciating pain. When the fit came to an end, she reached her hand to the table which stood beside her bed, and struck a match. The little flame shot up, illuminating the hand that held it, but surely with a strange light. The colour of her fingers was blood-red. For a moment she thought her eyes were deceiving her, but then she felt something warm upon her lips. She wiped them with her other hand, and that too became red. Then she knew

that it was really blood which she saw. The same moment the match went out between her fingers, and she shuddered with horror in the darkness. (464-465)

The heightened prose is sustained in the following chapter:

After the dread waking from the nightmare she had scarcely closed her eyes, but had lain through the long silent hours struggling with a fearful spectre in her thoughts scarcely less terrible than that which had oppressed her dreams. ... In the dim radiance which kept her company during this night of suffering she saw pass her bed the terrible forms of Disease, Despair and Death, and it seemed as though another ghostly shadow which had taken its place by her side whispered their names to her as they passed, and the name of the shadow itself was Fear. (466)

Here, Gissing mirrors Poe's use of the concept of Fear in "The Fall of the House of Usher," where Roderick Usher describes the same condition: "I dread the events of the future ... I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR." (322)

After this first shock of the illness Helen's health seems to improve. However it is only a temporary respite, as catalogued over the succeeding chapters: "...despite the fact that her health was unmistakably giving way, that the dread signs of hereditary disease daily became more pronounced – no argument could as yet induce her to cease from her daily work." (575); "The increasing paleness of her cheek, the constant cough,..." (576); "Often in the early summer dawns she awoke from a brief and troubled slumber, crying 'Arthur! Arthur!' In her dreams she was for ever seeking him, seeking him over wild, trackless deserts, amidst ghastly shapes and horrors unutterable." (577)

Helen's dreams foreshadow in Poe-esque fashion an ominous future. Arthur Golding is already married to Carrie – but separated due to his wife's alcoholic addiction. Helen is initially unaware of Arthur's marriage but when she is apprised of the situation, despite her great love for Arthur, she urges him to take Carrie back. This process is the start of the downfall of Arthur, who realises that life with Carrie will be impossible, and sees his future hopes of life with Helen come to nothing. After a second separation from Carrie, Arthur flees to America in search of a new life, still with the dream that a future with Helen may some day be possible. This dream is shattered when news reaches him of Helen's death.

In Part One of this essay mention was made of Gissing's ability to mask the literary allusions in his short stories. This is also the case with the

novels. Gissing always attached great significance to the names of his characters and it is significant to note that Poe composed two poems with the title “To Helen.” The first poem is the well-known and highly regarded love poem to the classical “Helen.” The second “To Helen,” though not such an artistic success, is of more significance here. After the death of Helen the narrator is kept alive by his vision of Helen’s eyes. His love and devotion to his Helen reflects closely that of Arthur’s for Helen Norman:

They *would not* go – they never yet have gone.
Lighting my lonely pathway home that night,
They have not left me (as my hopes have) since.
They follow me – they lead me through the years.
They are my ministers – yet I their slave,
Their office is to illumine and enkindle –
My duty, *to be saved* by their bright light,
And purified in their electric fire,
And sanctified in their elysian fire. (96-97)

Note Poe’s italicised wording here with the religious overtone – *to be saved* – indicating the saving power of Helen’s love for the narrator. This resonates with Arthur’s view of his Helen when in a letter to her he includes the following line “for will you not indeed be my salvation ...” (508). Helen’s love for Arthur sustains him while she is alive, but unlike the love for the narrator in Poe’s poem, it is unable to sustain him after her death. The last chapter of *Workers in the Dawn* titled “The End” is the most melodramatic and sensational of the whole novel. It is also full of Poe-esque allusions. To understand these allusions fully two extensive quotes from this chapter need to be given. Both of these depict the violence of nature – of wild oceans wastes and seething cataracts – areas of fundamental importance to Poe’s vision. In the first we have a description of Arthur’s voyage by ship from Liverpool to New York:

The voyage proved long and stormy ... When he lay in his berth at night, listening to the lash and thunder of the waves against the sides of the vessel; to the cracking and straining of the masts and cordage, to the shrill whistle upon deck ... his heart was filled with a wild wish that the winds might sweep yet more fiercely upon the heaving water, that the ocean might swell up to mountainous waves, such deep delight did he experience in the midst of the grand new scene ... Throughout the day, no stress of weather could suffice to keep him below. It was his chief pleasure to sit in the stern, in the shelter of the wheel-house, from whence he could overlook the whole length of the ship as it plunged down the sides of the huge water-gulfs. How little

she looked, for all her thousands of tons burden, and what a mere mite she would have made in the gullet of the insatiable deep! Then, to turn and look down into the frothy hell beneath the stern; to watch for minutes the fierce whirlpool where the untiring screw was struggling amid a thousand conflicting currents, and then to feel the vessel rising upwards, upwards, till at length a mountain of deep green water surged from beneath her, showing a surface smooth and solid-looking as ice, threatening the very sky in its upward striving. ... the thought of his security in the midst of such terrors gave him a loftier and truer conception of human powers than he had yet attained to. (594-595)

After landing in America followed by an unsettled year of wandering Arthur finds a room in a house from where he can hear “a heavy deep-noted unceasing roar” emanating from the cataract of Niagara which is “not quite ten minutes’ walk from his door ... The never-ending roar of waters bade him look back upon his life and see how every purpose had been frustrated; or, if he yet ventured to raise an eye towards the future, murmured sternly, “Too late! Too late!” (595-597)

Here we have again the all-pervading water motive with the ever present deep roar of the cataract. Arthur’s sternly murmuring of “Too late! Too late!” is in the typical style of Poe – especially noticeable in “The Raven” with its mournful, repeated refrain of “Nevermore! Nevermore!”

On reading in a newspaper of Helen’s death at Mentone, in her twenty-second year, Arthur gives up all hope and heads out to the cataract of Niagara:

A full moon reigned in the heavens, making it almost as light as day, though tingeing everything with her own peculiar silvery hue. Just on the edge of the precipice, where the gathered waters took their fearful plunge, hung a second full orb, a perfect reflection of that above, the clear, luminous circle seeming scarcely disturbed by a wrinkle on the surface, the hue of which was a pale emerald. From the abyss into which the torrent disappeared rose vast columns of spray, transparent, glistening with a marvellous brilliancy, fading at length into the air like breath. Along either shore of the river, and on the dark barrier which Goat Island interposes between the American and Horse-shoe Falls, frost had built all manner of fantastic shapes, seizing upon the feebler jets of water which part from the main mass, and holding them suspended half way down the precipice as gigantic icicles; freezing the spray as it fell, layer upon layer, till huge blocks had been formed; daring even to encroach upon the very edge of the majestic cataract, and skim it with weird bridges, firm as adamant. And over all this was spread a thick coat of snow, itself frozen into a thousand strange forms, making the eye ache to behold its dazzling purity. ... And

from the midst of all this dread magnificence spoke the solemn voice, not harshly loud, not so overpowering as to render other noises mute, but in subdued, melodious thunder, as though proclaiming with calm, passionless decision, the immutable power of destiny. (598-599)

Here Gissing introduces a mystical tone reminiscent of Poe and continues, together, with the ever-present water motive – leading on to the tragic conclusion:

...he found himself straying amid the billows of life like a wrecked and manless ship upon an ebbing sea. ... he drew nearer to the edge of the cliffs ... His eyes were fixed upon the cataract ... So long and so fixedly had he gazed, that the plunging water had begun to exercise a terrible fascination over him; involuntarily he drew nearer and nearer. The deep, musical voice from out of the hidden depths seemed to call to him irresistibly, and he followed. A wild and mad longing to probe the dread mysteries veiled beneath that curtain of ever-rising spray took despotic hold upon him; with a delicious joy he contemplated a struggle with the roaring whirlpools, with a fierce longing yearned to experience their unimaginable horrors. ... he gained the elevation of a huge shapeless block which seemed to promise him a view straight down into the depths. But still the mists gathered thick beneath him, and from out of it called to him the voice of the whirlpool, now so loud within his ears that at length it silenced thought. For a moment his blood boiled, his pulses leaped, his brain was on fire with the fierce joy of madness; in the next he shrieked in a voice which overcame that of the Falls, "Helen! Helen!" and plunged into the abyss. (600)

Poe was always interested in portraying the forces of nature in his tales and especially those of the violent seas and bizarre natural phenomena such as whirlpools, cataracts and the vast icy, unexplored regions of the South. His interest can be primarily charted in the short stories "MS. Found in a Bottle" (1833), "A Descent into the Maelström" (1841), and his novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838).

Each of these stories is instructive here. "A Descent into the Maelström" tells of the destruction of a schooner in a gigantic whirlpool off the Norwegian coast and the fantastic yet believable survival of one of the fishermen. The maelström is situated in the Lofoden region and described precisely as lying between the island of Moscoe and the shore. There is then an explanation of the cause of the maelström followed by an actual description of one sighted by the narrator from his mountain top position. It is tellingly compared to the Niagara Falls: "The edge of the whirl was represented by a broad belt of gleaming spray; but no particle of this slipped into the mouth of the terrific funnel, whose interior, as far as the

eye could fathom it, was a smooth, shining, and jet-black wall of water ... speeding dizzily round and round with a swaying and sweltering motion, and sending forth to the winds an appalling voice, half shriek, half roar, such as not even the mighty cataract of Niagara ever lifts up in its agony to Heaven.” (434-435)

The story relates how the fishermen and their boat were caught up in a sudden storm and gradually pulled across the mountainous water towards the maelström. Here we can see similarities with Gissing’s description of Arthur’s stormy voyage across the Atlantic together with the scene at the Falls:

...the seas, which at first had been kept down by the wind ... now got up into absolute mountains ... Around in every direction it was still as black as pitch, but nearly overhead there burst out, all at once, a circular rift of clear sky – as clear as I ever saw – and of a deep brightest blue – and through it there blazed forth the full moon with a lustre that I had never before knew her to wear. She lit up every thing about us with the greatest distinctness ... (441)

... presently a gigantic sea happened to take us right under the counter, and bore us with it as it rose – up – up – as if into the sky. I would not have believed that any wave could ride so high. And then down we came with a sweep, a slide, and a plunge ... as if I was falling from some lofty mountain-top ... I began to reflect how magnificent a thing it was to die in such a manner, and how foolish it was in me to think of so paltry a consideration as my own individual life ... Never shall I forget the sensations of awe, horror, and admiration with which I gazed about me ... the rays of the full moon ... streamed in a flood of golden glory along the black walls, and far away down into the inmost recesses of the abyss. ... but the yell that went up to the Heavens from out of that mist, I dare not attempt to describe. (442-445)

Poe’s earlier tale “MS. Found in a Bottle” if anything is an even more fantastic tale. Here we have a similar situation in which a cargo ship sailing in the Malay archipelago is caught up in a storm and carried far off course – “farther to the southward than any previous navigators.” The stormy and mountainous seas are again a recurring factor: “At times we gasped for breath at an elevation beyond the albatross – at times became dizzy with the velocity of our descent into some watery hell ...” During one of the storms they collide with a strange looking vessel and the narrator is hurled through the air and into the rigging of this “ghost ship.” The vessel with its ghostly crew is then carried by a mysterious current ever further to the south and

into regions again reminiscent of Gissing's descriptions of the frozen Niagara Falls:

All in the immediate vicinity of the ship is the blackness of eternal night, and a chaos of foamless water; but, about a league on either side of us, may be seen, indistinctly and at intervals, stupendous ramparts of ice, towering away into the desolate sky ... the ship proves to be in a current ... which howling and shrieking by the white ice, thunders on to the southward with a velocity like the headlong dashing of a cataract. (198)

Unlike the narrator in "A Descent into the Maelström," the narrator here does not escape the chaos of the fast approaching whirlpool. His fate in the icy depths of the water has parallels with that of Arthur Golding:

To conceive the horror of my sensations is, I presume, utterly impossible ... It is evident that we are hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge – some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction ... Oh, horror upon horror! – the ice opens suddenly to the right, and to the left, and we are whirling dizzily ... we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool – and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and of tempest, the ship is quivering ... going down! (198-199)

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym has similarities to both tales already described. Here we have a ship and crew that are sailing on a voyage of discovery to the Antarctic. After numerous and horrific adventures the two surviving crew escape from an island of savages in a small boat still heading southward into the icy wastes of the Antarctic and towards Poe's deliberate enigmatic ending. Of special note is an incident in a preceding chapter where the crew are trying to escape down the steep side of an island cliff. Here the narrator is overcome with his fear of heights and his desire to jump anticipates that of Arthur Golding:

At length arrived that crisis of fancy ... in which we begin to anticipate the feelings with which we shall fall – to picture to ourselves the sickness, and dizziness, and the last struggle, and the half swoon, and the final bitterness of the rushing and headlong descent. And now I found these fancies creating their own realities ... There was a ringing in my ears, and I said, "This is my knell of death!" ... and, with a wild, indefinable emotion, half of horror, half of a relieved oppression, I threw my vision far down into the abyss ... my whole soul was pervaded with a longing to fall; a desire, a yearning, a passion utterly uncontrollable ... there came a spinning of the brain; a shrill-sounding and phantom voice screamed within my ears; a dusky, fiendish, and filmy figure stood immediately beneath me; and, sighing, I sunk down with a bursting heart, and plunged within its arms. (1170-1171)

The enigmatic finale of Poe's narrative has an added mystical dimension when a large white shrouded figure is perceived through the curtain of the cataract. Gissing's narrative ends on a similar mystical note when Arthur Golding has "a wild mad longing to probe the dread mysteries veiled beneath that curtain of ever-rising spray" and "to experience their unimaginable horrors."

Any of the above texts taken in isolation may not be conclusive, but the cumulative weight of the descriptive parallels is difficult to ignore. Another detail that should not be overlooked here is the similarity of the names – Arthur Gordon and Arthur Golding.⁶ The narrative of Arthur Golding may be more realistic than that of Arthur Gordon but both end in an icy and cataclysmic finale.

Gissing's fascination with water and death is by no means confined to *Workers in the Dawn*. Harold Cuthbertson's death in a dark and icy pool in "The Quarry on the Heath" has already been noted. In Gissing's very first published tale "The Sins of the Fathers" both male and female protagonists perish in the icy wastes of a river: "She answered with a wild shriek of laughter, clasped him fiercely round the neck, and dragged him down the steps. In vain he tried to struggle, for she was nerved with the strength of frenzy. There was a plunge, a cracking as the thin layer of ice gave way, a splashing of the water on the lowest step, and then all was still. The thick snow soon made the river once more a smooth white surface ..." (18). In "Brownie" the tale concludes with the death of the guilt-ridden Denby: "Just then a faint, gleaming moonlight fell across the path, and disclosed the figure of Brownie stopping the way ... Denby's eyes fell upon her, and he uttered a cry of horror. Covering his face with his hands, he took a wild plunge, and the waters of the river closed over him" (177). After concluding *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing turned to writing a shorter work, the novella *All for Love*, completed in early 1880. Here the murderer, Laurence Bloomfield and his victim, the blackmailing Philip Vanstone also end up in the depths of an icy river.⁷

Apart from the water and death motive, there are more conventional Gothic episodes to be found in *Workers in the Dawn*. Parts of chapter 23, "The Shadow of Death," seems to be an exercise in the Gothic mode. The opening paragraph describing Golding's discovery of the dead body of his benefactor, Mr Tollady, is overtly Poe-esque and indeed is quite unexpected after the more conventional preceding chapters – but all the more effective for that:

Speechless and horror-stricken, Arthur Golding stood for a full minute, holding with his right hand the dead man upright in the chair, while the candle, still close to the pale features, trembled in his left. Involuntarily he had endeavoured to give utterance to a cry of pain and terror, but, though his lips were widely parted, no sound escaped them. The eyes of the corpse were still open, and seemed to gaze upon him with a resemblance to life which held him fixed as with a horrible charm. At length he forced himself to turn away and put down the light upon the table; then he once more leaned his ear close against the breathless lips, and, suddenly seized with terror at the dreadful silence, fled from the room out into the street. (262)

Gissing's choice of words such as "corpse," "horrible charm," and "seized with terror" heighten this small tableau of Gothic horror, fittingly illuminated by flickering candlelight. The bizarre description of the gloomy and fanatical John Pether, one of Tollady's friends, related in the same chapter, is a continuation in the same Gothic vein: "His face was strongly smeared with grime, and his long, skeleton-like hands, which rent the silk as if they took a pleasure in destruction, were black and hairy like those of a gorilla. The effect of his eyes, as he turned them upon Arthur's sudden entrance, was that of two very small black spots in the centre of two spheres of gleaming white." (262)

Despite these extracts highlighting the continued Poe-esque association, this novel remains an early representation of the realism that Gissing was introducing into his works – together with the characteristic autobiographical elements such as the voyage to America and the foreshadowing here of the disastrous marriage to Nell. However, Gissing studies have moved on from viewing the novels and short stories purely from an autobiographical angle. Apart from the many literary allusions that can be found in his writings scholars have now unearthed literary plot elements in the stories and novels ranging from Shakespeare⁸ through to Dickens⁹ and Walter Pater.¹⁰ These are not always easy to discover as Gissing was a master at camouflaging these influences within his text.

Poe remains an early and important literary influence. In many ways he was a kindred spirit and Gissing would have revelled in the multitude of classical allusions, the wide and recondite learning, together with the complex symbolism and psychology to be found in both his tales and poems. That his knowledge of Poe was extensive and deep is clearly evident in Gissing's early short stories and *Workers in the Dawn*. Gissing's fascination with Poe lasted over a period of six years stretching from 1876 through to 1881. Although the influence of Poe certainly declined after

1881 further allusions undoubtedly remain to be discovered in both his early and later works.

¹ George Gorniak, "George Gissing and Edgar Allan Poe," *Gissing Journal*, January 2012, pp. 1-12.

² George Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn*, ed. Debbie Harrison, Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2010. All page numbers in the essay refer to this edition.

³ Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Tales*, New York: The Library of America, 1984, pp. 317-36. Page numbers to all Poe's stories and poems mentioned in the text refer to this edition.

⁴ George Gissing, *Collected Short Stories: Volume One*, Grayswood, Surrey: Grayswood Press, 2011, pp. 242-58. Page numbers to all Gissing short stories mentioned in the text refer to this edition.

⁵ Gissing would use this technique in a number of his later novels as well. A good example can be found in the description of the books in the library of Richard Mutimer in chapter five of Gissing's third published novel *Demos* (1886).

⁶ Arthur Gordon Pym's companion on the first part of his voyage is Augustus Barnard. The same unusual Christian name is shared by Augustus Whiffle in *Workers in the Dawn*.

⁷ George Gissing, *All for Love* in *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*, ed. Pierre Coustillas, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970, pp. 105-78. In a survey of the twenty-three recorded suicides in Gissing's works, Bouwe Postmus records eight deaths by water, seven of them in the early stories up to *Workers in the Dawn*. The final suicide by water takes place in *Denzil Quarrier* which is a later reworking of the novella *All for Love*. See "A Coroner's Reports: Gissing as a Registrar Extraordinary of Self-Inflicted Death" by Bouwe Postmus in *Writing Otherness: The Pathways of George Gissing's Imagination*, ed. Christine Huguet, Equilibris, 2010, pp. 277-94. The majority of later suicides in Gissing's novels and short stories are by poisoning.

⁸ "A Midsummer's Madness," ed. Barbara Rawlinson in *Spellbound, George Gissing*, ed. Christine Huguet, Equilibris, 2008, pp. 93-98.

⁹ See for example M. D. Allen, "Bleak House and *The Emancipated*," *Gissing Journal*, October 2007, pp. 17-27, and M. D. Allen, "Our Mutual Friend: A Source for *A Life's Morning*," *Gissing Journal*, July 2011, pp. 16-24.

¹⁰ Adeline Tintner, "Eve Madeley: Gissing's Mona Lisa," *Gissing Journal*, January 1981, pp. 1-8.

Notes and News

As is well-known to historians of the press, research in old newspapers and journals is endless. Whether we circumscribe our research to the English press or not, a considerable amount of new material becomes available every day and only specific research is likely to make sense. However, some scholars are not easily discouraged and there are plenty of areas that are sure to bear fruit. Very likely Markus Neacey is one of the few exceptions we have in mind, and our hopes were not disappointed a few weeks ago when he sent us a list of items which confirms our

impression that the epithet “definitive,” as one of our publishers should have known a few years ago, is sure to become meaningless sooner or later.

Who could have guessed that “Snapshall’s Youngest,” one of Gissing’s last short stories, had appeared in the *Sunderland Weekly Echo and Times* on Saturday, 29 June 1901, p. 5? Or that the same story was printed in the *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald* on Saturday, 8 October 1904, p. 3? Apparently no one so far had mentioned Björnstjerne Björnson’s interest in Gissing, but Markus Neacey discovered in the *Northern Echo* for 10 December 1897, under “Northern Echo: Daily Notes,” a paragraph devoted to the Norwegian writer, who indeed until a few months earlier had never heard of his English colleague. Presented with a copy of *Born in Exile* by an English tourist met by chance, Björnson is said to have “after a perusal of a very few pages of Mr. Gissing’s fine work” declared emphatically “He can paint.” Perhaps Gissing heard of this; at all events he sent Björnson a presentation copy of *The Crown of Life* in 1899.

Markus Neacey also informs us that the *Gloucestershire Echo* for 22 May 1942 listed in the B.B.C. Home Service programme for that day a talk to be given by Frank Swinnerton on “Books and the Writer: George Gissing.” Lastly it would seem that on 16 October 1908 the serialization of *Will Warburton* started in the *Manchester Courier Weekly Supplement*.

Of all Mr. Neacey’s recent discoveries the most arresting is probably a long article he found in the *West Australian* for Saturday, 4 December 1937, p. 6. Such articles were uncommon at the time. Its title was unpromising, but the writer, C.R.B., must have had a good knowledge of his subject. He entitled his piece rather too modestly. Yet he wasn’t wide of the mark when he wrote in his sub-title that Gissing was an almost forgotten novelist. One thing at least is sure: the portrait of Gissing he reproduced must have puzzled most readers. Where did C.R.B. find this portrait which does not seem to have been a favourite after 1895?

The last few paragraphs read:

Few circulating libraries stock Gissing, and even quite well-equipped public libraries are apt to be without a complete set of his works. Those who know him will deplore this state of things and look forward to the reaction in his favour which is sure to come.

For Gissing is far more valuable than Dickens as an interpreter of the early 19th Century. He had less exuberance of imagination, certainly, but then he knew his facts better. He lived with the London poor as one of them, not as an observer, with a safe funk hole to retreat to when poverty became unbearable. With his scholar’s mind and gentlemanly upbringing, this life was an unutterable torture to him; it alone enabled him to write the greatest series of sociological novels in English.

Whereas Dickens is always the spectator and frequently a *deus ex machina* to his characters, Gissing lived too close to poverty to allow himself to be as sentimental as Dickens or to delude himself with Dickensian visions of a social amelioration. For my part, I find him the better writer, too, though on that point opinions will doubtless continue to vary, as they have varied in the past. Popular opinion is likely to give Dickens the palm for no other quality than his robustious, infectious optimism.

No one ever accused George Gissing of being an optimist. All his books are tragic and some of them are exceedingly painful: the “Crown of Life” is, I think, the only one which leaves a pleasant aftertaste, if we except the delicious travel sketches and especially “By the Ionian Sea.” “Thyrza,” “In the Year of Jubilee,” “The Nether World,” “Born in Exile,” “A Life’s Morning”—all these are sad and sombre in colouring. They are not, on the other hand, in the least morbid for, despite the circumstances of Gissing’s life, he never became morbid: he retained always a core of sanity, of health, in mind if not in body, which preserves all his work from the fatal taint. Equally his delicate, careful craftsmanship keep his books free from the hysteria which infects so much of modern “proletarian writing.” His work is genuinely scientific as well as being finely wrought, it will stand comparison with the best of the field studies of poverty in Booth’s great “Survey of London.”

His two great themes are poverty and social manners, from both of which he had suffered more than his due. In book after book, he shows the evil and the inhuman wastes of poverty in an industrial society. He has no remedy to propose as Dickens had, for he saw deeper into the nature of poverty than Dickens and his insight forbade him to think of administrative reform as a cure for a social sickness of this magnitude. “Demos” records his intellectual adventures with socialist ideas and reveals his passionate sense of social injustice. But he was not intellectually convinced that socialism was either possible or desirable, and in later books he deserts the exploration of remedies for the evils he describes in favour of microscopic and exact delineations of its effects on human character. None of this perhaps will serve as an incentive to the reader to begin straightway upon a reading of his books, but those who are not deterred by the appearance of gloom will find much to interest and more to move them in the works of George Gissing.

On 5 November 2012 Dr. Colin Lovelace, President of the Association France-Grande Bretagne in the Basque Country, gave a lecture at the Association in Toulon on “The Heroic and Tragic Life of George Gissing, English Novelist and man of letters. The lecture was well attended and the audience proved very interested.

On 29 November 2012 the *Telegraph* carried, under “Books,” a list of “Ten great novels about journalism” compiled by Sameer Rahim and Felicity Capon, we were told by Tom Ue. Gissing headed the list with *New*

Grub Street, followed in chronological order by Joyce's *Ulysses*, 1922, Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*, 1938, *Why Rock the Boat?* by William Weintraub, 1961, *A House for Mr Biswas* by V. S. Naipaul, 1961, Michael Frayn's *Towards the End of the Morning*, 1967, Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter*, 1986, *Bilton* by Andrew Martin, 1999, *Death and the Penguin* by Andrey Kurkov, 2002 and Robert Harris's *The Ghost*, 2007.

Gissing's presentation copy of *Sleeping Fires* to Clara Collet, we heard from John Spiers last November, was (and perhaps still is) offered for sale, priced at £2250, by Paul Rassam, 12 Hill Close, Charlbury OX7 3SY, e-mail paul@paulrassam.com Miss Collet's and Gissing's initials in the inscription of the recently rebound copy have been misread by the dealer, who also misdated Gissing's letter to Clara Collet he refers to.

Recent Publications

Volume

New Grub Street, Penguin English Library, 2012. Paperback, pp. 579. The inside front cover reproduces a little known portrait of Gissing, signed by him and jocularly by H. G. Wells; it was sketched by Mrs. Clarence Rook on 8 June 1901 at Spade House, where Gissing was staying before moving to the Nayland Sanatorium. The text of the novel is followed by a well-known assessment of Gissing's career by V. S. Pritchett on "Grub Street," first published in 1948. Unfortunately Pritchett's knowledge of Gissing was less than passable. It was biased, poorly informed, and betrayed a pitiful failure to understand the subject dealt with. How can the general editor of the Penguin English Library reconcile conflicting statements within this new edition? £5.99.

Articles, reviews, etc

D. J. Taylor, "Books of the Year," *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 November 2012, p. 14. On volume 3 of *The Heroic Life of George Gissing*.

D. J. Taylor, "Gissing," letter to the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 December 2012, p. 6, correcting the garbled version of his short piece in the previous number.

William Greenslade, review of Vol. I of *The Heroic Life of George Gissing*, *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 56, no. 2, 2013, pp. 249-52.

Recent Publications