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

Fragments of Life: Arthur Machen and George Gissing

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The recent 50th anniversary *History and Index* of *The Gissing Journal* has brought to light some unexpected entries in the 'Subject Index' section.[1] These include entries on authors such as John Betjeman, Arthur C. Clarke, C. S. Lewis and Edgar Allan Poe – not the names one usually associates with Gissing. To these disparate writers can be added another one – Arthur Machen – the 'Apostle of Wonder.'

Arthur Machen was born in 1863 and died in 1947. Although he was to live almost twice as long as Gissing, he was a near contemporary. Like Gissing he was born in the provinces and grew up with a great love of books and literature and like Gissing one of his favourite authors was Dickens.[2] But Machen and Gissing had much else in common. They were widely read in the classics and contemporary writing and both aspired to and reached an excellence in their own work. Despite the high quality of their writing neither author received a wide readership in their lifetime – some of the topics they broached did not sit well with either Mrs. Grundy or the majority of contemporary critics. However, both authors had a small but dedicated circle of admirers and champions in their day and now have enthusiastic readers and contributors to journals dedicated to their work and memory.

Machen was the only son of an impoverished vicar of Gwent. He did well at school but his parents were too poor to send him to university. Machen, like Gissing was drawn to London and he arrived in 1881 with a vague plan of a writing career to be supported by journalistic work. These first few years proved very difficult and on many occasions, he suffered through hunger, subsisting on a diet of dry bread and green tea. Like Gissing he earned some extra money by tutoring while he focussed on his own writing career. One can envisage both Machen and Gissing enduring similar poverty in the 1880s – living in dingy rooms not far from each other – each struggling with his own writing. Machen's first published work was *The Anatomy of Tobacco*

(1884)[3] – a quaint celebration of the wonders of pipes and smoking – all of course in the days before anyone was aware of the inherent dangers of tobacco. In these early years Machen supported himself by working variously as a publisher's clerk, book cataloguer, children's tutor and translator. His French was excellent and he translated some important works including the first complete translation of *The Heptameron* of Margaret of Navarre (1886) and the *Memoirs of Jacques Casanova* (1894). These books proved popular but the needy translator received only a minimum financial reward for all his hard work.

In the mid-1880s while working with the London publisher George Redway, Machen was required to summarise and catalogue a large and diverse collection of esoteric works of the occult. This work familiarised him with a vast store of strange and obscure lore which he was able to put to use in some of the plots of his future novels and short stories. The late 1880s and early 1890s heralded a growing liberalism in literature and a growing dissatisfaction with the old-fashioned triple-decker novels of the circulating libraries. These years saw the appearance of bolder, bohemian writers who would later be described as aesthetes and decadents. Their writings explored more daring, sensational, and horrific themes and are exemplified by Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). With encouragement from Wilde himself, Machen soon began writing short stories and some longer works. He reached a wider audience with his novels *The Great God Pan* (1894) and *The Three Impostors* (1895). Both these novels, or more accurately novellas, are loosely modelled on Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights* (1882, 1885), where a series of improbable and bizarre incidents occur to the protagonists in the familiar setting of Victorian London streets. Notwithstanding their popularity, these two works by Machen are not necessarily an easy read; there are numerous named characters within a series of interlinked narratives which move back and forward in time, testing the concentration of the reader.

Despite his high regard for Poe, a writer of a similar vein, it is unlikely that Gissing was aware of Machen or his writing. However, the younger novelist was certainly familiar with the works of Gissing and especially *New Grub Street* (1891) where some scenes are reflected in one of his own novels. In an early chapter of *The Three Impostors* the reader is introduced to the ethnologist and student of physical science, Charles Phillipps, who is seated, at sunset, at the window in his room in Red Lion Square, observing the lights come on in the houses opposite. Edwin Reardon, in an early chapter in *New Grub Street*, is similarly seated at his window, at sunset, near Regent's Park

watching the lights come on in the houses opposite. Phillipps's friend Dyson is an aspiring novelist who has a realist friend planning a Zolaesque series of novels about a single London street, reminding the reader of Reardon's friend Harold Biffen who plans a realist novel about a local grocer.[4]

It is instructive to compare and contrast the sunset scenes from the two books. Here we have first the account of Reardon followed by that of Phillipps:

> One evening he sat at his desk with a slip of manuscript paper before him. It was the hour of sunset. His outlook was upon the backs of certain large houses skirting Regent's Park, and lights had begun to show here and there in the windows; in one room a man was discoverable dressing for dinner, he had not thought it worthwhile to lower the blind; in another, some people were playing billiards. The higher windows reflected a rich glow from the western sky.
>
> […] Occasionally he dipped his pen into the ink, and seemed about to write; but each time the effort was abortive. At the head of the paper was inscribed 'Chapter III,' but that was all. And now the sky was dusking over; darkness would soon fall.
>
> […] The colours faded from the sky, and night came quickly. Reardon threw his arms upon the desk, let his head fall forward, and remained so, as if asleep.[5]

> One night in June Mr Phillipps was sitting in his room in the calm retirement of Red Lion Square. He had opened the window, and was smoking placidly, while he watched the movement of life below. The sky was clear, and the afterglow of sunset had lingered long about it. The flushing twilight of a summer evening vied with the gas-lamps in the square, had fashioned a chiaroscuro that had in it something unearthly; and the children, racing to and fro upon the pavement, the lounging idlers by the public, and the casual passers-by rather flickered and hovered in the play of lights that stood out substantial things. By degrees in the houses opposite one window after another leapt out a square of light; now and again a figure would shape itself against a blind and vanish, and to all this semi-theatrical magic the runs and flourishes of brave Italian opera played a little distance off on a piano-organ seemed an appropriate accompaniment, while the deep-muttered bass of the traffic of Holborn never ceased. Phillipps enjoyed the scene and its effects; the light in the sky faded and turned to darkness, and the square gradually grew silent, and still he sat dreaming at the window.[6]

Both accounts are finely descriptive and atmospheric but there are marked differences. Gissing's account is the more factual – focussing on details such as the man dressing for dinner and the people playing billiards. It also describes the movement of events in a detached manner – "And now the sky was dusking over; darkness would soon fall. […] The colours faded from the sky, and night came quickly." Gissing does not linger on any scene more than required.

Machen's account focusses more on the atmosphere of the evening rather than on any particulars. For example, none of the people in the flats opposite are described – rather they appear as vague figures and shapes at the windows

– and all to the accompaniment of a distant piano-organ. Machen even describes the scene as "semi-theatrical magic" which gives the scene a dream-like quality – "a chiaroscuro that had in it something unearthly." Here we see the subtle difference between the two authors, with Machen emphasising and lingering over the magic or unearthliness of a typical London summer evening – attaining to the poetic prose to which he always strived. It could be argued that the Gissing novel is a tragedy and the author wished to move the story on. But the Machen novel though, perhaps not so artistically serious is likewise a tragedy – and the scene here adds nothing to the movement of the plot. It is as if the author, within the overall setting of his novel, desires to interject his consciousness of both the beauty and horror, the malevolent and celestial, appearing so close together in the London streets.

Machen wrote other stories in a similar vein and the better-known works include "The Inmost Light," "The Red Hand," and "The Shining Pyramid." These novels and stories caused quite a stir in their day but by modern day standards are quite restrained and there is rarely any representation of horror or gore. Almost everything is presented by inference, allusion, and atmosphere. Machen is too subtle a writer to resort to any gross horror. It may be more accurate now to bracket his stories under the heading of Gothic – as they have more in common with the stories of Bulwer Lytton, Sheridan Le Fanu, Poe, and Stevenson than with the modern exponents of the genre. However, the stories are still very powerful and indeed have influenced many later writers. This phase of Machen's writing came to an end with the trial and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde in 1895 and the subsequent reaction against any writing perceived as outré, occult, or decadent. The death of his beloved first wife in the late 1890s also affected him deeply and his subsequent work was to become more positive in tenor.

The 1904 novella *A Fragment of Life* contains some of Machen's most Gissing-like writing – with highly realistic and detailed descriptions – at times reminiscent of Gissing's *Diary*, his novella *The Paying Guest*, and his novel *Will Warburton*. *A Fragment of Life* tells the story of a young London married couple Edward and Mary Darnell. Edward has worked for ten years with 'mechanical drudgery' as a clerk in the City, on a reasonable wage, but with little left over after the monthly outlays. They live a life of a typical lower middle-class couple where a careful account has to be made of every expenditure. Edward is a likeable character who although he lives an ordinary material life conforming to the expectations of his family, neighbours, and colleagues, does have a spiritual side which he initially tries to suppress. It is this conflict of the material and spiritual which pervades the

course of the novella. The start of the story revolves around the attempted expenditure of ten pounds, part of a gift, received from a rich aunt. Edward's idea is to furnish their empty spare room. However, after careful calculation and detailed enquiry as to the cheapest costs they realise it cannot be done for that sum and then Mary, who always had doubts about the plan, clinches the argument:

> "But, after all, Edward, we don't really want to furnish the room at all. I mean it isn't necessary. And if we did so it might lead to no end of expense. People would hear of it and be sure to fish for invitations. You know we have relatives in the country, and they would be almost certain, the Mallings, at any rate, to give hints."
>
> Darnell saw the force of the argument and gave way. But he was bitterly disappointed.[7]

Edward then suggests that they could take on a paying guest – and that this would help cover the extra costs of furnishing the spare room. Here we have shades of Gissing's novella,[8] where Clarence and Emmeline Mumford agree to take on a paying guest – with disastrous results! Whereas Emmeline finally agrees to Clarence's suggestion, here Mary is more circumspect and sensibly turns down Edward's idea:

> "I don't think we could manage it, Edward," she said; "it would be inconvenient in many ways." She hesitated for a moment. "And I don't think I should care to have a young man in the house. It is so very small, and our accommodation, as you know, is so limited."[9]

Mary in turn then suggests that the ten pounds could be put to use in replacing their kitchen stove which she maintains uses too much coal and with most of the heat being lost up the chimney.

> Only a few nights before Mrs. Darnell had spoken seriously to her husband about it; she had got Alice [their maid] to weigh the coals expended in cooking a cottage pie, the dish of the evening, and deducting what remained in the scuttle after the pie was done, it appeared that the wretched thing had consumed nearly twice the proper quantity of fuel. (pp. 40-41)

Edward confesses it is a brilliant idea: "It's much better than mine, Mary," he said quite frankly. "I am so glad you thought of it. But we must talk it over; it doesn't do to buy in a hurry. There are so many mistakes" (p. 41).

Thereafter the couple investigate thoroughly the costs and advantages of the various ranges on offer. They accumulate an assortment of literature on the subject including leaflets and marketing pamphlets on all types of ranges. This occupies them through June and into most of July – and here Machen even manages to outdo Gissing himself in the factual detail provided:

> But when, in one of the lists, they encountered the images of little toy 'cottage' ranges, for four pounds, and even for three pounds ten, they grew scornful, on the strength of

the eight or ten pound article which they meant to purchase – when the merits of the divers patents had been thoroughly thrashed out.

The 'Raven' was for a long time Mary's favourite. It promised the utmost economy with the highest efficiency, and many times they were on the point of giving the order. But the 'Glow' seemed equally seductive, and it was only £8. 5s. as compared with £9. 7s. 6d., and though the 'Raven' was supplied to the Royal Kitchen, the 'Glow' could show more fervent testimonials from continental potentates.

It seemed a debate without end, and it endured day after day […] (p. 41)

Here Machen is highlighting the banality of everyday existence – although he is not decrying the importance of a reasonable income. After all he had faced hunger in his life and like Gissing had struggled through a literary career with little monetary reward. His satire, although gentle, is directed at life that exists only on a material plane. It is not aimed at just the lower working classes but could be equally directed at the well-to-do middle classes as they decide to refurnish their comfortable villas and go about their daily work, however rewarding, or equally at the millionaires who are deciding which latest yacht to purchase. Such a focus exclusively on the material side of life is to Machen a dead end and ultimately a meaningless experience. Darnell on the other hand is an individual who, like Machen himself, and indeed everyone, has a spiritual side to his character although it is one that he tries to evade. Here Machen summarises Darnell's dilemma:

So, day after day, he lived in the grey phantasmal world, akin to death, that has, somehow, with most of us, made good its claim to be called life. To Darnell the true life would have seemed madness, and when, now and again, the shadows and vague images reflected from its splendour fell across his path, he was afraid, and took refuge in what he would have called the sane 'reality' of common and usual incidents and interests. His absurdity was, perhaps, the more evident, inasmuch as 'reality' for him was a matter of kitchen ranges, of saving a few shillings; but in truth the folly would have been greater if it had been concerned with racing stables, steam yachts, and the spending of many thousand pounds.

But so went forth Darnell, day by day, strangely mistaking death for life, madness for sanity, and purposeless and wandering phantoms for true beings. He was sincerely of opinion that he was a City clerk, living in Shepherd's Bush[.] (pp. 44-45)

Darnell also has to endure further grey and monotonous days of life in the City and in Shepherd's Bush. Here we have a fine descriptive passage emphasising the spiritual weariness of Darnell – one, again highly reminiscent of Gissing:

All day long a fierce and heavy heat had brooded over the City, and as Darnell neared home he saw the mist lying on all the damp lowlands, wreathed in coils about Bedford Park to the south, and mounting to the west, so that the tower of Acton Church loomed out of a grey lake. The grass in the squares and on the lawns which he overlooked as the 'bus lumbered wearily along was burnt to the colour of dust. Shepherd's Bush Green was a wretched desert, trampled brown, bordered with monotonous poplars,

> whose leaves hung motionless in air that was still, hot smoke. The foot passengers struggled wearily along the pavements, and the reek of the summer's end mingled with the breath of the brickfields made Darnell gasp, as if he were inhaling the poison of some foul sick-room. (p. 45)

Of course, this would not be a book authored by Arthur Machen if it remained simply a pastiche of Gissing – excellent though it would have been. Machen does introduce new subplots, concerning obsessive neighbours, servant trouble, and difficulties with relatives and parents. However, Darnell's life is not really bad. After all he is happily married and has his own home, has a housemaid and has a reasonably good job. His life is only mundane because he is suppressing his spiritual side. However, Darnell's growing perception of the mundanity of his daily life enables him to give more thought to his spiritual side – the 'true life.' He shares his spiritual experiences with Mary and she also gradually begins to sense a change within herself. Still, more everyday problems loom up for the couple and have to be dealt with – although they are becoming more accepting of the absurdities of day-to-day life. Despite these recurrent distractions, Darnell's increasing meditations on life finally reach a stage where he realises that the spiritual side of his existence had been completely subsumed by everyday materialistic life. However, there are possibilities that the spiritual side could be retrieved:

> It was, of course, with difficulty and slowly that these things became clear to him. He was an English City clerk, 'flourishing' towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the rubbish heap that had been accumulating for some centuries could not be cleared away in an instant. Again and again the spirit of nonsense that had been implanted in him as in his fellows assured him that the true world was the visible and tangible world, the world in which good and faithful letter-copying was exchangeable for a certain quantum of bread, beef, and house-room, and that the man who copied letters well, did not beat his wife, nor lose money foolishly, was a good man, fulfilling the end for which he had been made. But in spite of these arguments, in spite of their acceptance by all who were about him, he had the grace to perceive the utter falsity and absurdity of the whole position. […] Darnell knew by experience that man is made a mystery for mysteries and visions, for the realization in his consciousness of ineffable bliss, for a great joy that transmutes the whole world, for a joy that surpasses all joys and overcomes all sorrows. He knew this certainly, though he knew it dimly; and he was apart from other men, preparing himself for a great experiment. (p. 73)

A Fragment of Life was praised in its day by reviewers, and some critics think it among the best of his writing. The novella was a revelation to many contemporary readers including the classical composer John Ireland (1879-1962).[10]

> The combination of Gissing-like realistic observation coupled with Machen's visionary mysticism works well and the story has not lost any of its edge, and in

today's materialistic society retains its relevance. This blend of realism and mysticism was something that Machen revisited in his other works, notably in *The Hill of Dreams* (1907) and *The Secret Glory* (1922).[11]

Like Gissing before him Machen made very little from all his writing. In his autobiography, he summed up his work and the meagre rewards for all his toil and effort – in words and thoughts that echo Gissing:

> I have just been running through a list of my books from 1881 to 1922, and reckoning – it was an easy task – how much money I have made by them. The list contains eighteen titles. And my total receipts for these eighteen volumes. For these forty-two years of toil, amount to the sum of six hundred and thirty-five pounds. That is, I have been paid at the rate of fifteen pounds and a few shillings per annum.
>
> […] And then, taking another side of the question: consider the debit of toil and endeavour and mortification and disappointment that these forty-two years of book-writing have cost me. What about the wear and tear of heart and that T,e,a,r, which is pronounced in another manner […][12]

Machen thus earned considerably less than Gissing for his writing[13] – however he was kept afloat financially by some family legacies in the 1890s and later by working with a travelling theatre group and finally as a journalist and reporter for the London *Evening News*. Machen's autobiography was published in three parts as *Far Off Things* (1922), *Things Near and Far* (1923) and *The London Adventure* (1924). These books were highly praised by the critics, and also by the author himself. When one admirer sent an appreciative note to Machen he received the following reply from the author: "Very hearty thanks for your cordiality as to the Trilogy – what a pity it cannot be a Saga. Honestly, I share your opinion; I like it, or most of it; I go so far as to say that I like it better than Gissing's "Ryecroft," which I like very much."[14] Machen's work is a memoir like *Ryecroft*, conveying the same mood of literary heritage where the focus is on books, reading, and philosophy. In marvellous detail, Machen evokes his childhood in Gwent and his first encounters with literature and then his early difficult years in London to feed and clothe himself and the misery and struggles with his own writing. He had an eager enthusiasm for the adventure of wandering through the London streets; he describes how he would set out on long walks of discovery though the city and especially the expanding suburbs which always held an especial fascination. Like Dickens and Gissing before him he picked up ideas from the scenes, characters, and incidents he observed. Although he lived in various lodgings, he particularly recalls the time he lived in a room at Clarendon Road in Notting Hill Gate. The following extracts from his autobiography give a flavour of that time. Gissing would have recognised in Machen a familiar fellow traveller:

> I see myself all through that year 1883 tramping, loafing, strolling along interminable streets and roads lying to the north-west and the west of London, a shabby, sorry figure; and always alone. I remember walking to Hendon and back – this must have been on a whole holiday – and to this day I can't think how I found my way there, through what clues I struck from the north parts of Clarendon Road into the Harrow Road, and how I knew when to leave the Edgware Road and bend to the right. Anyhow I got there and back, tired enough and glad of the half-loaf of bread that awaited me. […] I look back upon myself in that little room in Clarendon Road with some amazement. I come in from one of my long, prowling walks – I may have been to Hounslow to look for the Heath, or I may have been to Hampton Court – and make my meal of bread and tea, and then settle down to tobacco and literature. I find that my landlady turns off the gas at the meter at midnight, so I provide myself with carriage candles, which I fix up somehow on the table. I read on night after night. It may be Homer's *Odyssey*, or it may be *Don Quixote* – to which I have been faithful ever since I found the book in the drawing-room of Llanfrechfa Rectory – it may be that singular magazine of oddities, Disraeli's *Curiosities of Literature*, it may be Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*; a great refuge, this last, a world of literature in itself. Or I am reading Pepys for the first time, with ravishment, or Pomponius Mela's *De Situ Orbis* in a noble Stephanus quarto, or Harris's *Hermes*. […] Or I am reading Carlyle – *Sartor Resartus* or the Johnson and Burns and Walter Scott Essays – and I must say that I think a good many young men of this age would be all the better for a Carlyle course.[…] So I read and meditated night after night, and I am amazed at the utter loneliness of it all […] alone in my little room, friendless, desolate; conscious to my very heart of my stuttering awkwardness whenever I thought of attempting the great speech of literature; wandering, bewildered, in the world of imagination, not knowing whither I went, feeling my way like a blind man, stumbling like a blind man, like a blind man striking my head against the wall, for me no help, no friends, no counsel, no comfort.[15]

Machen's lament here is echoed by Gissing in the guise of Ryecroft: "Is there, at this moment, any boy of twenty, fairly educated, but without means, without help, with nothing but the glow in his brain and steadfast courage in his heart, who sits in a London garret, and writes for dear life?"[16] Had he but known he could have visited Machen in his similar lodgings not far away and found a struggling writer only too keen to welcome and discuss literature with a fellow scribe. Like Machen, Gissing enjoyed nothing better than a long walk through the London streets. Here is Ryecroft again reminiscing on his early days in London:

> Often it is the High Street of Islington, which I have not seen for a quarter of a century, at least; no thoroughfare in all London less attractive to the imagination, one would say; but I see myself walking there – walking with the quick, light step of youth, and there, of course, is the charm. I see myself, after a long day of work and loneliness, setting forth from my lodging. For the weather I care nothing; rain, wind, fog – what does it matter! The fresh air fills my lungs; my blood circles rapidly; I feel my muscles, and have a pleasure in the hardness of the stone I tread upon. […] Nothing tires me. Late at night, I shall walk all the way back to Islington […][17]

Both Machen and Gissing were highly critical of their own writing – attested by the discarded pages, chapters, and in some cases whole novels, which littered their progress through the years. Both also had strong opinions on literature. In his non-fiction work *Hieroglyphics* (1902) Machen sums up his thoughts on literature and shows a distinct preference for authors who focus on the imaginative in literature against those who are merely documentative. He finds praise for authors he feels have sought the essence of life in their works; those authors who deal with the inner being, rather than the outward; authors who also bring out the sense of the beauty, mystery, and wonder of life. Authors whom he feels have that inward touch include Rabelais, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Hawthorne, the Brontës, Walter Scott, Dickens, Poe, the early Hardy, and Robert Louis Stevenson. Authors who miss out on the interior meaning include Jane Austen, Thackeray, Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, George Eliot, and the later Hardy.

Gissing would have agreed with some of these choices. He would also have approved of the realism that Machen was able to bring to his novels although doubtless he would have recoiled from the spiritual and visionary aspects of his writing. However, who can tell; had Gissing lived longer he may too have come under the spell of the 'Apostle of Wonder.'

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[1] Markus Neacey, *The Gissing Journal: A History and Index of the First 50 Years* (Grayswood, Surrey: Grayswood Press, 2016), p. 37.

[2] Arthur Machen, *The Handy Dickens* (London: Constable, 1941).

[3] Earlier in 1881 Machen had privately printed, in a quantity of 100 copies, a long poem, "Eleusinia," based on the Eleusinian Mysteries of ancient Greece.

[4] See the "Introduction" by David Trotter in Arthur Machen, *The Three Impostors* (London: Everyman, 1995), pp. xx-xxi.

[5] George Gissing, *New Grub Street* (London: Penguin Books, 1968), Chapter 4, "An Author and His Wife," p. 77. Gissing, of course was equally capable of waxing lyrical on scenes that caught his imagination; the two essays, "On Battersea Bridge" and "Along Shore" are fine examples of his descriptive talent. Some of his best and most evocative writing can be sampled in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.

[6] Arthur Machen, *The Three Impostors* (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), "Adventure of the Gold Tiberius," pp. 8-9.

[7] Christopher Palmer (ed.), *The Collected Arthur Machen* (London: Duckworth, 1988), p. 37. Subsequent page numbers refer to this book.

[8] George Gissing, *The Paying Guest* in *Three Novellas*, edited by Pierre Coustillas. Grayswood, Surrey: Grayswood Press, 2011.

[9] *The Collected Arthur Machen*, p. 39. Subsequent page numbers refer to this book.

[10] Several of his compositions were influenced by Machen's writing including the three piano pieces *Decorations*, the orchestral tone poem *The Forgotten Rite*, and his *Legend for Piano and Orchestra* which he dedicated to the author. Further information on this topic can be found in "The Influence of Arthur Machen on the Music of John Ireland," by Colin Scott-Sutherland in *Avallaunius*, Issue 16, Summer 1997, pp. 7-13.

[11] These two books were originally written in the late 1890s – although it took many years before they were finally accepted for publication.

[12] *The Autobiography of Arthur Machen*, comprising *Far Off Things* and *Things Near and Far*, edited and introduced by Morchard Bishop. London: Garnstone Press, 1974, pp. 187-188.

[13] See Roger Milbrandt's two articles in *The Gissing Journal*: "How Poor was George Gissing? A Study of Gissing's Income between 1877 and 1888," 43:4 (October 2007), pp. 1-17, and "How Secure was George Gissing? A Study of Gissing's Income between 1889 and 1903," 45:1 (January 2009), pp. 1-34.

[14] See the "Introduction" to *The Autobiography of Arthur Machen*, op cit.

[15] *The Autobiography of Arthur Machen*, pp. 123-131.

[16] George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, edited and introduced by Mark Storey. Oxford: Oxford University Press (The World's Classics), 1987, "Autumn," p. 128.

[17] *Ibid*., "Winter," p. 144.

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The Dickens Fellowship of Japan Annual General Meeting: "Dickens and Gissing"

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The Dickens Fellowship of Japan held their 2017 Annual General Meeting at the University of Tokyo on Saturday, 7 October. Following a short paper session in which Akiko Kawasaki (Komazawa University) gave a talk titled, "Sharing Death: Fainting in *A Tale of Two Cities*," a special symposium on Dickens and Gissing was held. The subtitle of the symposium was "Subterranean Similarities and Differences," and it was presided by Mitsuharu Matsuoka (Nagoya University).

In his review on *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (1898), C. K. Shorter finds it interestingly ironic that Gissing was commissioned to criticise Dickens favourably. Gissing describes poverty in a darker way, while Dickens provides a brighter description. Dickens is often seen as an optimist when compared to Gissing, whose work is largely pessimistic. And yet, Dickensian humour and laughter can be detected in Gissing's more sombre novels, whereas Dickens left us several novels with the same heavy themes seen in the works of Gissing. In addition, several critics have pointed out similarities between the two novelists, especially evident in their characters, plots, techniques, social problems, and scene depictions of London. However, there are also differences behind these similarities. The differences were produced by the influences of each artist's innate idiosyncrasies, as well as those of their Victorian-era mindsets. Paying careful attention to the subterranean similarities and differences between Dickens and Gissing, the five symposium speakers compared and examined their selected novels from their different perspectives. Here are the five symposium members and their respective short reports:

1. Ayaka Komiya (Meiji University), "From Dickens's London to Gissing's London"

In 1822, a young Charles Dickens left Chatham and arrived in London. There, he strolled around the capital's streets and neighbourhoods. His Wellerian "extensive and peculiar" knowledge of London helped him write novels in that city's settings. It was about half a century later, or in 1877, that Gissing, born in Yorkshire, moved to London. His move took place after a year or so of unhappy wanderings in America. The capital he saw was the very world of Dickens, who was his favourite childhood author. Gissing stated that ". . . four and twenty years ago, when I had no London memories of my own, they were simply the scenes of Dickens's novels . . ." (Gissing, *The Immortal Dickens,* 1925). London became the base and centre of Gissing's later life. Like Dickens, Gissing moved around the capital for observation purposes, and set many of his novels there. As a subject of discussion, Komiya compared Dickens's London with Gissing's London, and provided a special reference to their early novels, which depicted locales in the same slums. Gissing's version of London in his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), is a Dickensian London. However, when Gissing wrote *The Nether World* (1889), he made use of his own knowledge of London's slums, which he gained during his nine-year residence there.

2. Fumie Tamai (Doshisha University), "The Politics of Sympathy in the Works of Dickens and Gissing"

The American philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum maintains that literature, particularly novels, can make a rich contribution to education because of its ability to develop the reader's sympathetic imagination. In order to illustrate her points, Nussbaum aptly cites Dickens, who is most clearly aware of his power to form the bonds of sympathy with his readers. Audrey Jaffe argues that in Victorian fiction, "sympathy" offers an individualistic and affective solution to the problems of class alienation and conflicts, and enables an assimilation of individuals into larger communities, such as nations. While Dickens tries to reform society through the evocation of sympathy toward others in his readers' minds, Gissing is sceptical of the possibility of social reform through those means. Gissing writes to Algernon saying that his "methods & aims" are different from those of Dickens. How, though, are they different? Examining the politics of sympathy with a special focus on *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41) and *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), Tamai claimed that Dickens arouses the reader's sympathy by deemphasising the physical reality of the heroine Nell, while Gissing sticks to realistic representations of the poor, and warns the reader against forming any sentimental identification with them.

3. Atsuko Miyake (Seinan Gakuin University), "Nineteenth-Century British Design Reform in Transition and Its Literary Representations"

The design reform movement began in Britain toward the beginning of the Victorian era. Britain had recognised herself as an artistic backwater in Europe. The Great Exhibition of 1851 can be seen within this cultural context. Design reform was aimed at more closely linking arts, industry, and morality in order to enhance the nation's tastes. At the end of the 19th century, the movement developed into two cultural trends. One was the aesthetic movement, which was centred on the doctrine that art exists for the sake of its beauty alone. The other was a boom in the publication of handbooks and articles on furnishing and upholstery. Miyake compared Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-53) and *Hard Times* (1854) with Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893) and *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), and argued that changes in the 19th-century British art movement lay underneath the different literary representations of room furnishings by the two novelists. For example, the discussion between Sissy and the third gentleman, considered as a satirical representation of Henry Cole, in *Hard Times*, refers to his famous campaign for "taste," while Mr. Skimpole's grumbles on furniture in *Bleak House*

remind us of an over-decorated armchair displayed at the Great Exhibition. Gissing's novels capture well the results of Cole's efforts; the idea of "taste" had spread throughout society, and room furnishings were connected to the contemporary New Woman issue.

4. Mitsuharu Matsuoka (Nagoya University), "Modern Urban Dwellers and Their Self-denial, Self-alienation, and Self-deception"

The main point in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-05) is that the Protestant thought of attaining the grace of God by connecting the self-denying culture of Protestantism with the secular commercial activities, which permeated the lives of nineteenth-century urban dwellers, resulted in a major contribution to the formation of modern capitalist society. In the works of Dickens, self-sacrifice as a form of self-denial holds implications for the love of God in giving Jesus as an atoning sacrifice. Another form of self-denial appears in the shape of egoism in self-made men or of self-abnegation in the tortured through guilt. This is especially true when the self-denying spirit is directed toward profit-taking and the accumulation of capital. The egoist is alienated from society and others, whereas the self-abnegator alienates himself. It is interesting, however, that both types fall into self-deception resulting from solitude or uneasiness. The works of Gissing also contain many scenes that are based on the urban dwellers' self-denial, self-alienation, and self-deception, but their causes are sometimes rather different from those in the works of Dickens. Are the differences all due to naturalism as a literary movement, which finds no meaning in a human's self-denying aspiration for improvement? After examining Mary Kingcote's self-denial as a kind of masochistic pleasure taken in medieval asceticism in *Isabel Clarendon* (1886), Matsuoka analysed the connection of lodging-house life with self-alienation in poverty, and the high frequency of self-deception in the love problems described in *New Grub Street* (1891).

5. Ryota Kanayama (Ritsumeikan University), "For Whom is Education?"

In his *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (1898), Gissing points out that Dickens's lack of education reveals itself as a disadvantage to his books, and that it was more important in Dickens's days than in the late 19th century to have received a classical education. Although Dickens criticises brutal boarding schools, the crammed educational system, and classics scholars, he still sees, with a certain amount of trust in the schooling system, the need for a comprehensive cultural education to prevent common people from rampaging violence. Gissing began his career as a novelist after the Elementary Education

Act of 1870, which legally guaranteed the right of elementary education to all. This does not mean that Gissing was sorry that Dickens could have received much benefit from this educational system if he had been born half a century later. Rather, he does not hide his disdain for the masses; he perceives them as having imperfect educational achievements. Drawing a comparison between the two novelists, who are different in terms of educational philosophy though they were both interested in the lower middle class as a target for description, Kanayama revealed what is behind those differences. Dickens was sure of his social background as a middle-class man, and as such took it for granted that he could have been given a chance to study at an institute of higher education such as Cambridge University. Gissing, on the other hand, hated those who were as daring enough as him to try to climb the social ladder by improving their academic careers, and thus gaining the necessary respect to be accepted into high society.

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Book Review

George Gissing, *La vera storia di Will Warburton* [*Will Warburton. A Romance of Real Life*], transl. by Vincenzo Pepe with an introduction by Markus Neacey and a translator's note. Cava de' Tirreni (SA): Marlin Editore, 2017. Pp. 343. ISBN 9788860431226. 14 euros.

Gissing's artistic reputation in Italy has been gradually growing over recent years thanks to a conspicuous number of translations of his novels,[1] the most recent one being *Will Warburton*, written in 1902-1903 but published posthumously in 1905. On re-reading it for the present review, my appreciation of its merits has increased: it was high time for this novel to be made available to an Italian readership.

First, a few words about the work, which, on the whole, has not been given much attention by critics. Simon James, on remarking that it has received less critical attention since Gissing's death, writes that, together with his other late novels, it does not articulate "a critique of market values to the same degree as his earlier work."[2] And yet, in the unfolding of the plot, Will Warburton's eponymous character shows a deep rejection of the laws of the market which impose Darwinian competition and the struggle for survival. This novel, which offers "[a] broad social canvas and complex class layerings,"[3] also possesses something that is typical of other narratives by Gissing; as L. R. Leavis points out, one gains the strong impression that here, as in New Grub Street, Isabel Clarendon, and Sleeping Fires (to which we

could add Born in Exile and The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft), our author "has been often writing about versions of himself in amazingly disparate literary contexts."[4] In Will Warburton, in fact, "[t]he predicament of [Gissing's] hero-grocer somehow reflects that of the fiction writer vis-à-vis the literary market-place, and the happy ending of his 'romance of real life' seems to foreshadow a degree of reconciliation with the economics of democratic modernity."[5]

The story is that of a young businessman who moves down the social ladder into a lower class, as he becomes a grocer serving customers from behind a counter. This is for him a source of shame and of a concomitant sense of guilt for the lies he has to invent in order to conceal his change of status. But, in the end, this new condition which is responsible for a failure in his love life – he is rejected by a woman he would like to marry – proves rewarding: a less snobbish and more genuine girl will let love prevail over class prejudices and accept him. "The implication is," writes Jacob Korg "that it is better to surrender honestly and fully to 'an age of trade' than to seek a corrupting compromise."[6] The love plot and the money plot intersect – as often happens in Gissing's fiction –, the latter heavily influencing the former, confirming our writer's disenchanted attitude. The representation of London, moreover, provides a depressing vision of city life, characterised by the individual's loneliness amidst the crowd.[7]

One of the strongest points of this novel is the protagonist's characterisation. As John Halperin remarks, "[a] brilliant examination of the psychological impact of class barriers and pressures on a sensitive nature, Will Warburton describes, from the inside, the pathology of class fear and the ways in which it can govern human intercourse."[8] Other interesting aspects of this text are the use of irony and the description of bitterly comical situations in which the main character finds himself in the course of his social déclassement.

From these scattered remarks, there emerges the presence, in this novel, of narrative motifs which recur in Gissing's own life and work, such as the "guilty secret" he was so familiar with (owing to his personal history), and the critique of any form of class hypocrisy. For all these reasons, it is evident that an Italian translation of Will Warburton was long overdue.

Vincenzo Pepe is not new to Gissing's work, as he published The Day of Silence/Il giorno del silenzio (a selection of short stories) in 2008, and Gissing's Neapolitan "diaries," Diari napoletani, in 2011. This recent Italian version of Will Warburton confirms his familiarity with the author's texts, with his language and style, which are always necessary prerequisites to the 'art' of translation. Pepe tries to offer a convincing rendering of some

'difficult' terms. For instance, at the end of the fourth chapter, Will Warburton's friend Norbert Franks describes Rosamund Elvan as "the most beautiful girl I ever saw, and the sweetest, and the brightest, and the altogether flooringest," which is translated as: "la più bella ragazza che io abbia mai visto, e la più dolce, la più luminosa, una vera sventola" (p. 36). "Sventola," referred to a woman, means that she is "a hot chick" (to use one equivalent colloquial expression), but in the novel's context this colloquialism seems unjustified to me; a better translation would have probably been "una ragazza mozzafiato" ("a breathtaking girl"). Another informal term that Pepe uses twice is "mazzata" (for "blow," in Chapter XII, p. 81, and for the sentence "he has been badly treated" in Chapter XIV, p. 95), while a more satisfactory rendering would have been "colpo" in the first case, and "è stato trattato male" in the second. But, apart from these and other minor points, as well as a couple of misprints, this translation is fluent and accurate, and often offers brilliant solutions. Above all, the translator succeeds in adopting a language and a style that are consistent with the atmosphere of the story and its cultural context.

Vincenzo Pepe reveals his empathy with Gissing's world view in his Note, where he points out the importance of this novel for its times as well as its modernity and up-to-dateness. He writes that Gissing, with great sensitivity, perceived in his age the signs of an infection which spread throughout the social strata, the "fetishism of economic liberalism," which also characterises our contemporary global society. This fine translation manages to convey that "spirit of the age."

Maria Teresa Chialant, University of Salerno (Italy)

[1] See Markus Neacey, "Italian Editions of George Gissing's Works," *Gissing Journal*, 51:4 (October 2017), pp. 36-39.

[2] Simon J. James, *Unsettled Accounts. Money and Narrative in the Novels of George Gissing*. London: Anthem Press, 2003, p. 139. James quotes Luisa Villa's brilliant article "The Grocer's Romance: Economic Transactions and Radical Individualism in *Will Warburton*," *Gissing Journal*, 36:2 (April 2000), pp. 1-19.

[3] Arlene Young, "Learning Another Language: Gissing and the Discourses of Humour," in Christine Huguet (ed.), *Writing Otherness. The Pathways of George Gissing's Imagination.* Haren, NL: Equilibris Publishing, 2010, p. 141. Huguet, in her "Introduction" to the volume, defines this novel as a "distanced and mimetic representation of the lower-middle-class's comedy of pretentiousness," p. 23.

[4] L. R. Leavis, "Gissing in Context," in Bouwe Postmus (ed.), *A Garland for George Gissing*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2001, p. 193.

[5] L. Villa, *op. cit*., p. 15.

[6] Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1963, p. 255.

[7] Halperin writes that from *Workers in the Dawn* to *Will Warburton,* "Gissing's repugnance to city life is vividly articulated" ("Gissing's Urban Neurasthenia," in John Spiers, ed., *Gissing and the City*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 180).

[8] John Halperin, "Introduction" to George Gissing, *Will Warburton: A Romance of Real Life*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1985, no page.

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Notes and News

On 12 January 2018 DTV (Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag) published a bilingual anthology of English short stories called *Love is a Funny Thing*/*Wohin die Liebe fällt*. Priced at €10 the collection has been selected and translated by Richard Fenzl, who previously translated Gissing's first volume of short stories, *Human Odds and Ends* in 2000. The Gissing story included here is "The Prize Lodger," which in Fenzl's German version is appropriately titled "Der hochgeschätzte Untermieter." The story finds itself in good company alongside short works by George Egerton, William Schwenck Gilbert, Thomas Hardy, D. H. Lawrence, George Moore, and Arthur Morrison.

Dr Gerald Hull of the University of Wales at Bangor recently gave a talk on 13 February 2018 at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute entitled "George Gissing - *New Grub Street* and the writer's inner world."

Wakefield Museum at 3 Burton Street opened a new exhibition "A Day in the Life of Wakefield" on 16 October last autumn "showing 24 hours in Wakefield, from sunrise to sunset, through artistic visions and paintings." Visitors to the exhibition are "guided through an astonishing day with views by talented local artists, such as Cynthia Kenny and Louisa Fennell. Passages from books by local authors, such as George Gissing and Joanne Harris, add a few choice words to the pictures." On the museum website Councillor Jacquie Speight writes, "Visit this latest exhibition at Wakefield Museum that shows a lot can happen in a day. This eclectic gathering of pictures and words, in many styles and ages, are carefully selected to create an epic 24 hours of art, capturing views of our city." The exhibition will run until 22 June 2018.

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Recent Publications

Volumes

Rebecca Hutcheon, *Writing Place: Mimesis, Subjectivity and Imagination in the Works of George Gissing* (Routledge Studies in Nineteenth Century Literature). London: Routledge, 2018. Pp. 224. ISBN 9780815385820. HB £115.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Roger Jones, "Labourers in Fetters: *New Grub Street* by George Gissing," *Slightly Foxed*, 55 (Autumn 2017), pp. 37-41.

Katherine Magyarody, "Odd Woman, Odd Girls: Reconsidering How Girls Can Help to Build Up the Empire: The Handbook for Girl Guides and Early Guiding Practices, 1909–1918," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 41:3 (Fall 2016), pp. 238-262. Article frequently cites Gissing's *The Odd Women*.

Sue McPherson, "Gissing's *New Grub Street* and the Wider Concerns of Impoverishment," *English Literature in Transition*, 60:4 (2017), pp. 490-505.

Gabrielle Miller, "Representations of 'Odd' Women in Gissing and Galdós," *Anales Galdosianos*, 52 (2017), pp. 33-51.

Tom Ue, "George Gissing On-Screen: An Interview with Morgan Watkins on The Lighthouse Golem," *Film International*, 15:4 (1 December 2017), pp. 138-140.

Tom Ue, "Indecision, Inaction, and Public Politics in Gissing's *Veranilda*," *Victoriographies*, 8.1 (March 2018), pp. 100-119.

Paul Young, "The *Land* that England Lost: W. H. Hudson's *The Purple Land*, Liebig's Extract of Meat Company, and the Romance of the Outlands," in Wendy Parkins (ed.), *Victorian Sustainability in Literature and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 180-203.

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