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

Further Fragments of Two Lives: Machen and Gissing

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A preceding essay on Machen and Gissing concluded by summing up Machen's thoughts on literature in his book *Hieroglyphics*.[1] This book, a mixture of fiction and literary philosophy, has some interesting similarities to Gissing's *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Chief among these is that both books seem to portray the musings of the respective authors on aspects of life and literature, yet in reality are skilfully wrought out treatises. However, instead of presenting standard essays on their philosophy, both authors resort to the literary conceit of conveying these reflections through the medium of a fictional third party, whom they take pains to establish as a real historical figure. Gissing and Machen were literary artists of the very highest order, and one can readily understand their reluctance to present yet another standard book of essays, however good. Instead, they used their artistic skills to present these essays and musings in this more inventive and ultimately more artistic and palatable format.

In Gissing's book we are presented with the thoughts and reminiscences of a reclusive writer called Henry Ryecroft, who pens his thoughts from his cottage in Devon, to which he retires at the age of fifty from London Grub Street life with an unexpected legacy of £300 per annum. In the Preface to the book Gissing sets the scene by describing Ryecroft as an old acquaintance of his from earlier years in London. So realistic is this description and the background that, after the book was published, Gissing received more than 60 letters from readers keen to know whether Ryecroft had really existed or not![2]

In his Preface Gissing explains how his friend had recently passed away at the age of fifty-five, and that the duty fell to him to examine Ryecroft's papers. Among the papers, Gissing comes across three manuscript books "which at first glance seemed to be a diary," but on closer inspection he "saw that they were no mere record of day-to-day life; evidently finding himself unable to forego altogether the use of pen, the veteran had set down, as

humour bade him, a thought, a reminiscence, a bit of reverie, a description of his state of mind, and so on […] in this written gossip he revealed himself more intimately than in our conversation of the days gone by."[3] Gissing then goes on to relate his decision to edit and publish the most appealing parts of the diary. Noticing that Ryecroft often referred to aspects of nature and to months of the year he decides to group the miscellaneous jottings into four sections, named after the four seasons.

In Machen's book we do not have the name of the reclusive writer – he is apparently still alive and is simply described as an "obscure literary hermit" whom Machen, as he relates in his Preface, had met by accident in London many years ago. He is now living a reclusive existence in a large decayed house in Barnsbury, "an almost mythical region lying between Pentonville and the Caledonian Road."[4] They both share many interests and Machen enjoys visiting and listening to him discourse on philosophy and the art of literature in particular. Machen is so taken by the musings of his friend that he notes them down and then seeks his permission to have them published. The Hermit agrees on the understanding that "you make me sufficiently apocryphal. I am not going to compete with 'real' critics whose names are printed in the papers."[5] Machen keeps to his friend's request to remain anonymous and organises the Hermit's literary theories into a small book of six chapters. He concludes his Preface by observing that "these fragments which I propose are evidence that [the Hermit] earnestly desired the truth and sought it."[6] Thus, Machen is underscoring the fact that he has placed a lot of effort into this composition and that he looked upon this work as an important statement of his art and beliefs. This chimes in with Gissing's comments on *Ryecroft* in a letter to Pinker from September 1902, "I have given more thought & care and manual labour to this little book than to anything else I ever did. […] If you can suggest to Constables that I by no means regard the thing as an airy trifle, but as about the best I have it in me to do, I should be glad."[7] Evidently, this short work is not to be treated like the long novels which Gissing produced with such consistent regularity. Not that he ever wrote anything lightly, but he is making clear that this book is something altogether different from his previous work. With such high claims and high regard from both writers, it behoves the critic and academic to give these two books due attention and consideration.

After noting the similarities of these books, it would be easy to assume that one writer was possibly influenced by the other. The publishing history proves otherwise. Machen's *Hieroglyphics* was first published in March 1902, ten months before the appearance of Gissing's *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* in January 1903. However, *Ryecroft* had already seen

publication in four quarterly instalments, as "An Author at Grass" in the *Fortnightly Review*, between May 1902 and February 1903. Thus, both books were published almost simultaneously. Furthermore, we know that Gissing had already sketched out the earliest draft of his book in September and October 1900 at St-Honoré-les-Bains[8] while Machen had completed his book a year earlier in 1899. So much for the publishing history. We can now turn to the books themselves to see how they concur and differ in their theories and reflections.

Machen's book is the easier to classify as is made clear in the full title of the book – *Hieroglyphics: A Note upon Ecstasy in Literature*. Gissing's book is the more diffuse and as such more difficult to categorise: here we have a variegated selection of musings and jottings on aspects of nature, life, work and literature and all seemingly and casually grouped into the four seasons. In reality, this apparent randomness masks a well thought-out artistic construction. The first section "Spring" includes specific autobiographical musings which provide readers with an overview of Henry Ryecroft's background and work in London's Grub Street, together with its associated hardships. Section I sets the scene; with a few deft reflections and allusions Gissing conjures a clear portrait of a disillusioned, retired writer of Grub Street:

> For more than a week my pen has lain untouched. I have written nothing for seven whole days, not even a letter. […]
>
> I could imagine that my old penholder feels reproachfully towards me. Has it not served me well? Why do I, in my happiness, let it lie there neglected, gathering dust? […]
>
> Old companion, yet old enemy! How many a time have I taken it up, loathing the necessity, heavy in head and heart, my hand shaking, my eyes sick-dazzled! How I dreaded the white page I had to foul with ink! […] There was a time – it seems further away than childhood – when I took up my pen with eagerness; if my hand trembled it was with hope. But a hope that fooled me, for never a page of my writing deserved to live. I can say that now without bitterness. It was youthful error, and only the force of circumstance prolonged it.[9]

These brief, rolling, descriptive passages, peppered with staccato question marks and exclamation marks, have a poetic and rhythmical intensity that attest to the deep "thought and care and manual labour" that the author had invested in them. Here we have reached a pinnacle of Gissing's art; poetic prose at its finest. This reflective, poetic prosody cannot be maintained at such a high pitch throughout the book. However, there are many passages where Gissing manages to find just the right note. The very next section presents an equally fine, contemplative reverie. Here we have a

recognisable experience, but rarely presented in such an evocative manner. Gissing is able to transmute a commonplace experience into something more profound:

> The exquisite quiet of this room! I have been sitting in utter idleness, watching the sky, viewing the shape of golden sunlight upon the carpet, which changes as the minutes pass, letting my eye wander from one framed print to another, and along the ranks of my beloved books. Within the house nothing stirs. In the garden I can hear the singing of birds, I can hear the rustle of their wings. And thus, if it please me, I may sit all day long, and into the profounder quiet of the night.[10]

Each reader will of course choose the sections that please him or her the most. Another personal example can be given here, from section five of "Summer":

> When a child, I was permitted to handle on Sunday certain books which could not be exposed to the more careless usage of common days; volumes finely illustrated, or the more handsome editions of familiar authors, or works which, merely by their bulk, demanded special care. Happily, these books were all of the higher rank in literature, and so there came to be established in my mind an association between the day of rest and names which are the greatest in verse and prose. […] Nowadays mind and opportunity fail me never. I may take down my Homer or my Shakespeare when I choose, but it is still on Sunday that I feel it most becoming to seek the privilege of their companionship. For these great ones, crowned with immortality, do not respond to him who approaches them as though hurried by temporal care. There befits the garment of solemn leisure, the thought attuned to peace.[11]

It is small wonder that Machen himself liked the book so much.[12] Despite the similarities to *Hieroglyphic*s, the above example is one of only a very few discourses in *Ryecroft* on literature *per se*. There is no attempt here at literary analysis of the merits between the various books and authors. In keeping with the overall tone of the book these sections are reveries on books and authors that Ryecroft has loved and venerated. The authors he chooses to remember are old favourites like Homer, Virgil, Milton, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Johnson, Goethe and Schiller. Of the 103 sections in *Ryecroft* only around ten are fully devoted to thoughts on books and authors. Other sections discuss a variety of topics including nature, holidays, friendship, poverty, weather, cooking, and religion.

Here we see the main difference between these books. *Hieroglyphics* has a far more focussed objective: it is devoted exclusively to theories, thoughts, and aesthetics of books, with a detailed analysis and prescription as to how these can be measured. After the Preface outlining Machen's relationship with the Hermit he launches straight into the heart of his philosophy on books

and literature. In chapter one the Hermit discourses on the differences between an interesting or sensational piece of writing and an artistic one. The former type is only interesting till the secret is given out – while the other, for example, Milton's pastoral poem *Lycidas*, can be read over and over again as one never fails to respond to an artistic surprise. In addition to plot and style a sense of atmosphere has to be added – one that Machen refers to as 'ecstasy.' There is a lower and a higher ground in literature which separates the common from the artistic:

> I really think then that we have disposed of perhaps the most generally received of artistic fallacies – that books are to be judged by their power of reproducing in the readers these feelings of grief, interest, curiosity, and so forth which he experiences in his everyday life, which he really does experience in greater or less degree every time he talks to a friend, takes up a newspaper, or receives a telegram. It comes to this again and again, doesn't it? That Art and Life are two different spheres, and that the Artist with a capital A is not a clever photographer who understands selection in a greater or less degree.[13]

This is not to say that Machen does not enjoy books that he would class in the former rank. He enjoys popular books like *Pride and Prejudice* and *Vanity Fair* as much as any other reader, he sees that they are faithful portrayals of people and society, but he sees that these books do not have the 'ecstasy' that he thinks is the essential ingredient that needs to be present in a book to lift it to the higher artistic plane. For example, he instances Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* as a book belonging to the higher ground of literature. He then compares *The Pickwick Papers* with Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, discoursing at length on their differences, before finally arriving at his definition of ecstasy which is the central tenet of his literary philosophy. There needs to be an added sense of mystery and strangeness in a book. He is not surprised that Dickens has his faults and that these are plenty, but is more surprised that he has genius in his writing, and that *Pickwick* has much in common with Homer's *Odyssey*:

> It is a book of wandering; you start from your own doorstep and you stray into the unknown; every turn of the road fills you with surprise, every little village is a discovery, a something new, a creation. You know not what might happen next; you are journeying through another world. I need not remind you how glorious all this is in the "Odyssey," which of course is so much more beautiful than "Pickwick," as that glowing Mediterranean Sea, whose bounds on every side were mystery, is more beautiful than the muddy, foggy Thames, as those rolling hexameters are more beautiful than Dickens's prose; and yet in each case the symbol is, in reality, the same; both the heroic song of the old Ionian world and the comic cockney romance of 1837 communicate that enthralling impression of the unknown, which is, at once, a whole philosophy of life, and the most exquisite

> of emotions. In varying degrees of intensity you will trace it all through fine literature in every age and in every nation; you will find it in Celtic voyages, in the Eastern Tale, where a door in a dull street suddenly opens into dreamland, in the mediaeval stories of the wandering knights, in "Don Quixote," and at last in our "Pickwick," where Ulysses has become a retired City man, whimsically journeying up and down the England of eighty years ago. You talk of the "grotesquerie" of "Pickwick," but don't you see that this element is present in all masterpieces of the kind? Remember the Cyclops, remember the grotesque shapes that decorate the "Arabian Nights," remember the bizarre element, the almost wanton grotesquerie of many of the "Arthur" romances. In all these cases as in "Pickwick" the same result is obtained; an overpowering impression of "strangeness," of remoteness, of withdrawal from the common ways of life. "Pickwick" is, in no sense, or in no valuable sense, a portrayal, a copy, an imitation of life in the ordinary sense of "imitation" and "life"; "Pickwick," and Sam, and Jingle, and the rest of them are not clever reproductions of actual people (is there any more foolish pursuit than that of disputing about the 'original' of Mr. Pickwick?); the book is rather the suggestion of another life, beneath our own or beside our own, and the characters, those queer grotesque people, are queer for the same reason that the Cyclops is queer and the dwarfs and dragons of mediaeval romance are queer. We are withdrawn from the common ways of life; and in that withdrawal is the beginning of ecstasy.[14]

This literary philosophy as outlined begs the question as to where Gissing's writing would fit within this scheme of things: the lower or higher ground of literature? If the casual reader were to be acquainted only with the majority of books and essays written about Gissing over the years, he would undoubtedly surmise that Gissing should be classed with the writers found in the lower plane. After all the reader is told again and again how realistic a writer Gissing is, how accurately he writes on his own concerns and misfortunes, and those of other people, how exact are his descriptions of place and geographical location – indeed just how accurate he is a photographer of his surroundings. However, this sort of writing does not automatically give rise to great literature and Gissing often comes across as some sort of automaton, with his books at times more subject to scientific analysis than literary analysis. Not that any of these highlighted aspects are unimportant. Yet as Machen points out, "the Artist with a capital A is not a clever photographer who understands selection in a greater or less degree." And few critics these days would argue that Gissing is not a great Artist with a capital A – therefore some ingredient must be missing from these many books on Gissing. What is missing is the sense of mystery, the sense of both heightened wonder and horror that Gissing almost always brings to his works. This can be described as another form of 'literary ecstasy' where the Artist sees beyond the merely outward show and sees to the inward spirit, and it is this, which lifts many of Gissing's works to the higher artistic plane.

For example, Gissing's early novels are full of strange and outré scenes – especially those depicting the working class areas – and are suffused with Gothic overtones.

Machen uses various synonyms for 'ecstasy' – such as sense of the unknown, sense of wonder, rapture, adoration, and withdrawal from the common life. Here we have Machen elaborating on this idea further:

> [I]t is not the business of the literary artist to describe facts – real or imaginary – in words: he is possessed with an idea which he symbolises by incident, by a story of men and women and things. He is possessed, let us say by the idea of Love: then he must write a story of lovers, but he must never forget that A. and B., his actual lovers in the story […] symbolise the universal human passion, which in its turn is a copy of certain eternal and ineffable things.[15]

Machen goes on to argue "that mere incident by itself is nothing, that it only becomes something when it is a symbol of an interior meaning."[16]

Anyone acquainted with the early works of Gissing – the so-called 'working-class novels' of the 1880s will find plenty of symbolic meaning and heightened rapture and wonder amongst all the bleakness and horror. In the very first book *Workers in the Dawn* we have scenes of love and rapture between Arthur Golding and Carrie Mitchell and then Helen Norman – that are extraordinarily sensitive, intense and romantic – not an aspect of Gissing that is usually discussed or remarked upon. These intense scenes if anything are surpassed by the love scenes to be found in *Thyrza*. Perhaps only Charlotte Brontë or Thomas Hardy could write anything as emotionally charged as that to be found in some of the encounters between Thyrza Trent and Walter Egremont. Take the understated episode where Thyrza, already attracted to Walter, determines to see him once more before her marriage to Gilbert Grail. She finds him arranging books at the planned workers library and during their conversation Walter speaks of his travels around the world eliciting the following thoughts and emotions from her:

> What things he had looked upon! How vast the world was, and what marvels it contained! When he ceased, she could say nothing. If she had fallen at his feet, it would have been but the natural prompting of her spirit.
>
> He ended somewhat abruptly, and went to the shelves with books. Thyrza rose and followed him. He looked back, strangely, as if startled. […]
>
> Again he laughed. The laugh troubled her; she preferred him to be grave. […]
>
> "Mr. Egremont, may I come and help to put up a few to-morrow morning?" Again her tongue uttered words in defiance of herself. She could not believe it when the words were spoken.[17]

A similar insanity begins to affect Walter in his relationship to Thyrza. The later emotionally charged scene between Thyrza and Walter on the Embankment and then Lambeth Bridge is a masterful and restrained account of hidden and unspoken desires and passions. A reader can almost weep with Thyrza in her emotional despair after the encounter:

> She went to the end of the bridge, and there crept into a dark place whither no eye could follow her. Her strength was at an end. She fell to her knees; her head lay against something hard and cold; a sob convulsed her, and then in the very anguish of desolation she wept. The darkness folded her […] She wept her soul from her eyes.[18]

Gissing himself felt a special affinity with the book and the passion he put into his characters affected him deeply. His increasing emotions over the book can be charted in his letters to his sister Ellen throughout the latter half of 1886 and the start of 1887. In July he writes "I have a book in my head which no one else could write, a book which will contain the very spirit of London working-class life. Little by little it has been growing[.]"[19] By 22 November he is able to write that he is nearing the end of volume two and that he thinks it better than anything else he has done: "Yes, you will like it, I know. It will be called 'Thyrza' […] I write with fever & delight."[20] On 28 December 1886, he writes that *Thyrza* is "better in many respects than 'Demos.' Last night I cried myself into illness over a chapter as I wrote it [.]"[21] Barely three weeks later in another letter to Ellen he confesses that "Thyrza herself is one of the most beautiful dreams I ever had or shall have. I value the book really more than anything I have yet done. The last chapters drew many tears."[22] Here we are seeing a new Gissing, a deeply romantic and emotionally charged Gissing, one not usually spoken about – but one encountered again and again in almost all his books from *Workers in the Dawn* – through to *Will Warburton.*

Machen does not include many living authors in his literary analysis in *Hieroglyphics*. However, if he had, then there is no doubt that Gissing would have been included in the roll call of those authors who infuse their writing with a sense of 'ecstasy.' An author like Gissing, who peers into the very souls of his characters with such intensity and awareness, could hardly be otherwise excluded. The presence of ecstasy within a book is not always easy to define or explain. As Machen summarises, "Art is always miraculous. In its origin, in its working, in its results it is beyond and above explanation, and the artist's unconsciousness is only one phase of its infinite mysteries."[23]

[1] George Gorniak, "Fragments of Life: Arthur Machen and George Gissing," *Gissing Journal*, 52:2 (April 2018), pp. 17-27; Arthur Machen, *Hieroglyphics: A Note upon Ecstasy in Literature* (London: The Unicorn Press, 1960).

[2] Letters from George Gissing to Clara Collet and his mother in June and August 1903 in *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, eds. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas. 9 vols (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1990 -1997), Vol. IX, pp. 93-94 and p. 105.

[3] George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Oxford: The World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 7.

[4] *Hieroglyphics*, p. 5.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 10. [6] *Ibid*., p. 11.

[7] *Letters*, Vol. VIII, p. 429.

[8] Gissing had already contemplated a volume of essays as early as 1887. Many of these ideas can be found jotted in his *Commonplace Book* and *Memorandum Book* (see 'Further Reading' below). See also the Notes on Composition and Publication in Pierre Coustillas's *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography* (High Wycombe: The Rivendale Press, 2005).

[9] *Ryecroft*, p. 11.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 12. [11] *Ibid*., pp. 60-61.

[12] In reply to a letter from Morchard Bishop praising his autobiography, Machen wrote back on 12 July 1942: "Very hearty thanks for your cordiality as to the Trilogy […] Honestly I share your opinion […] I go so far as to say that I like it better than Gissing's 'Ryecroft', which I like very much." See *The Autobiography of Arthur Machen* (London: Garnstone Press. 1974), p. 10.

[13] *Hieroglyphics*, pp. 30-31.

[14] *Ibid*., pp. 56-57. [15] *Ibid*., p. 85. [16] *Ibid*., p. 89.

[17] George Gissing, *Thyrza* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2013), p. 260.

[18] *Ibid*., p. 282.

[19] *Letters*, Vol. III, p. 48.

[20] *Ibid*., p. 66. [21] *Ibid*., p. 72. [22] *Ibid*., pp. 76-77.

[23] *Hieroglyphics*, p. 136.

Further Reading

Pierre Coustillas, *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography* (High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire: Rivendale Press, 2005).

John Gawsworth, *The Life of Arthur Machen*, ed. by Roger Dobson (Leyburn, North Yorkshire: Tartarus Press, 2005).

Jacob Korg (ed.), *George Gissing's Commonplace Book* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1962).

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Make Love, Not War: George Gissing's *The Crown of Life*

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And he shall judge among nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (Isaiah 2:4)

Irene: from Greek Ειρηνη (Eirēnē), derived from a word meaning "*Peace*." *This was the name of the Greek goddess who personified peace.* (Behind the name.com)

"*Peace! What better could a man pursue?*" (Piers Otway)

"*Strike, England, and strike home.*" (From "The Transvaal" by Algernon Charles Swinburne, 1899)

Talented, experienced, and inspired, George Gissing seamlessly incorporates two major themes in *The Crown of Life*: a passionate anti-war thesis and a passionate celebration of romantic love. While he was writing *The Crown of Life*, the Boer War was on the horizon, and many Englishmen were hungering for war; it was courageous of Gissing to be so stridently anti-war. But from earliest childhood, Gissing was a pacifist: "long before he could reason clearly on the subject he had fairly settled in his mind that war was only for savage peoples."[1]

In addition, as this novel takes place, the British Empire was energetically pursuing other imperialistic goals. It is natural that the characters discuss these issues frequently. Alexander, Piers' half-brother, is not a bad person, but he is representative of the feelings of many Englishmen, and Gissing uses his remarks to Piers to demonstrate how even decent people can get caught up in the war frenzy. Alexander is a journalist and a proud and energetic proponent of armed combat. He contends that war is a noble cause:

> "A word from *us*, and it means war, Piers, glorious war, with triumphs for the race and for civilisation! England means civilisation; the other nations don't count […] we must be armed and triple-armed; we must be so strong that not all the confounded foreigners leagued together can touch us. It's the cause of civilisation, Piers […] I stand for England's honour, England's supremacy on sea and land."[2]

Arnold Jacks is a major character. His political views are succinctly revealed during a discussion of Home Rule.

> "I would grant Home Rule of the completest description, and I would let it run its natural course for—shall we say five years? When the state of Ireland had become intolerable to herself and dangerous to this adjacent island, I would send over dragoons. And," he added quietly, crumbling his bread, "the question would not rise again."[3]

Arnold Jacks and his father manage to retain an affectionate relationship despite their extremely opposed political views.

Jacks admires Lee Hannaford – a more despicable character has rarely been drawn! Hannaford "represents the spirit of those last fifteen years of the nineteenth century which witnessed the development in quick succession of rapid firing weaponry utilizing more powerful and efficient 'propellants.'"[4] Both the bloodthirsty Hannaford and the power hungry Jacks have a lack of or a misplaced libido. Arnold displays no erotic interest in Irene: his passion is Imperialism. Hannaford's passion is weapons of war. He takes a sensual pleasure in the improved methods of slaughter. One wonders what he would make of the 21st century's unimaginable capacity for bloodletting and destruction (see note: **Hannaford**.)

From a minor character – again, like Alexander, a likeable enough – Englishman:

> "And after all, there's no harm in a little fighting. It's better to fight and have done with it than keeping on plotting between compliments. Nations are just like schoolboys, you know; there has to be a round now and then; it settles things, and is good for the blood."[5]

As alarming as these sentiments may seem, the end of the nineteenth century in England brought England to new heights of admiration for things military: "In Gissing's time the glamour of the army held all-powerful sway over the minds of average men and women[.]"[6] (See note: **Tyrtaeus**.) Gissing was repelled and frightened: "The glorification of the empire was to him [Gissing] particularly detestable—and dangerous."[7] Gissing was critical of Kipling's admiration of Empire: "Few things became more hateful to him than the war-like spirit of the self-styled champion of the British Empire."[8]

Mrs. Hannaford's adolescent imaginings are stimulated by martial displays, and she hastily agrees to marry Lee Hannaford. "As a girl in her teens, she had been charmed by the man's virile accomplishments, his soldierly bearing and gay talk of martial things[.]"[9] Even the gentle and sensible Irene is so taken in by the "glamour" of militarism and the appeal of Empire that she becomes engaged to Arnold Jacks, who is passionately committed to England's imperialistic goals. Irene can even respond lightly to Jacks as he extols the virtues of British domination:

> He began to sketch the future extension of Britannic lordship and influence. Kingdoms were overthrown with a joke, continents were annexed in a boyish phrase; Armageddon transacted itself in sheer lightness of heart. Laughing, he waded through the blood of nations, and in the end seated himself with crossed legs upon the throne of the universe.[10]

But shortly after this conversation, Irene visits her wise, quiet, peaceful and elderly cousins. After Irene comments, "We are told […] that England *must* expand," her cousin replies,

> "Probably. But the mere necessity of the case must not become our law. It won't do for a great people to say, 'Make room for us, and we promise to set you a fine example of civilisation; refuse to make room, and we'll blow your brains out!' One doubts the quality of the civilisation promised."[11]

Irene's pacifism eventually becomes more strident in her sarcastic reaction to Helen Borisoff's description of shooting as a sport: "I suppose one *must* shoot something."[12] And,

> "It amazes me," Irene continued, subduing her voice. "Incredible that men can come up here just to bang guns and see beautiful birds fall dead! One would think that what they *saw* here would stop their hands—that this silence would fill their minds and hearts, and make it impossible!"[13]

Although the enthusiasm for war was the prevailing attitude, there were other voices espousing the doctrine of pacifism. Upon the death of Piers' father, John Jacks returns to Piers a manuscript that Jerome Otway had written. In this sly fable, soldiers about to be sent to battle easily figure out that they were simply providing the cannon fodder to advance the orders of the great officials: "And what man among us desires to be blown to pieces by their new instruments of war? Pray, why should *we* fight? If the great officials are angry, as the news-sheets tell us, e'en let them do the fighting themselves."[14] Or, in 20th century vernacular, "Hell no! We won't go!" The soldiers left, and the war between the Durobans and the Kalayans ended without a shot being fired.

But Gissing was not hopeful about improved relations among nations. As one Gissing critic points out, Gissing foresaw an era of impending dangers and "government by petty men, cruel and wasteful wars, mediocrity of culture, perhaps even a return to barbarism."[15] His fears were well-founded. The voices crying out for peace and reason were shouted down by strident shouts for conflict from "patriots," whose hearts beat faster at the thought of war. Young men were taught that it was "theirs not to reason why/theirs but to do and die."[16] And generation after generation doomed warriors, reasoning or not, rode "into the jaws of death/ into the mouth of Hell."[17] Gissing remained pessimistic, but he continued to argue for peace, and *The Crown of Life* is a brave and urgent appeal to antiwar sentiments.

Nevertheless, *The Crown of Life* is, after all, a love story.

Amor Vincit Omnia

Shortly before beginning *The Crown of Life,* Gissing had finally found his true love and was able to convey the deep joy and satisfaction that such a union could bring as he created the romance of Piers Otway and Irene Derwent.

> [I]t was in England in 1898 that he found his ideal woman, Gabrielle Fleury, an intelligent Frenchwoman […] At last he found, with Gabrielle, a generous measure of the happiness that had hitherto so persistently eluded him. To Edward Clodd, at the beginning of 1902, Gissing said: "You speak of my wife [i.e. Gabrielle]. Oh, yes, she is still with me; and, I devoutly hope, will be so until I can no longer benefit by human solace. Our marriage … has been justified by the event, and with quietness and indifference to past troubles."[18]

Gissing had achieved the crown of life and was eager to write of happiness in romantic love. "The author seems to have been deeply interested in his book; it reads as if it had been written with ease and spirit."[19] Gissing doubtless had love on his mind while he was writing *The Crown of Life.* And in 1898, "Influenced by Gabrielle, [he] began work on *The Crown of Life,* the book he thought would be his best novel."[20]

In January 1900, Henry Hyde Champion wrote a review that was highly positive about *The Crown of Life* as a novel and very enthusiastic about George Gissing as an artist. Gabrielle Fleury commented on the review, writing that it was "excellent," "intelligent and laudatory."[21] "She doubtless reflected Gissing's opinion."[22] Although their years together were few, George Gissing and Gabrielle Fleury were very close. Fleury's grief at his passing is well-documented and very moving.

Love becomes the dominant feature of the novel. Piers' love for Irene is the driving force of his life. He realises that the serene, happy union of man and wife is the crown of life. Jerome Otway, his father, reflects sadly upon his marriages:

> Why had he not—he who worshipped the idea of womanhood—sought patiently for his perfect wife? Somewhere in the world he would have found her, could he but have subdued himself to the high seriousness of the quest. In a youthful poem, he had sung of Love as "the crown of life," believing it fervently; he believed it now with a fervour more intense, because more spiritual. That crown he had missed, even as did the multitude of mankind. Only to the elect is it granted[.][23]

Piers muses about love: "Love in the high sense between man and woman is of all things the most rare. Few are capable of it; to fewer still is it granted. 'The crown of life!' said Jerome Otway."[24] Piers rarely wavers from his commitment to Irene, but there are several references to transitory carnal engagements.

> [T]here was always the fear of relapse, such as had befallen him now and again during his years in Russia; a relapse not alone in physical training, but from the ideal of chastity. He had cursed the temper of his blood; he had raved at himself for vulgar gratifications; and once more the struggle was renewed.[25]

Devoted to Irene always, Piers was often at the mercy of his physical longings.

> The truth was, of course, that though imagination could always restore Irene's supremacy, and constantly did so, though his intellectual being never failed from allegiance to her, his blood had been at the mercy of any face sufficiently alluring.[26]

Piers fears that "[t]he mere flesh would constrain him to marriage[.]"[27] He is afraid that "[t]oo insistent were the flesh and blood that composed his earthly being."[28] In his 1899 review of the *The Crown of Life,* Morley Roberts notes that Gissing frequently and honestly alludes to the fact that men experience intense sexual desire: "Almost alone among modern writers he has dared to delineate the tortures of the undebauched celibate, and, delicate subject though this may be, he has handled it truly, purely, and without offence."[29] Piers tries to remain physically active as he copes with his loneliness. "An ascetic of old times, subduing his flesh in cell or cave, battled no harder than this idealist of London City tortured by his solitude."[30] Piers Otway is a healthy young man.

In fact, the first image we have of him is as a twenty-one year old visitor to London. He is enjoying looking into the windows of a print shop. His eye

> was drawn irresistibly to the faces and forms of beautiful women set forth with varied allurement. Some great lady of the passing time lounged in exquisite array amid luxurious furniture lightly suggested; the faint smile of her flattered loveliness hovered about the gazer; the subtle perfume of her presence touched his nerves; the greys of her complexion transmuted themselves through the current of his blood into life's carnation; whilst he dreamed upon her lips, his breath was caught, as though of a sudden she had smiled for him, and for him alone.[31]

There are further descriptions of feminine attraction here, and they affect Piers, who "always lingered by the print shops […] and always went on with troubled blood[.]"[32] A short time after Piers is seen admiring the women in the print shop window, he meets Irene. *He is smitten*! Although she is a few years younger than Piers, at this stage, Irene is more mature. One is reminded of Romeo and Juliet: when Shakespeare's lovers meet, Juliet at fourteen already has womanly wisdom. As does Irene, who regards the socially inept Piers with motherly kindness. To Piers, Irene always "is the sun," and he devotes his life to winning her love. Piers seeks union with this ideal woman; it would be the crown of life.

As he falls helplessly, deeply, and permanently in love, Piers becomes so infatuated that he can no longer study or even sleep. He changes his career plans. As always, he is polite and loving towards his father, but informs him that he has had a change of heart about his career and plans on a career in commerce. He wants to go to Odessa, master Russian, and become a person of value in the field of commerce. He has recognised the value of money! He himself says he is "[s]avagely set on it!"[33] He realises that in order to marry Irene, "[m]oney he must have; a substantial position; a prospect of social advance. Not for their own sake, these things, but as steps to the only end he felt worth living for—an ideal marriage."[34] For Piers, "there was for him but one prize worth winning, the love of the ideal woman."[35]

There are many disappointments for Piers as he pursues his dream. He knows Irene had not reacted as he had when they first met, he get hints from Mrs. Hannaford that he is not of the appropriate class to court Irene Derwent, he disgraces himself in front of her family by arriving at a social meeting very drunk, he fears Irene's reaction when she becomes aware of his illegitimate birth, and finally, he learns of her engagement to Arnold Jacks. But he struggles to master his depression and resumes his Russian based business venture.

After an interval in Russia, upon returning to England for business, Piers is greeted by Mrs. Hannaford and Olga. "'How much improved!' was the thought of both." He had become "larger, manlier […] self-possessed."[36] He had also become an engaging conversationalist and had gained superb control of his emotions. His great love for Irene had only deepened, but he had the willpower to constrain and conceal his passionate feelings. During the evening he meets with Dr. Derwent and Irene: "Piers saw that Irene had turned to him; he held himself in command" as he continued to make normal conversation, the art of which he had mastered.[37] "In truth, these three years had intellectually much advanced him."[38] He had become a successful businessman.

> Strangers with whom Piers Otway had business at this time saw in him a young man of considerable energy, though rather nervous and impulsive, capable in all that concerned his special interests, not over-sanguine, inclined to brevity of speech, and scrupulously courteous in a cold way.[39]

He and Irene have conversations that advance Irene's respect and admiration for Piers: "It will be interesting to see him in another five years."[40] But for the suffering lover, who has learned of her engagement to Arnold Jacks, these encounters are an ordeal that in no way lessens his love for her, but which cause

him to almost feel faint.[41] "Her voice, at moments, touched him to a sense of faintness[.]"[42]

Piers assumes Irene's marriage is a foregone conclusion and turns his attention to Olga. "He was persuading himself that in her he saw his heart's desire. For Piers Otway was one of those men who cannot live without a woman's image to worship."[43] He convinces himself that she is "his perfect vision of delight."[44] Although it does prove to be momentary, his attraction to Olga seems a false note in this love story. His "love" for Olga and his proposal of marriage may startle the readers of *The Crown of Life*. But Piers is nothing if not human, and this short spell of wavering proves it. He was "maddened by solitude!"[45] His desire for marriage was prompted by his extreme loneliness. Here is an echo of the loneliness of George Gissing: "This solitude is killing me. I can't endure it any longer."[46] Piers' depression is severe, and his torture is expressed thus: "He said to himself that he had grown old in hopeless love—only to doubt in the end whether he had loved at all."[47]

Olga suddenly breaks off with Piers and elopes with Mr. Florio. That she loves Piers is evidenced in her jealousy of Irene, and readers may wonder why she married Mr. Florio so abruptly. Was this her shining hour of generosity? Or does she simply choose the man she knew loved her as she knew Piers did not? She responds to his proposal doubtfully. Piers said,

> "I want you for my companion—for my wife"—
> She looked him in the face—a strange, agitated, half-defiant look.
> "I don't think that is true! You don't want *me*"—
> "You! Yes, you. Olga! And only you!"
> "I don't believe it. You mean—any woman."[48]

Whatever her motives are, when Piers learns of Olga's marriage, he is quite sanguine about losing her. In fact,

> The memory was faint; he found it hard to imagine that the loss of a woman he did not love could so have afflicted him. Olga Hannaford—Mrs. Florio – was matter for a smile; he hoped that he might some day meet her again, and take her hand with the old friendliness, and wish her well.[49]

As the years pass, Piers gains a healthy self-respect:

> He allowed himself a little pride. […] he had made friends […] among the intelligent and the powerful. That gift, it seemed, was his, if no other—the ability to make himself liked, respected. He, by law the son of nobody, had begun to approve himself true son of the father he loved and honoured.[50]

When he meets Irene again a few years later, his passion for her is still very much alive. When Irene enters the room, Piers is waiting, unseen behind two men. Here is one of Gissing's amazing short sentences that convey so much: "*And at length he looked*."[51] [Italics mine.] His constant adoration has not been misplaced. "What he now beheld was the exquisite fulfilment of that bright promise. He had not erred in worship; she who had ever been to him the light of life, the beacon of his passionate soul, shone before him supreme among women."[52]

Irene's journey to romantic love is more gradual than Piers', and her passion for him is not sudden but incremental. She is one of Gissing's most attractive creations; and the difficult task of representing her gradual recognition of her love for Piers – extending over several years, at the beginning of which the young girl's attitude towards him is rather that of a mother – is fulfilled with consummate skill and artistry.[53] The woman she is becoming will be an ardent lover. Even though she is a thoroughly modest and reserved young Englishwoman, there are indications of her sensuality. For instance, she appreciates food! "Irene had an excellent appetite" and "[b]ut with the others she talked as brightly as usual, managing, none the less, to do full justice to the meal [...] and she never affected a delicate appetite."[54] As she matures, her political views become more like Piers'. Originally she asks Piers: "But what would have been the history of England these last fifty years, but for our men of iron selfishness? Isn't it a fact that only in this way could we have built up an Empire which ensures the civilisation of the world."[55] Eventually, though, Irene rejects the imperialistic and militaristic Arnold Jacks in one of the strongest scenes in the novel. Jacks' appeal is very strong, and he argues logically and considerately (at first) for her to just wait a while before breaking their engagement, but Irene is obdurate. Her insistence on cancelling the wedding is her epiphany. The turning point in the novel occurs when Irene courageously holds fast to her decision, even though it was very difficult for her. Piers will later wonder, "Was she brought nearer to him by her own experience of heart-trouble."[56]

The years pass, and her recognition of her love for Piers grows. For reasons she does not fully understand, she memorises the poem he wrote for her, and she is concerned when she learns he has been ill: "Immediately on reaching Odessa, Piers Otway had fallen ill, and for a time was in danger. Irene mused. She would have preferred not to think of Otway at all, but often did so, and could not help it."[57] And she learns Russian! "She began to study Russian, and in secret; her impulse dark, or so obscurely hinted that it caused her no more than a moment's reverie."[58] In the course of these

studies, she finally admits to herself that she wishes to "harmonise her life with that she imagined for her ideal man."[59] (Learned Russian! No wonder it took her years to look him up!) She asks Helen Borisoff to help her contact Piers.

Irene has been influenced by the happy marriage of her parents and will not settle for less. She is touched by the enduring devotion that her father has towards her dead mother. The relationship between Piers' parents was also very happy, even though they could not marry due to a previous marriage. The difficulty of divorce in late nineteenth-century England is a sub-theme in this novel; at the time he was writing *The Crown of Life,* Gissing was struggling to divorce his wife, even though they had been separated for many years and she was in an institution. Like Gissing's marriage, the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Hannaford was made in hell. It was "one, at least, of the innumerable mock marriages which burden the lives of mankind. Mrs. Hannaford's only bitterness was that in law she remained wedded […] a martyr to national morality."[60]

Divorce was rarely an option for an unhappy couple, and there are few happy marriages in a Gissing novel. There are several opinions of marriage expressed in *The Crown of Life.* There is something touching about the marriage of Alexander and Biddie. Alexander advises Piers to be patient in his search for a mate: "When it comes to wives, the best or none!"[61] Arnold Jacks' view of marriage provides a stark contrast: "Marriage—that is another thing. The approaches to wedlock are a subject of honourable convention, not to be confused with the trivialities of romance."[62] The marriage of Helen Borisoff is just for convenience, but it seems to work. Only once, when Helen momentarily neglects to inform Irene of a vital message, do we get a hint that she envies Irene and is perhaps yearning for Piers herself. Piers' mother was not able to marry his father, but the couple experienced the crown of life.

Married or odd, there are several minor characters in *The Crown of Life.* The novel is peopled with a diverse group of characters who act and interact to express Gissing's views on war and love as they advance the plot. These scenes are sometimes humorous. Readers can feel Gissing's compassion for most of these characters; their very lapses endear them to us. When Gissing wants to create a sympathetic character, he is a master. The notably very unsympathetic characters are Arnold Jacks, Daniel Otway, and the despicable Lee Hannaford. (See note: **Hannaford**.)

These characters provide interesting insights into late nineteenth-century Victorian England. Kite, for example, is a fascinating if somewhat stereotyped example of the struggling artist. Gissing comments on art trends

through the voice of Olga's roommate, Mrs. Bonniface, a painter who makes art of posters. She is a nineteenth-century Andy Warhol. She ultimately takes in the starving Kite. Mr. Florio makes just a few brief appearances, but he is likeable and sad. His negative comments about his native Italy are strange, considering Gissing's affection for Italy, "the country he loved above all others."[63] Gissing's characters are well-developed and believable, with the exception of Olga Hannaford.

Olga's character does not seem logically developed. At one point she gains our respect for the loving care of her mother *and* for rejecting Piers' impulsive marriage proposal. She may marry Mr. Florio because she knows he loves her, but is her elopement with Mr. Florio also her finest hour? She is certainly at her least admirable when she sends a letter to Irene that discredits Piers, and, Olga hopes, will derail the romance. But Irene, unlike Rhoda of *The Odd Women,* who also receives some very damning evidence about her lover and challenges him with it, has faith in Piers.

What Olga lacks in believable character development, she more than makes up for by being convenient. Whenever the plot needs an incident to advance it, or a character needs another descriptive scene, or whenever the readers need some page turning action, Olga fills the bill. When we first meet her, she is somewhat sullen and mysterious, but oddly appealing in a dark way. She provides the perfect foil to Irene's sunny disposition, friendly, open personality, and fair beauty. Olga is unkempt in her bohemian life, beautiful in Piers' eyes during his brief infatuation with her, and sincere and attractive in her role as care giver to her mother. Olga gives Gissing the opportunity to write about bohemian life and art. Although Olga's attractiveness comes and goes, she receives three offers of marriage! She knows neither that Kite nor Piers truly love her, so she settles for Mr. Florio, who actually does.

The pace of the novel dramatically accelerates as Piers and Irene finally find each other, declare their love, and all is happily resolved. Happily, that is, for everyone but Olga Florio, Daniel Otway, and Lee Hannaford. But at least Olga and Daniel have butter, and Lee Hannaford has guns.

The final paragraphs are richly written. Some readers may find them too rich. Possibly. And still others might describe them as overly sentimental. Maybe. But readers like myself read lines like these with a contented sigh:

> Her voice had a soft, caressing tremor; her hand sought his.
> "Irene! You have given me a new life, a new soul!"
> Her lips were near as she answered him.
> "Rest from your sorrows, my dearest. I love you! I love you!"[64]

The Crown of Life is a completely unified and very satisfying novel. It is a powerful argument to make love, not war!

Epilogue: Helen Borisov:

> "Generally, the man or woman born for Love is born for nothing else."
> "A deplorable state of things!" exclaimed Irene, laughing.
> "Yes—or no. Who knows? Such people ought to die young."[65]

There is another love story in *The Crown of life*: Gissing's love for England. No discussion of the novel would be complete without including a few of the many absolutely beautiful descriptive passages:

> At the head of Wensleydale, where rolling moor grows mountainous toward the marches of Yorkshire and Westmorland, stands the little market-town named Hawes. One winding street of houses and shops, grey, hard-featured, stout against the weather; with little byways climbing to the height above, on which rises the rugged church, stern even in sunshine; its tower, like a stronghold, looking out upon the brooding-place of storms. Like its inhabitants, the place is harsh of aspect, warm at heart; scornful of graces, its honest solidity speaks the people that built it for their home. This way and that go forth the well-kept roads, leading to other towns; their sharp tracks shine over the dark moorland, climbing by wind-swept hamlets, by many a lonely farm; dipping into sudden hollows, where streams become cascades, and guiding the wayfarers by high, rocky passes from dale to dale. A country always impressive by the severe beauty of its outlines; sometimes speaking to the heart in radiant stillness, its moments of repose; mirthful sometimes, inspiring joyous life, with the gleams of its vast sky, the sweet, keen breath of its heaths and pastures; but for the most part shadowed, melancholy, an austere nurse of the striving spirit of man, with menace in its mountain-rack, in the rushing voice of its winds and torrents.[66]

> No corner of England more safely rural; beyond sound of railway whistle, bosomed in great old elms, amid wide meadows and generous tillage; sloping westward to the river Dee, and from its soft green hills descrying the mountains of Wales.[67]

> He had taken a ticket at hazard for a place with a pleasant-sounding name, and before village bells had begun to ring he was wandering in deep lanes amid the weald of Sussex. All about him lay the perfect loveliness of that rural landscape which is the old England, the true England, the England dear to the best of her children. Meadow and copse, the yellow rank of new-reaped sheaves, brown roofs of farm and cottage amid shadowing elms, the grassy borders of the road, hedges with their flowered creepers and promise of wild fruit—these things brought him comfort.[68]

> On a glorious night of stars, he walked with his son up to the open moor. A summer breeze whispered fitfully between the dark-blue vault and the grey earth; there was a sound of water that leapt from the bosom of the hills; deep answering to deep, infinite to infinite.[69]

> So Irene, alone, journeyed from King's Cross into the North Riding. At evening, the sun golden amid long lazy clouds that had spent their showers, she saw wide Wensleydale, its closing hills higher to north and south as the train drew onward, green slopes of

meadow and woodland rising to the bent and the heather. At a village station appeared the welcoming face of her friend Helen. A countryman with his homely gig drove them up the hillside, the sweet air singing about them from moorland heights, the long dale spreading in grander prospect as they ascended, then hidden as they dropped into a wooded glen, where the horse splashed through a broad beck and the wheels jolted over boulders of limestone. Out again into the sunset, and at a turn of the climbing road stood up before them the grey old Castle, in its shadow the church and the hamlet, and all around the glory of rolling hills.[70]

They exchanged few words; the picture before their eyes, and the wild music that filled the air, imposed silence. Headlong between its high banks plunged the swollen torrent, the roaring spate; brown from its washing of the peaty moorland, and churned into flying flakes of foam. Over the worn ledges, at other times a succession of little waterfalls, rolled in resistless fury a mighty cataract; at great rocks in mid-channel it leapt with surges like those of an angry sea. The spectacle was fascinating in its grandeur, appalling in its violence; with the broad leafage of the glen arched over it in warm, still sunshine, wondrously beautiful.[71]

On either hand was a wood, thick with undergrowth; great pines, spruces and larches, red-berried rowans, crowding on the steep sides of the ravine; trees of noble stature, shadowing fern and flower, towering against the sunny blue.[72]

Notes

Hannaford. Ivan Melada had an idea: "Had Gissing had sufficient inspiration to have made Lee Hannaford a major figure, he would have anticipated in *The Crown of Life* not only the Czar's proclamation but also 'Dr. Strangelove.'"[73] One can contemplate a novel featuring Lee Hannaford with only absolute dismay. Other negative comments include those of James Joyce, who complained he could not even finish *The Crown of Life*.[74] The people who have actually finished *Ulysses* would barely fill the town square of a small town.

Tyrtaeus. For a more thorough discussion of the effect of military music and verse see George Gissing's "Tyrtaeus" reprinted in *The Gissing Journal*, 10:3 (July 1974) in "Gissing on Matters of War and Ethics: Two Half-forgotten Essays," pp 1-7. Note also W. B. Yeats' poem "On being asked for a War Poem" (1915): "I think it better that in times like these/A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth/We have no gift to set a statesman right," ll. 1-3.

[1] Pierre Coustillas and Xavier Petremand (eds.), "George Gissing and War: An Unpublished Essay [by A. C. Gissing]," *Gissing Journal*, 28:1 (January 1992), p. 8.

[2] George Gissing (1899), *The Crown of Life* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), pp. 51-52.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 11.

[4] Ivan Melada, "George Gissing's Anti-Jingo Book: *The Crown of Life* and the Question of Peace," *Gissing Journal*, 14:1 (January1978), p. 13.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 308.

[6] Pierre Coustillas and Xavier Petremand (eds.), "George Gissing and War: An Unpublished Essay [by A. C. Gissing]," p. 8.

[7] Pierre Coustillas, "Gissing's Pacifism: A Temperament in the Light of History," *Gissing Journal*, 44:2 (April 2008), p. 4.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 8.

[9] Gissing, p. 16.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 76. [11] *Ibid*., p. 80. [12] *Ibid*., p. 305. [13] *Ibid*., p. 306. [14] *Ibid*., p. 178.

[15] Mabel Donnelly, *George Gissing, Grave Comedian* (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1954), p. 2.

[16] Alfred Tennyson (1854), "The Charge of the Light Brigade," II. vii-viii.

[17] *Ibid*., III. vii-viii.

[18] A. C. Ward, *Gissing* (London: British Council and The National Book League, 1959), p. 19.

[19] Anon., "[Unsigned contemporary review of *The Crown of Life*] An Unexpectedly Cheerful Book," in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 355.

[20] James Haycock, "A George Gissing Chronology," Victorian Web: Literature, History, & Culture in the Age of Victoria. Accessed 18 July 2018.

[21] Henry Hyde Champion, "Book Lover," in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 359.

[22] *Ibid*.

[23] Gissing, p. 69.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 167. [25] *Ibid*., p. 99. [26] *Ibid*., p. 103. [27] *Ibid*., p. 113. [28] *Ibid*., p. 168.

[29] Morley Roberts, "The Crown of Life," in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge, p. 353.

[30] Gissing, p. 182.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 1. [32] *Ibid*., p. 2. [33] *Ibid*., p. 95. [34] *Ibid*., p. 55. [35] *Ibid*. [36] *Ibid*., p. 93. [37] *Ibid*., p. 102. [38] *Ibid*., p. 103. [39] *Ibid*., p. 144. [40] *Ibid*., p. 160. [41] *Ibid*. [42] *Ibid*., p. 156. [43] *Ibid*., p. 249. [44] *Ibid*., p. 250. [45] *Ibid*., p. 272.

[46] Sydney Lott, "Gissing's Dreams and Realities, between Wives," *Gissing Journal*, 36:3 (July 2000), p. 21.

[47] Gissing, p. 267.

[48] *Ibid*., p. 272. [49] *Ibid*., p. 277. [50] *Ibid*., p. 285. [51] *Ibid*., p. 286. [52] *Ibid*.

[53] Anon., "[Unsigned contemporary review of *The Crown of Life*] A Good Novel," in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge, p. 356.

[54] Gissing, pp. 19 and 26.

[55] *Ibid*., p. 157. [56] *Ibid*., p. 291. [57] *Ibid*., p. 82. [58] *Ibid*., p. 315. [59] *Ibid*. [60] *Ibid*., p. 96. [61] *Ibid*., p. 50. [62] *Ibid*., p. 74.

[63] Markus Neacey, "George Gissing's Long Journey to Potsdam," *Gissing Journal*, 52:3 (July 2018), p. 33.

[64] Gissing, pp. 328-329.

[65] *Ibid*., p. 196. [66] *Ibid*., p. 64. [67] *Ibid*., p. 78. [68] *Ibid*., p. 166. [69] *Ibid*., p. 98. [70] *Ibid*., p. 304. [71] *Ibid*., p. 311. [72] *Ibid*., p. 323.

[73] Ivan Melada, p. 10.

[74] *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge, p. 518.

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Some Newly-Discovered Contemporary Reviews of Gissing's Early Novels

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In his *George Gissing, The Definitive Bibliography* (2005), Pierre Coustillas lists thirteen known reviews of Gissing's first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, all dating from 1880. Twelve of these had been previously recorded in *Gissing, The Critical Heritage* (1972), four being printed in that volume. By January 1977 (see *The Gissing Newsletter* of that date) an extremely negative review by Annie Besant in the *National Reformer* had been discovered. Bouwe Postmus added one more review to the list which he found in the *Examiner* of 17 July 1880 (see April 2010 issue of *The Gissing Journal*). I have now discovered two further contemporary reviews of the novel from 1880 and 1881 taking the number of known reviews up to sixteen. Although Gissing was of the opinion (admittedly because he was not aware of a good many of them), and later scholars too, that *Workers in the Dawn* had received scarcely any notice in the press upon publication owing to Remington's lack of interest in advertising the novel, it seems now that the novel actually received tolerable recognition on its appearance. After all, sixteen reviews is a decent number for a first novel (by comparison 10 years later *New Grub Street* received thirty-two), and one can assume that there are still more waiting to be discovered in the coming years.

Of the two newly-found reviews, the most unexpected discovery is the unsigned lengthy one from the *Western Morning News* of 30 May 1881 which appeared almost exactly a year after *Workers in the Dawn* was originally published. The same review was reprinted in the *Rutland Echo and Leicestershire Advertiser* on 4 June 1881, a fact which suggests it was published in other regional newspapers around that date. The *Western Morning News* is a daily regional newspaper still in existence today. It was founded in 1860 by William Saunders (1823-1895), a Liberal Party politician, vice-president of the temperance society United Kingdom Alliance, and radical member of the London County Council in later years, and Edward Spender (1834-1878), a young liberal-minded journalist and champion of the temperance movement. According to the latter's great-grandson, Barney Spender,

> Edward Spender saw the potential for a daily newspaper in the regions, immediately able to report what was going on in London; in Parliament, in the courts, in the heart of the nation. To this day Spenders have been good at spotting openings and ideas, less good at following them through, lacking perhaps the business savvy to make them work. If Edward was like that, then he was also lucky. His sister Caroline had married

> a man called William Saunders, eleven years Edward's senior who also saw the possibilities. And had the capital and business acumen to do something about it. They went into partnership and in 1860, when Edward was just 26 years old, they set up the *Western Morning News* as a daily newspaper in Plymouth, some 238 miles (383 kilometres) south-west of London. Saunders was the business, Spender was the editorial. Four years later and now a married man, Spender opened up the newspaper's London office. Contemporary accounts call him the "Prince of the Lobby" although there do not appear to be any records to that effect at the House of Commons. Sadly, much of the *Western Morning News* archive went up in smoke during the air raids of the Second World War.

Edward Spender, a great-uncle of the yet-to-be-born poet, Stephen Spender, died early in heroic circumstances in June 1878 at Whitsand Bay saving his two sons from drowning at sea. On a bluff overlooking Whitsand Bay there is a simple stone Celtic cross commemorating the tragedy, which was erected that same year.

Not unsurpisingly the reviewer in the *Western Morning News* reveals that he does not care for the subject of Gissing's first novel, nor the way it is told, but does concede that it "exercises a strange fascination." The most notable part of the review is the extensive summary which proves that the reviewer did read all three volumes of the novel all the way through to its sad denouement at Niagara Falls.

Coustillas's *Bibliography* shows that several of Gissing's other early novels up to 1890 received surprisingly low numbers of reviews in the press. He lists only ten known reviews of *The Unclassed* (Postmus found one more in 2010); sixteen of *Isabel Clarendon*; and fourteen of *The Emancipated*. *Demos* with thirty-one, *Thyrza* with twenty-six, *A Life's Morning* with twenty, and *The Nether World* with twenty-three all faired better. I have now found three further reviews of *The Unclassed*, two of *Isabel Clarendon*, and one of *The Emancipated*, most of them (which have escaped notice until now) found in the more prominent dailies and journals of the day such as the *Daily News* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The newly-discovered reviews have been added to the chronological tables I have compiled (see further down).

All the newly-discovered contemporary reviews of the first editions of *Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed*, *Isabel Clarendon*, and *The Emancipated* are highlighted in bold in the chronological tables and printed below. The main source of the tabular listings is Pierre Coustillas's *George Gissing, The Definitive Bibliography* (High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, 2005), which I denote by the abbreviation "GG Bibl." Reviews located after 2005 have all been recorded in *The Gissing Journal* which is abbreviated to "GJ" in the tables.

Reviews of *Workers in the Dawn*:

1.	*Athenaeum*	12 June 1880	p. 758	GG Bibl
2.	*Graphic*	19 June 1880	p. 627	GG Bibl
3.	*Court Circular and Court News*	19 June 1880	p. 588	GG Bibl
4.	*Whitehall Review Lit Suppl*	15 July 1880	p. iv	GG Bibl
5.	*Examiner*	17 July 1880	p. 868	GJ Apr 2010
6.	*Daily News* (London)*	29 July 1880	p.6	GG Bibl
7.	*Academy*	31 July 1880	pp. 76-77	GG Bibl
8.	*Illustrated London News*	31 July 1880	p. 110	GG Bibl
9.	*Weekly Dispatch*	15 August 1880	p.6	GG Bibl
10.	*National Reformer*	22 August 1880	pp. 163-164	GG Bibl
11.	*St. James's Gazette*	28 August 1880	pp. 13-14	GG Bibl
12.	***Morning Post***	**11 September 1880**	**p. 3**	**GJ Apr2019**
13.	*Manchester Examiner and Times*	15 September 1880	p. 3	GG Bibl
14.	*Spectator*	25 September 1880	pp. 1226-1227	GG Bibl
15.	*World*	6 October 1880	p. 18	GG Bibl
16.	***Western Morning News***	**30 May 1881**	**p. 2**	**GJ Apr2019**

(Republished in *Rutland Echo and Leicestershire Advertiser*, 4 June 1881, p. 6)

*See also reference to *Workers in the Dawn* under the heading "Recent Novels" in *Daily News* of 2 March 1882, p. 6.

Reviews of *The Unclassed*:

1.	*Evening News*	25 June 1884	p. 1	GG Bibl
2.	*Academy*	28 June 1884	p. 454	GG Bibl
3.	*Athenaeum*	28 June 1884	pp. 820-821	GG Bibl
4.	***St. James's Gazette***	**25 July 1884**	**p. 7**	**GJ Apr2019**
5.	*World*	30 July 1884	p. 22	GG Bibl
6.	*Morning Post*	7 August 1884	p. 6	GG Bibl
7.	*Daily Telegraph*	21 August 1884	p. 6	GG Bibl
8.	***Glasgow Herald***	**27 August 1884**	**p. 4**	**GJ Apr2019**
9.	*To-Day**	September 1884	pp. 304-308	GJ Apr2010
10.	*Graphic*	13 September 1884	p. 286	GG Bibl
11.	*London Figaro*	20 September 1884	p. 15	GG Bibl
12.	***Standard* (London)**	**3 October 1884**	**p. 2**	**GJ Apr2019**
13.	*Spectator*	31 January 1885	p. 158	GG Bibl
14.	*Daily News* (London)	19 October 1885	p. 2	GG Bibl

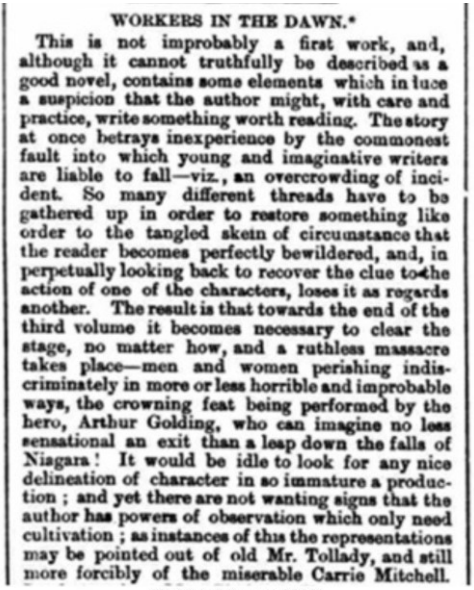
*The Periodical's full name is *Today: the Monthly Magazine of Scientific Socialism*

Reviews of *Isabel Clarendon*:

1.	*St James's Gazette*	5 June 1886	p. 7	GG Bibl
2.	*Daily Telegraph*	10 June 1886	p. 2	GG Bibl
3.	*Athenaeum*	19 June 1886	p. 808	GG Bibl
4.	*Court Journal*	26 June 1886	p. 753	GG Bibl
5.	*St Stephen's Review*	3 July 1886	p. 23	GG Bibl
6.	*Scotsman*	8 July 1886	p. 7	GG Bibl
7.	*Academy*	10 July 1886	p. 24	GG Bibl
8.	*Saturday Review*	10 July 1886	p. 58	GG Bibl
9.	*Illustrated London News*	10 July 1886	p. 50	GG Bibl
10.	*Vanity Fair*	10 July 1886	p. 27	GG Bibl
11.	*Morning Post*	28 July 1886	p. 2	GG Bibl
12.	*London Figaro*	7 August 1886	p. 14	GG Bibl
13.	***Pall Mall Gazette***	**13 August 1886**	**p. 4**	**GJ Apr2019**
14.	*Queen*	28 August 1886	p. 247	GG Bibl
15.	*Guardian*	15 September 1886	p. 1364	GG Bibl
16.	*Graphic*	2 October 1886	p. 370	GG Bibl
17.	*Spectator*	23 October 1886	p. 1420	GG Bibl
18.	***Daily News* (London)**	**28 December 1886**	**p. 3**	**GJ Apr2019**

Reviews of *The Emancipated*:

1.	*Athenaeum*	12 April 1890	p. 466	GG Bibl
2.	*Illustrated London News*	19 April 1890	p. 498	GG Bibl
3.	*Academy*	19 April 1890	p. 263	GG Bibl
4.	*Vanity Fair*	19 April 1890	pp. 352-353	GG Bibl
5.	*Graphic*	26 April 1890	p. 488	GG Bibl
6.	*Morning Post*	30 April 1890	p. 2	GG Bibl
7.	*Die deutsche Presse*	4 May 1890	p. 143	GG Bibl
8.	*St. James's Gazette*	8 May 1890	p. 6	GG Bibl
9.	*Guardian*	28 May 1890	p. 882	GG Bibl
10.	*Daily News* (London)	30 May 1890	p. 6	GG Bibl
11.	*London Figaro*	14 June 1890	p. 4	GG Bibl
12.	*Saturday Review*	21 June 1890	p. 772	GG Bibl
13.	*Spectator*	21 June 1890	p. 875	GG Bibl
14.	*Westminster Review*	September 1890	pp. 333-334	GG Bibl
15.	***Pall Mall Gazette***	**13 October 1890**	**p. 3**	**GJ Apr2019**



WORKERS IN THE DAWN.*

This is not improbably a first work, and, although it cannot truthfully be described as a good novel, contains some elements which in luce a suspicion that the author might, with care and practice, write something worth reading. The story at once betrays inexperience by the commonest fault into which young and imaginative writers are liable to fall—viz., an overcrowding of incident. So many different threads have to be gathered up in order to restore something like order to the tangled skein of circumstance that the reader becomes perfectly bewildered, and, in perpetually looking back to recover the clue to the action of one of the characters, loses it as regards another. The result is that towards the end of the third volume it becomes necessary to clear the stage, no matter how, and a ruthless massacre takes place—men and women perishing indiscriminately in more or less horrible and improbable ways, the crowning feat being performed by the hero, Arthur Golding, who can imagine no less sensational an exit than a leap down the falls of Niagara! It would be idle to look for any nice delineation of character in so immature a production; and yet there are not wanting signs that the author has powers of observation which only need cultivation; as instances of this the representations may be pointed out of old Mr. Tollady, and still more forcibly of the miserable Carrie Mitchell.

(British Library 2019)

Morning Post, 11 September 1880, p. 3.

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It would be idle to look for any nice delineation of character in so immature a production; and yet there are not wanting signs that the author has powers of observation which only need cultivation; as instances of this the representations may be pointed out of old Mr. Tollady, and still more forcibly of the miserable Carrie Mitchell. In fact, when Mr. Gissing will condescend to restrain himself to matters of humble life it is evident that he is writing from true and painful experience, and the result is that such portions of his work are very superior to any others; although it may well be doubted whether the pages of a novel are the most suitable vehicle for the introduction of such topics as the prevalent vices of a great city. There would seem to have been an intention to enforce a serious moral, viz., the danger attending life without religion. It is rather a pity that this could not have been done without a rushing into polemics, and the passages in the second volume concerning the ornaments of the Church merely

show ignorance. The author may be advised, before attempting another work of fiction, to devote serious study to the construction of his plot, and to practise simplicity of language, when he may not impossibly be rewarded by success.

*Workers in the Dawn: A Novel. 3 vols. By George R. Gissing. London: Remington and Co.

Western Morning News, 30 May 1881, p. 2.

"Workers in the Dawn."

It is rarely that modern novels by untried authors are worth very serious notice. Such an exception, however, is Mr. George R. Gissing's story called "Workers in the Dawn." It is not a pleasant tale, nor a story for indiscriminate reading; nor is it to be recommended for its artistic excellence. It is a novel with a purpose, and the only quality which it [has] is its surprising earnestness and moral aspiration. Nor is it an orthodox book. It exhibits an almost crazy dislike for parsons, of whom Mr. Gissing can hardly have met a favourable specimen, and at times its Agnosticism amounts to blank denial. While saying some true things about marriage, it yet contains such a bitter denunciation of an institution which is necessary to the existence of society that the book is half spoilt by its violence. But, with all its faults, the novel exercises a strange fascination. It seems as though it were written in blood; and its scathing and scorn for the sins of modern civilisation burn like fire. Its author, it may be imagined, has found no rest for the sole of his foot in existing religious thought; the ordinary life of a heartless and conventional society has wearied and disgusted him; he is inclined to hate the whole world as he still continues to hate the parsons. But pity conquers when he turns to the East-end of London and finds there the multitude of the miserable, ignorant, and uncivilised poor. He does not know the poor with intimate familiarity even yet, those who have had a long experience of them tell us; and he trips now and then in describing their customs, even as regards the liquor which they drink. But he nevertheless knows them well, and he paints the picture of their life so strongly, and generally with such truth, that nobody who reads the book and lives near a great town where there are always such sad congregations of untutored people, will fail to catch some reflection of his intense sympathy.

The story of the book may be briefly told. Arthur Golding and Helen Norman are the children of two old college friends, whose lives have led them far apart, so that Arthur is born in a London slum, Helen in a country rectory. Helen inherits her father's disease, consumption, and Arthur his father's legacy of want and shame. Brought together once in childhood, they remain memories

to each other until they meet as youth and maiden. The boy passes from begging to running errands, and from that to a bookseller's shop, while the girl, having lost her father, is brought up by the sarcastic artist, Mr. Gresham, who is her guardian. He, however, leaves her to follow her own bent; and, her father's tastes having led her to eccentric reading and unusual thoughtfulness, she passes, not only through that phase of "conversion" which comes to many girls, but through an earnest scepticism on truthseeking, which (says the author) "is the lot of hardly any woman, though of every intelligent lad." Having been almost converted to Romanism during a stay in France, she revisits her old home, where the Ritualism of the new rector so shocks her by its unreality that she is thrown off her balance, until she comes across Strauss's "Leben Jesu." This decides her to learn German and go to Tübingen to sound the depths of all philosophy and thought. This she does, and passes from theology, through philosophy, to science, ending with Schopenhauer, Comte, and Shelley as her guides for life.

Having thus arranged her mind, she returns to England to do all the good she can, and decides to work in London slums, which she finds far worse than she had ever dreamed. She meets with the usual rebuffs, difficulties, and mingled success and failure, known well to those who "work amongst the poor," and finally she dies of consumption, hastened by overwork. Whilst Helen is thus approaching the dread problem of life from the point of view of the thoughtful rich, Arthur is approaching it from that of the thoughtful poor. His childhood's experiences have taught him what misery and degradation are. While with the good printer, Mr. Tollady, he gains an education which enables him to measure those experiences. He joins a working men's club of a semi-revolutionary type, which helps him to arrange his ideas; and finally he developes a genius for painting, which adds to his former thoughts fresh questionings as to the place of art in a renovated and revolutionised world. He is discovered by Mr. Gresham, Helen's guardian, who cultivates his genius, and finally, on his coming of age, puts him in possession of some money left him by Helen's father. And there is no reason why the hero should not have married the heroine, and both have lived very happily together ever after, improving the world on new principles, and working in the dawn of a brighter day. But the real world is sad, and the story is true to it.

While Arthur Golding is a journeyman printer he lodges in the same house with one Carrie Mitchell, a beautiful girl, who is seduced by the son (of course) of a clergyman. Arthur, out of it pity, which he mistakes for love, becomes first her friend and then her husband. The marriage is unhappy, for Carrie's beauty is her only gift; her education and views of life being far too

elementary and gross for such a husband. She takes to drink, deserts Arthur for her seducer, and falls lower and lower, till she becomes a common prostitute. Meantime Arthur, who had met Helen Norman before, and had renewed their childhood's acquaintance, comes across her again, and they find out that they love, and have always loved, each other. Helen, of course, looks upon her lover as unmarried, and he is too weak to tell her his secret: but at last Carrie comes to Arthur's lodgings and tells the true story, in his absence, to Lucy Venning, the daughter of the house, from whom it passes to Helen. A terrible scene ensues, in which she and Arthur part for ever; she going to France for her health, and he (at Helen's bidding) to try and reclaim his wife. That wife, at first repentant, finally turns out worse than ever; and Arthur goes to America with a floating idea of clearing land and farming. His natural indecision, however, makes him waste time and money in travelling, and when at length he settles near Niagara, he hears not only that his wife is dead, but that Helen also has passed away. Weary of his wasted life, and deprived by death of all his best friends and influences, he gives up to despair, and drowns himself in the Falls.

The problems attacked by "Workers in the Dawn" are by no means simple. There are many confusing elements in life of which the book takes no notice. Yet these problems have to be faced, and the sooner we are awake to them, the better. It is not pleasant to be called up in the early morning, at its greyest, dullest, ugliest light; when sad realities are neither hidden by the delusive beauty of moonlight, nor glorified by the glowing sun, but stand out, naked and hideous, in the cold, grey dawn. This will express the feelings of many who may read this book, and would rather not believe it. For them it is written. It is one of the many voices which are telling us now to wake up from slumber, to cast away too brilliant enthusiasm, and to face the problems of the day in cold, grey, common-sense.

St. James's Gazette, 25 July 1884, p. 7.

"The Unclassed"

Prejudice alone can prevent this novel from obtaining high appreciation: it is singularly original, noticeably powerful, and deeply interesting in its way. There's the rub—in its way; for the way is open to certain objections, more or less reasonable, and is calculated to excite the prejudice aforesaid. This being so, it is a bounden duty to speak plainly, as plainly as the author speaks, and, at the risk of using words and mentioning subjects which as a general rule it is better to leave unused and unmentioned; to state distinctly, for the information and, if necessary, for the warning of all whom it may concern,

what it is that readers of the novel will have to read about. Be it premised that the novel is of the realistic sort, which generally means—though there is no reason whatever why it should—that an author has chosen an unsavoury theme. Here the novelist has, no doubt, chosen an unsavoury theme; but then his treatment is altogether different from the ordinary; it is of the disinfecting, deodorizing, etherealizing kind. And yet his realistic romance has for its fundamental idea a conception which is true enough, Heaven knows, to life, but too shocking almost, if it were not so sad and so pathetic, for the subject of a mere tale that is told. Be it known, then, to all who have eyes and see not, ears and hear not, and who will not acknowledge the indisputable facts of this awful world, that among "the unclassed" of our social system there is—to speak after the Irish mode—a class of persons called prostitutes; who may be as "respectable" to all outward appearances as their most virtuous neighbours, who are not given to strong drink or to bad language or to any description of rowdiness. These persons may sometimes, either after or (most probably) before they go, as the saying is, "on the streets," have children as dear to them and as much attached to them as Virtue's own to Virtue. Now the heroine of the novel under consideration is a woman of this kind, and she is the daughter of another. She is left on the wide world at eleven years of age or thereabouts, when her mother, whom she passionately loves, is taken from her to die at the hospital; and she has to "go out to seek her fortune." What fortune she finds we already know. In mercy to the reader, however, it should be mentioned that her state of degradation is very short-lived; and that she emerges from it by her innate force of character, combined with certain mental and moral influences converging upon her from various directions.

About the author's descriptions of persons, places, and things, there is a literalness and a bluntness of expression which must be called brutal, in the common French acceptation of the term; but he is not content, as some of his school are, to draw an appalling picture of life with ruthless accuracy, and leave it to be accepted as a faithful representation not only of what reality is under certain circumstances but of what it must be. He introduces reliefs; brings good out of evil; administers some crumbs of comfort, some drops of consolation. The author may recall the manner of the unspeakable Zola, but only to a limited extent: he may lack Zola's picturesqueness and photographic minuteness; but he has a humour to which Zola is a stranger, and he is a complete stranger to the bestiality in which Zola appears to revel. To conclude, it will be understood that we do not recommend the book as everybody's reading: we have only given a fair and honest description of it.

Glasgow Herald, 27 August 1884, p. 4.

"The Unclassed"

Mr Gissing has chosen an uncommon subject for his novel, and his treatment of it is still more uncommon. The demi-monde, indeed, appears frequently enough in the writings of some novelists; but it always come in on the sly, so to speak. Its presence is not openly acknowledged, but only hinted at in a half-ashamed way. This is not Mr Gissing's method. The demi-monde is not, with him, an accessory to his subject, but his subject itself. Very few English writers would dare to select such a one. French writers do it readily enough; but Mr Gissing does not write of it as too many French novelists do. His novel is moral enough at least. He looks at the "unclassed" not to sneer and laugh at them, but seriously and with a desire to reform them.

His heroine is one of the "unclassed" herself. Her mother had been one before her, and all her companions pursue the same profession. Ida Starr is a girl of uncommon beauty, and, therefore, of uncommon temptations. Her mother dies when she is very young, leaving her to the care of her grandfather. But Ida refuses to go to him. He had despised her mother; she had loved her mother, and would not go to the man who had despised her. She gets a miserable situation first of all, but soon runs away from it. An old lady then takes her in, and treats her kindly. After six years, however, she dies, and Ida is thrown on the world once more. She becomes a lady's maid in a family. The daughters there treat her badly, and the son only too well. She leaves her situation and becomes his mistress, and when that arrangement ceases becomes worse. While living thus she meets the hero, and learns to love him. Her love throws a new light on her mode of life altogether. She leaves it, gets some humble work to do, and begins to live anew for his sake. How she works her way to purity it would take too long to tell – that she does so is sufficient. Now all this is possible enough. One thing only is a little impossible – that is, that Ida, while living a shameful life, should have retained so much of the appearance, manners, and ideas of a lady. Her life was the most degrading one a woman can lead, yet Mr Gissing makes her perfectly refined in tone. That Ida should have retained sufficient good in her to enable her to reform herself, is, of course, quite credible, but so much refinement is hardly possible. The motive of Mr Gissing's story is a good one. He wishes to show that, in spite of their professional vice, the "unclassed" are not wholly bad – that they are quite worth redemption.

Standard (London), 3 October 1884, p. 2.

"The Unclassed." By George Gissing. Author of "Workers in the Dawn." Three Vols. Chapman and Hall.

One of Mr. Gissing's personages, who writes a novel, says: "The novel of everyday life is getting worn out. We must dig deeper, get to untouched social strata. Dickens felt this, but had not the courage to face his subjects. …. Not *virginibus puerisque* will be my lay, I assure you; but for men and women who look beneath the surface, and who understand that only as artistic material has human life any significance." "Prostitution," says this same gentleman, "and everything connected with it, is my highest interest." He tells a young woman, who confessed that "she got her living by a vile trade," "if you believe yourself to be made impure by any piece of conduct you are, in fact, made so; otherwise not." Ida agrees with him. "Give me," she says, "a fortune, and I will be as chaste as if I still sat on my mother's knee. The past life will have gone for ever, and have left no trace, except in a clearer understanding of things." The author of "The Unclassed," in framing his novel on the lines so plainly laid down by his own Osmond Waymark, has given us a story as roughly vigorous as it is unpleasing and even repulsive.

Pall Mall Gazette, 13 August 1886, p. 4.

"Isabel Clarendon." By George Gissing. Two vols. (Chapman and Hall.)

The author has plenty of materials, as far at least as character drawing is concerned, but has scarcely attempted to work it up into a real story. He does not care, it would seem, to tell us what becomes of the personages of his tale; even his heroine disappears from the scene in a vague kind of way, which leaves us very much in doubt both as to what kind of lot she deserved and what she actually got. But the characters themselves are remarkably interesting. Isabel Clarendon herself is a fine study of a very womanly woman. She is anything but faultless. She begins her career by making a loveless marriage for the sake of position. She is without culture, having an almost pronounced dislike for books; but, on the other hand, there is a marvellous charm about her which it is impossible to resist. Bernard Kingcote, again, is a very skilfully depicted specimen of the "Self-Tormentor." One loses patience, with a genuine vexation which is in itself a very high testimony to the author's power, at the way in which he throws away his happiness. The book-hunting parson, and Mrs. Stratton, a typical specimen of the British mothers who bear the thickheaded conquerors of the world, are especially admirable among the minor characters. Nor must we forget the little vignette of Mr. Billimore, the

chemist's assistant in the shop at Norwich. He is a quite insignificant person, and plays no part in the story; but there is a curious reality about him.

Daily News, 28 December 1886, p. 3.

"Isabel Clarendon." By George Gissing. (2 vols., Chapman and Hall.)

Mr Gissing's novel can hardly be said to be satisfactory as a story, for it lacks design, a quality which the masters of the new transatlantic school of fiction will hardly persuade the novel-reading world to despise. On the other hand, this is a remarkable and on the whole a very interesting book, by reason partly of the author's unaffected and vigorous style, and partly of his power to awaken sympathy for his crowded list of personages. Mr Gissing's method is that of introducing us to one or two social circles, then letting his folk converse on books, local legends, agnosticism, what not, till they begin to pair and talk love – occasionally, it is true, in a rather ill-assorted fashion, and so on till it pleases him to drop the curtain upon what, if such old-fashioned notions can be pardoned, can hardly be called a denouement. Bernard Kingscote, whose little adventure on a pedestrian tour opens up the way to these social circles; Ada Warren, the heiress who announces herself "an atheist" with such unfashionable frankness; Mrs Clarendon, the amiable and stately widow, who plays so well the part of Ada's mother; Robert Asquith, the Strattons, and other of the little groups, may lack sometimes the depth of portraits drawn "from the inner," but none the less they take a hold on the reader's imagination, and maintain to the end an unabated interest in their proceedings.

Pall Mall Gazette, 13 October 1890, p. 3.

MR. GEORGE GISSING'S "EMANCIPATED."

If a young gentleman or lady were to come to us and request our advice on the subject of "commencing novelist," we should not say "Don't!" but should recommend him or her to read "The Emancipated," by George Gissing, and, that done, should moralize as follows:— "Now, sir or madam, do you feel yourself capable of writing a better novel than this? Is not the style good, the tone liberal, the observation just, the psychology delicate, the story well-woven and sympathetic? Believe me, there are fifty chances of your writing a worse book for one of your writing a better. Yet this admirable novel, the product of culture, thought, refinement, and conscientious labour, is practically lost among the hundreds of similar stories (some a trifle better, others a thought worse) with which the press teems every year. It will win its author neither fame nor fortune. It is far from being even 'the book of its season'; six months

hence it will be forgotten; and (unless the circumstances are quite exceptional) it will put in the author's pocket a sum that would ill repay the mere manual labour of writing (say) a thousand sheets of foolscap. If this example encourages you, sir or madam, why, in heaven's name, go and do likewise!"

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Aberystwyth Bibliographical Group Report on Gissing

CHRIS BAGGS
Rhydyfelin,
Aberystwyth

Some twenty members of the Aberystwyth Bibliographical Group gathered on Tuesday, 22 January 2019, at the Four Seasons Hotel in Aberystwyth to hear the 300th talk delivered to the Group since its foundation in 1970. The invited speaker was Dr Chris Baggs, formerly a lecturer at the Department of Information and Library Studies at the University of Aberystwyth. His topic was 'George Gissing, library history and me'; a subject similar to the paper he gave at the SHARP conference held in Lyon in the summer of 2004.

Dr Baggs, having explained that his main academic field of research was all aspects of British public library history from its beginnings in 1850 through to 1914, revealed that he became entangled in the Gissing web largely by chance – agreeing to act as supervisor to a PhD student researching the economics of Gissing's publications during his lifetime. After reading a number of Gissing's novels, Dr Baggs had turned to Gissing's diaries and letters and therein discovered a rich vein of information for those interested in reading history, including in his own specialised field. It is well known that Gissing was a massive reader of books, newspapers, and periodicals, which he read, partly for basic enjoyment, partly as he needed to keep up to date both for his own work, and partly to keep abreast of what was being published in the literary world. To accommodate this need for reading matter, he bought many items, received others from friends and publishers, but, more significantly, relied very heavily on material he read in or borrowed from libraries of all descriptions. Aside from national institutions, like the British Museum Library and later in his career, the London Library, Gissing frequented: various subscription libraries (two in Exeter for instance); those typical late nineteenth-century library phenomena, the circulating library (both large, the Grosvenor in London and small, one whilst holidaying in Clevedon, although he never directly subscribed to the best known of them all, Mudie's); and, finally, the growing number of public libraries.

Dr Baggs showed from his study of the letters and diaries, that Gissing used a few public libraries only once or twice; two in more depth, in Bristol and Birmingham respectively, whilst conducting the research he needed for novels he was working on; and two for several months, namely at Exeter and Brixton, where he was living at the time. Gissing had become familiar with public libraries during his time in the United States, and initially compared the British examples very unfavourably with those across the Atlantic. His comments were historically sound, if he was comparing directly with libraries in London, where the individual parishes were slow to adopt the Public Library Acts. However he was most impressed by the Central Library in Birmingham, which had a major reference library and well-stocked newspaper reading rooms, and had specifically moved to Brixton in July 1893, precisely because he had heard that the best public library in London was to be opened there.

What particularly interested Dr Baggs was that in respect of Exeter and Brixton, Gissing's diaries go so far as to suggest which individual titles he borrowed from those libraries (although there can sometimes be a lack of clarity as to which library he was using, especially in Exeter). Moreover Dr Baggs noted that some of these titles borrowed from public libraries, reappear as books named and read by individual characters in specific Gissing novels – thus providing a direct link between his own reading and his writing.

However, in the end Gissing was a victim of his times, as far as his use of public libraries was concerned. First of all, coverage by public libraries was not then standardised across the nation, especially in relation to more rural areas, such as Dorking in Surrey. Secondly, the very limited budgets often given to public libraries meant their expenditure on the most current literature, especially novels, was restricted. To meet this specific need Gissing went back to relying on the circulating libraries (which much to his chagrin at times, he had to pay for – public libraries were of course, free). Nor could public libraries provide him with many of the more esoteric and heavyweight books Gissing also liked to read. On the other hand public libraries at that time spent a disproportionate amount of their monies on newspapers and periodicals, and Gissing made much use of their reading rooms as a consequence. These reading rooms were of particular value to him, as, unusually for an educated man of his day, Gissing was not a member of any club where newspapers and journals were readily available.

Dr Baggs's conclusion was that Gissing does provide a worthy and interesting case study for the public library historian and that more research could be done on his use of other types of library, and more on his reading habits in general. The talk was well received by the members of the Group

and a lively discussion ensued, with a wide variety of questions, particularly as to Gissing's wider reading.

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Book Review

George Gissing, *Il fuoco sotto la cenere*, translated, edited, and introduced by Maria Teresa Chialant, Roma, Aracne, 2014. 268 pp. ISBN 9788854870789. €16,00.

Maria Teresa Chialant's translation and critical edition of *Sleeping Fires* offers Italian readers an opportunity to fully appreciate one of George Gissing's lesser-known texts. Although the author himself defined his work as "a paltry little book of mine" in a letter to his German friend, Eduard Bertz, it clearly represents a valuable experiment in fiction, and as H. G. Wells observed in his review in January 1896: "Mr Gissing's new book will astonish his admirers. It is totally unlike anything of his we have read before." Undoubtedly, *Sleeping Fires* seems to defy the categories of genres, not simply in resisting the neat distinction between novel and short story, but also in its thematic variety, inasmuch as it combines the features of a travel book with those of a story of love within the enthralling paradigms of sensationalism: the "guilty secret," the long trip, illegitimacy, the late recognition of identity, illness, suffocated passions, and death.

Published in 1895, *Sleeping Fires* may be more properly conceived of as a *novella* whose plot is worth summarising: while sojourning in Athens, Edmund Langley accidentally meets a former fellow Cambridge student and dedicated archaeologist Worboys, who is in Greece as a travelling companion for the young Louis Reed. The latter happens to be the ward of Lady Revill, a highly respectable woman whom Langley had been close to marrying in his youth. Time seems not to have extinguished his feelings for her, and the meeting with Mrs Revill soon proves to bear this out. Yet, the woman has some startling truth to confess: Louis is indeed Langley's son, born from a previous relationship, the same one that had actually prevented their engagement.

Such a brief diegetic account nevertheless points to an unmistakeable thematic shift in Gissing's works towards the end of his career. While still preserving the "artistic-sincere" realism he claimed to pursue, *Sleeping Fires* represents an escape from the urban landscape and its proletarian crowds that Gissing had always depicted with extreme disillusionment. London's sordid slums described in *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and *The Nether World* (1889) become one of the European Grand Tour's most exotic destinations: Greece.

Undeniably, staring at the Acropolis in Athens, one may easily avoid being "constantly reminded of Piccadilly or the Boulevard" (p. 54). For Gissing, the "classic land" (p. 162) is an appropriate site for inspecting the conditions of modernity and its implications for the inquiring individual mind.

Gissing's characters adopt different attitudes towards Hellenic values. Worboys and Louis place themselves at opposite poles: the former is completely absorbed by his classical studies, and deeply committed to a past which carries much more meaning to him than the dull, incomprehensible present. The output of his research, however, is merely notional: Greece is to him but a long list of toponyms and ancient *codices*, namely data to be collected and classified in his next academic paper. Thus, Worboys is "erudite but hidebound" (p. 70), unable to show any sympathy with social acquaintances. Louis, on the other side, is a "terribly modern young man" (p. 68). His restlessness for and anticipation of the future, although certainly common in boyhood, are peculiar to the generation he is bound to represent. Born in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, he is compelled by the urgency of factuality. Classical history is of no use to him, nor do the heroes of Greek mythology evoke a sense of virtue. His foremost objective in life is to get an inspectorship for factories in order to "prosecute such scoundrels […] who break the laws […] just to save their pockets" (p. 100).

Langley's relationship with the past is far more ambiguous: his search for lodgings unknown to the average English tourist hints at his desire for an escapist retreat into the dusty lure of old Athens. Often he wanders through temple ruins, indulging in their splendour; unlike Worboys, however, he is not detached from the actual world. Forgotten times may be haunting as well as attractive. This is why one night he is tormented by the nightmarish visions of two female faces: one is Lady Revill's, "so distinct, so living," while the other, "pale and blurred" (p. 80), belongs to the woman of Langley's juvenile passion.

Deeper understanding of Langley's distinctive role in the text is provided by Chialant's thorough introduction which is composed of four sections. The first places *Sleeping Fires* against the background of the late nineteenth-century editorial market transition towards 'one-volume' novels. Chialant reminds us that, in the same year, Gissing wrote two other works of this kind: *Eve's Ransom* and *The Paying Guest*. Chialant's sharp analysis of *Sleeping Fires* is evident in the second section, in which she outlines the most relevant features of the plot that mainly revolves around Langley and Lady Revill's conversations. Gissing voices through them some significant ethical and political concerns which, while already present in his previous fiction, here point to one fundamental truth: love's ability to resist social prejudice, as well as aristocratic claims on decorum and respectability.

Passive obedience to nineteenth-century social preconceptions is also challenged by a secondary female character, Mrs Tresilian. A member of the upper bourgeoisie, she is the object of Louis's naïve infatuation. As Chialant suggests, owing to her liberal views and her personal engagement with philanthropic pursuits, she is part of an "informal sisterhood" (p. 198), whose members have chosen to live in one of London's poorest neighbourhoods. Consequently, she may be seen as a specimen of the 'New Woman.'

Still, the central core of Chialant's well-observed investigation lies in *Sleeping Fires*'s topological dimension. Reminding the reader of Gissing's own journey through Greece in 1889, Chialant notes how the author productively drew on his observations of the country from his diary entries of that time; thus, the *novella* is composed of a series of vivid pictures that resemble the ones he had sketched when visiting the magnificent land. Chapter VI, for instance, although very brief, is occupied almost entirely with Langley's visions of Greece and Italy while travelling back to England.

Not only does Gissing's first-hand knowledge of Greek geography and culture inform the detailed descriptive writing of the text, but it also informs the final sections of Chialant's introduction. She takes the novelist's devotion to the classical age as a token of the *fin de siècle* "Mediterranean Passion." Accordingly, *Sleeping Fires* is thought to clearly anticipate the thematic lines of *By the Ionian Sea* (1901).

While travelling to Italy and Greece was becoming almost customary for British intellectuals in the second half of the nineteenth century, Gissing's fictional topography in *Sleeping Fires* was not chosen merely for its popularity, but rather for the author's lifelong belief that classical culture should inspire the re-inspection of the artificial moral codes of the English. The opening and closing scenes of the *novella* are set in Athens, although the narrative takes place both in Greece and England. The two countries seem to identify the two opposite sets of values which Matthew Arnold had described in *Culture and Anarchy* as 'Hellenism' and 'Hebraism.' According to Arnold, whose influence Gissing had experienced since his years at Owen's College, the Western world is dominated by such rival "forces." The latter is associated with rigour, obedience and self-constraint in blind acceptance of God's will, all of them typical of Victorian society, and manifest in Lady Revill's initial reluctance to confront Langley. Hellenism, by contrast, aims at spontaneity, beauty and, ultimately, willingness to see things as they are. Unquestionably, Langley's statement about "[v]igour, sanity, and joy" being the Greeks' "gospel" (p. 114) adheres to Arnold's definition.

For this reason, Chialant makes Langley – who is in fact the only character to move across both spaces – stand at the centre of the cultural dichotomy

mentioned above. After "sunless years" preoccupied with the certainty that his life "must miss its consummation because he had played the pedant in morals" (pp. 90 and 92), it is in Greece that he will find his dormant feelings awoken. In Chialant's own words, Langley is the *trait d'union* between the two realities. While he never denies his affiliation to English culture, he is well aware of the moral hypocrisy concealed behind its polished façade. Therefore, "the world never had such need of the Greeks as in our time" (p. 114).

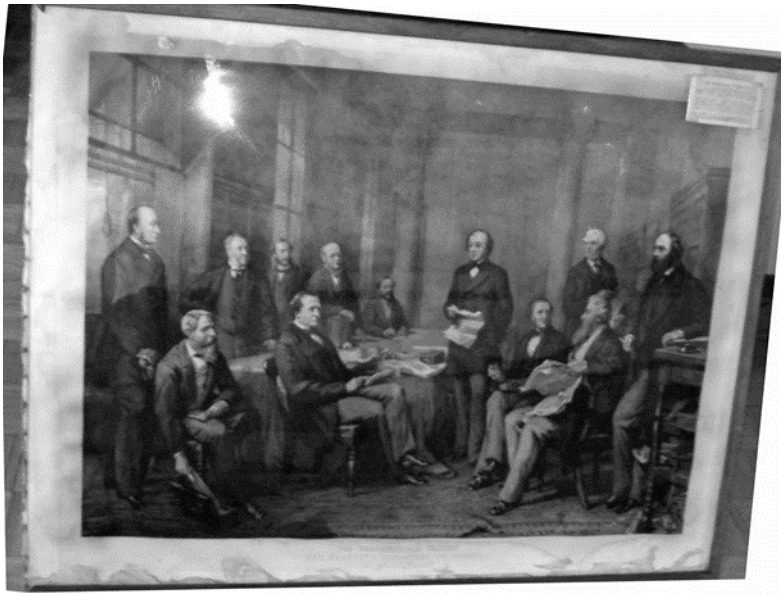
Fascination with Greece and its fairy-like atmosphere is retained in *Sleeping Fires*'s scrupulous translation into Italian. Chialant proves to be guided by a strong awareness of the primary role played by descriptions and dialogues. A few renditions will be especially worth noting. In Chapter VI, Mount Helicon is described as "vast yet incorporeal," set against a "liquid heaven" (pp. 134 and136). The translator's use of the word "baluginante" for the English "glimmering" (p. 137), typically referring to the light reflected on the surface of water, is effective in its portrayal of the sea and the sky as if melting into one another. As a result, the idea of the mount being perceived as a faint projection of the observer's mind, is thus reinforced. Furthermore, in Chapter XII, while Langley declares his love for Lady Revill, he suddenly calls her by her first name – Agnes (p. 226). From then onwards, in the Italian text the woman is no longer addressed by the formal second-person plural pronoun "voi." The latter is indeed replaced with the singular pronoun "tu," which aims to display Langley's rush of passionate feelings; these being so powerful that they allow him to disregard any former polite convention.

Il fuoco sotto la cenere is part of a series of publications collected under the title "Scritture d'oltremanica" and edited by Chialant herself. It comprises essays, translations, and critical editions of English works mainly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The present volume offers a parallel text with an insightful introduction and a rich bibliography listing almost fifty titles, not to mention a brief yet helpful set of notes, which assist the reader with the author's frequent references to Greek history and locations.

To conclude, Gissing's *Sleeping Fires* is a compelling work in both its form and themes. It rejects the intricate plot of earlier Victorian novels, while at the same time it challenges contemporary moral standards of gender and social institutions. It is hoped that Chialant's pioneering edition of *Sleeping Fires* will help open up further critical perspectives, waiting to "burst into consuming flame" (p. 214).

Lorenzo Buonvivere
University of Pescara

Since January ebay.com has had for sale an original huge cabinet etching entitled "The Beaconsfield Cabinet" by Captain Charles Mercier (1834-1901) for $399. This is the most famous painting by Mercier, who is known to Gissing afficionados as the person who sponsored his application of a British Library ticket and was for a time tutored by Gissing. He was also the father of St. Vincent Mercier, a medical officer and later secretary at the St. John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin in Leicester Square, who gave Gissing some occasional work and whom Gissing tutored in the late 1870s.



("The Beaconsfield Cabinet" by Charles Mercier [1874])
The Prime Minister at the time, Benjamin Disraeli, aka Lord Beaconsfield, is the central standing figure holding a paper in his right hand.

The owner of the painting is based in Carlsbad, California. He says that he discovered it in the attic whilst cleaning his parents' house and that his mother bought it in an antique store in the 1970s.

To add to the little written about the elder Mercier in Pierre Coustillas's recent biography of Gissing, I cite an obituary in the *Weekly Irish Times* from 22 June 1901, p. 12:

> Colonel Charles Mercier, who has just died at Bournemouth, was a many-sided man, best known in connection with several international movements tending to promote good relations between Great Britain and Belgium and France. Colonel Mercier, who was of Irish ancestry, and more remotely of Huguenot descent, was born at Clapham in June, 1834, and illustrating the traditions and genius of his ancestor, Philip Mercier, the distinguished Huguenot portrait-painter, was himself an artist. Colonel Mercier's most important work is one in which the Disraeli Ministry are represented in Cabinet Council in Downing Street; whilst as co-ordinate in significance, though of a different order, may be mentioned the Distribution of the Royal Maundy Bounty, which includes some interesting portraits of members of the Royal Family. His military career dated from 1860, when he joined the 6th Royal Lancashire Militia, now forming part of the Manchester Regiment, in which he rose step by step to the rank of colonel. He received testimonials from members of the auxiliary forces expressive of their admiration for the manner in which he conducted the Volunteer visits to Belgium, and the first Volunteer visit to France. He was the founder of the London Hospital Saturday Fund, from the presidency of which he retired in 1877. He originated, and was the honorary secretary of the committee for the national reception of the King and Queen of the Belgians, and the Anglo-Belgian Prize Fund Association, of which the Prince of Wales – now His Majesty King Edward VII – was President. Colonel Mercier was, for many years, Treasurer of St John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin, and from 1877 the President of the Chelsea Club, the "pattern Workmen's Club of the Metropolis."

Colonel Mercier was a lifelong freemason and a member of several London clubs. He was also much appreciated in England as a champion of good relations between the United Kingdom and its European neighbours, in particular Belgium and France. Interestingly, in a newspaper account (from *The Freemason*, 1 December 1877, p. 523) of a presentation dinner to Mercier on his resigning the presidency of the London Hospital Fund, the writer reports Alderman Gould as saying: "he looked upon Captain Mercier as a public benefactor. Captain Mercier had exerted himself to establish a friendly feeling between England and neighbouring nations, and had, by calling upon the sympathies of the working classes, drawn from those classes about £20,000, which had been distributed among the hospitals of London."

Tom Ue has contributed the Gissing entry to the new *Companion to Victorian Popular Fiction* recently published by McFarland & Co (see "Recent Publications" below). In his entry, which gives a concise and useful

overview of Gissing's career from the 1870s onwards, Ue notes that after his death "*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903) was the work for which Gissing is best known," and as confirmation quotes Pierre Coustillas's eye-catching remark that 'for half a century [it put] all Gissing's non-belletristic titles in the shade.'"

Gissing studies have come a long way since Russell Kirk (1918-1994) published his famous article "Who Knows George Gissing?" in the *Western Humanities Review* in 1950. Equally, Kirk's own reputation as a major political philosopher and moralist has grown in leaps and bounds in the twenty-five years since his death. In this time there have been new editions of his best works and a volume of his letters as well as a number of important books about his conservative ideology. These include *The Essential Russell Kirk: Selected Essays* (2006) edited by George A. Panichas, *The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk* (2007) by Gerald J. Russello, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology* (2012) by W. Wesley McDonald, *Russell Kirk* (Major Conservative and Libertarian Thinkers series) (2013) by John M. Pafford, *Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography of a Conservative Mind* (2015) by James E. Person Jr, *Russell Kirk: American Conservative* (2018) by Bradley J. Birzer, and *Imaginative Conservatism: The Letters of Russell Kirk* (2018) edited by James E. Person Jr.

Kirk acquired his B.A. at Michigan State University and M.A at Duke University before the Second World War, and afterwards gained his D. Litt at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. He then became a lecturer at Michigan State University, from 1953 until 1959, when he resigned in protest at the increase in student numbers and focus on sports as opposed to the liberal arts: a subject that Bernard Malamud treated eloquently in one of his finest novels, *A New Life*, in 1961. In the following decades Kirk turned to writing books and essays and, like Malamud, novels and short stories. Up to the 1990s he lectured frequently and held seminars for university students in his home at Mecosta, Michigan. He continued to esteem Gissing throughout these years. Indeed, he and his wife arranged to have a seminar of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute on the Political Novel and Gissing take place at his Piety Hill home over three days from 3-5 August 1990. Dr. Kirk opened the seminar with his 1950 paper "Who Knows George Gissing" and later lectured on "The Novel as a Source of Political Wisdom." Notably, the seminar was attended by Pierre Coustillas who read papers on "Gissing's Sense of the Past" and "Gissing and Democracy." As Coustillas reported in the October 1990 edition of *The Gissing Newsletter*, "The seminar took place in very pleasant and peaceful surroundings and was most efficiently and

gracefully organized by Mrs. Kirk. Some thirty to thirty-five academics and students attended the lectures which were followed by many stimulating questions and answers. This seminar will be remembered as a landmark in the continuing interest in Gissing."

Kirk also devoted a long section to "Gissing and *The Nether World*" in his most famous work, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana* (1991; this being the published version of his 1953 doctoral dissertation). Coustillas remarked in the July 1994 issue of our journal that Kirk's words on Gissing in that book "testif[y] to his good knowledge of the main works from *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed* through *The Nether World* and *Born in Exile* to *Our Friend the Charlatan* and *Henry Ryecroft*." He added that "[w]hat appealed to Russell Kirk in Gissing was his unsparing criticism of social evils in late Victorian England as well as his cultural commitment." Moreover, from 1990 up to 1994, Kirk reviewed each of the first four volumes of *The Collected Letters of George Gissing* for *Modern Age, A Conservative Review*.

Last December Mitsuharu Matsuoka, whose *Gissing in Cyberspace* website has been a major resource to Gissing admirers and scholars since 1995, has just published a new book of essays by various Japanese scholars entitled *Dickens and Gissing: Subterranean Similarities and Differences*, which he has edited and to which he has himself contributed an introduction and a chapter. He sends me the following translation of the book's contents (see also "Recent Publications" below):

Preface: Shigeru Koike (Tokyo Metropolitan University)
Introduction: Dickens and Gissing: Subterranean Similarities and Differences (Mitsuharu Matsuoka, Nagoya University)
Chapter 1: From Dickens's London to Gissing's London (Ayaka Komiya, Meiji University)
Chapter 2: Growing Fears of Alcohol and Drunkenness (Akemi Yoshida, Kindai University)
Chapter 3: Suitable Work for Ladies and Gentlemen: The "Respectability" Dilemma of Clerks (Motoko Nakada, Tsukuba University)
Chapter 4: The Mission of the Novelist: The Politics of "Sympathy" (Fumie Tamai, Doshisha University)
Chapter 5: For Whom is Education?: From Society to Individual (Ryota Kanayama, Ritsumeikan University)
Chapter 6: Self-denial, Self-alienation, and Self-deception in the Urban Dwellers of Victorian Britain (Mitsuharu Matsuoka, Nagoya University)
Chapter 7: The Rise of the New Man: The Imbroglio over the New Relationship between Men and Women (Takanobu Tanaka, Osaka City University)
Chapter 8: The Angel in the House and the New Woman: Images of Women Reconsidered (Akiko Kimura, Waseda University)

Chapter 9: Advertising and the Consumption/Commodity Culture (Yasuhiko Matsumoto, Tokyo University of Science)
Chapter 10: Negotiating with Dickens: Commercialism and Realism in *New Grub Street* (Midori Niino, Kobe City University of Foreign Studies)
Chapter 11: Two Versions of Forster's *Life of Dickens*: The Original and the Abridged and Revised Editions (Matsuto Sowa, Kinjo University)
Chapter 12: Biography and Autobiography: The Way of Describing Lives (Yuji Miyamaru, Chuo University)
Chapter 13: The Hero as Man of Letters: Dickens's Strenuous Spirit and Its Successor (Noriko Asahata, Osaka Seikei College)
Chapter 14: The Satirical Representations of Victorian Furnishings (Atsuko Miyake, Seinan Gakuen University)
Chapter 15: Reviews of Gissing's Works and Dickensian Elements (Tomoko Hashino, Kansai University of Foreign Studies)
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All fifteen contributors, he tells me, belong to the Dickens Fellowship of Japan, and Dickens is the main subject of the book.

As William Ward of Tasmania, Australia, informs me, there is very brief mention in the recent *New York Times Book Review* (21 February 2019) of Gissing in a review by Elaine Blair of a book by John Burnside about Henry Miller. Whilst addressing Miller's depiction of women in his fiction, Blair writes:

> Nonetheless, his (Henry Miller) books are full of female characters. Through his narrator's social and sexual encounters with prostitutes, secretaries, teachers, dancers, desperate job applicants, and other men's wives, Miller ends up showing us a great variety of women subject to the kinds of economic pressures, narrow prospects, sexual exploitation, and double standards elaborated- and lamented- by Samuel Richardson, Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, and Edith Wharton (most of whom were in their own time notably candid about sex). The difference and the shock of Miller is this: here is a novelist registering the same conditions that two centuries of great English- language writers taught readers to find absorbing, urgent, and unjust, but he has no moral response to them. He sees female characters from the other side, as it were, with cool indifference to their sense of themselves and to their fate, thus seeming to cut off a long - established, artistically fertile current of sympathy in prose fiction for the circumstances and constraints of people born female.

Did Miller ever read Gissing or refer to him in his correspondence? He did certainly know George Orwell and Gissing may have come up in their conversations. At any rate decades ago in the July 1978 issue of this journal there is brief mention of Gissing prefiguring Miller. In his "Letter to the editor," W. Francis Browne an instructor in English at Brooklyn College, City University of New York, wrote in reference to Dyce Lashmar of Gissing's *Our Friend the Charlatan*:

> Lashmar is a pitchman, a hustler, trying to make it. He is an outsider trying to get into society, and he uses his best commodity – himself. He has nothing else going for him. But the England of his time could still hold off the onslaught of his kind – as it did that of Godwin Peak.
>
> In Lashmar therefore one can find many excellent touches that prefigure characteristics in the works of such early twentieth century novelists as Maugham, Lawrence and Forster – even Evelyn Waugh – in Britain; and Dreiser and Fitzgerald – even Henry Miller – in America. Overall Gissing's works connect with much twentieth century writing, especially of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. And while Gissing may not have liked the association, Lashmar and his methods of achieving success in the world reach deep enough into the popular anti-heroism that is such a hallmark of convention of our current literature.

Here it is interesting to note that Maugham, Lawrence, and Forster had read Gissing, but what about Waugh, Dreiser, and Fitzgerald? Or Frank Norris, or Dorothy Richardson, who knew H. G. Wells, or Henry Handel Richardson, whose *Maurice Guest* (1908) recalls *Born in Exile* to some extent, or Jack London, too, for that matter. After all London's *The People of the Abyss* (1903) looks back to Gissing's *Demos* and *The Nether World* as much as it anticipates Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). Coming back to Henry Miller, one might also ask if John Cowper Powys, whom he greatly admired, or that other writer's writer and inter-war contemporary of his, Christopher Isherwood, ever mentioned Gissing in their works or correspondence?

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Recent Publications

Volumes

Mitsuharu Matsuoka, ed. *Dickens and Gissing: Subterranean Similarities and Differences*. Osaka, Japan: Osaka Kyoiku Tosho, 2018. Pp. vi + 298. ISBN 9784271210597. 3,400 yen.

Roger Dobson, "'A Trade of the Damned': Twin Toilers in Victorian Grub Street," in *The Library of the Lost: In Search of Forgotten Authors*, ed. by Mark Valentine (Leyburn, North Yorkshire: Tartarus Press, 2018), pp. 180-200. In this chapter Roger Dobson explores Gissing's *New Grub Street* and Arthur Machen's interest in Gissing. In an earlier chapter (pp. 23-32), "Sherlock Holmes: The Last Mystery," Dobson does some fascinating detective work of his own in trying to discover exactly when Sherlock Holmes undertook his very first case. He surmises, after "assembling all the facts," that "Holmes spent his university years far from the Gothic halls of Oxford or Cambridge," and that in fact he spent the spring of 1876 studying at Owens College where "the college authorities took the unorthodox step of requesting Holmes's help. Money and possessions were disappearing, and it was evident that a thief was abroad." Thus, "on the last day of May 1876," Holmes stepped in, and … the rest is history. Or at least that is Roger Dobson's version, which he originally published in the *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review* in February 1988.

Elizabeth F. Evans, "The Shopgirl's Masterplot: George Gissing and the Periodical Press of the 1890s," in *Threshold Modernism: New Public Women and the Literary Spaces of Imperial London* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018), pp. 72-83.

Nancy Henry, "Investment Cultures in Dickens, Trollope, and Gissing," in *Women, Literature and Finance in Victorian Britain* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 53-84.

Francine Prose, "George Gissing, *New Grub Street*," in *What to Read and Why* (New York: Harper, 2018), pp. 63-69.

Elizabeth Shand, "Women's Reading as Protest in Gissing's *The Odd Women*: 'I'll see how I like this first,'" *English Literature in Transition*, 62:1 (2019), pp. 53-71.

Tom Ue, "Gissing, George (1857-1903)," in the *Companion to Victorian Popular Fiction*, ed. by Kevin A. Morrison (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2018), pp. 95-96.

Pierre Coustillas at the 1999 Amsterdam Conference
(A sketch sent to Bouwe Postmus from Karina Of and Michael Of in 1999)

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Information for Contributors

The Gissing Journal publishes essays and book reviews on Gissing and his circle. Contributions may deal with bibliographical, biographical, critical, and topographical subjects. They should be sent as a Word document to the editor, Markus Neacey, either by email to forfarmarkus@fastmail.co.uk or by post to:

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