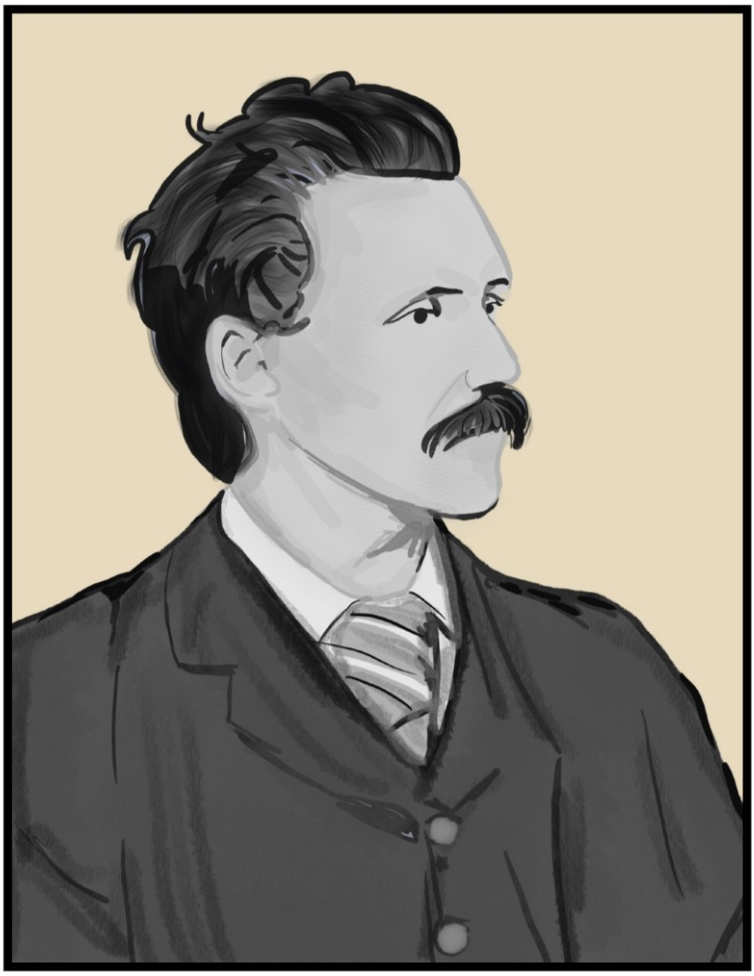

The Gissing Journal
October 2020 Supplement:

Gissing in Vogue

Contents

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The Gissing Journal Supplement: *Gissing in Vogue*

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

Preface: Gissing in Vogue

TOM UE
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Midway through *New Grub Street* (1891), Reardon meets up with his estranged wife Amy. In preparation, he leaves behind his overcoat. This attire, once "fairly good" (*New Grub Street*: 347), is now long past its prime, "the edges of the sleeves were frayed, two buttons were missing, and the original hue of the cloth was indeterminable" (347-348). Reardon knows Amy well, but not well enough. Her attention at the meeting is quickly drawn to "his muddy and shapeless boots," and their desire for "a renewal of amity" conflicts with their shock over each other's appearances: "such attire degraded him in her eyes; it symbolised the melancholy decline which he had suffered intellectually. On Reardon his wife's elegance had the same repellent effect, though this would not have been the case but for the expression of her countenance" (348-349). Surface appearances, as we see here, take on significant meaning for both characters as they variously under/overread: Amy cannot shake off her initial impressions of Reardon, nor he his of her. The narrator goes so far as to reason: "Had Reardon been practical man enough to procure by hook or by crook a decent suit of clothes for this interview, that ridiculous trifle might have made all the difference in what was to result" (349). Over a decade later, Gissing returns to this theme in his unfinished novel *Veranilda* (1904). This time, it is Basil's fashion sense that wins over his beloved:

> She dared not raise her eyes to him; but in the moment of his appearance before her, it had gladdened her to see him attired as when she first knew him. Had he worn the soldierly garb in which he presented himself at Marcian's villa, the revival of a dread memory would have pierced her heart. Even as in outward man he was the Basil she had loved, so did his voice recall that brighter day. (*Veranilda*: 326)

Clothing can make or break a relationship: it drives a wedge between Reardon and Amy, even as it makes Veranilda recognise Basil in Basil. This pair of scenes speaks to the centrality of "fashion" to Gissing, whether he is thinking and writing about England in the 1880s or Rome in the sixth century. *Gissing in Vogue* brings together 20 contributors from different parts of the world in a shared conversation about fashion. The aim is to think about any aspect of Gissing

and his oeuvre in relation to this theme, as it variously manifests in the sense of "[a] prevailing custom, a current usage; *esp*. one characteristic of a particular place or period of time" ("*OED* online: "Fashion, n.," def. 8a.; original emphasis), a "[c]onventional usage in dress, mode of life, etc., *esp*. as observed in the upper circles of society; conformity to this usage" ("Fashion, n.," def. 9a.; original emphasis), or "[t]he mode of dress, etiquette, furniture, style of speech, etc., adopted in society for the time being" ("Fashion, n.," def. 10a.). Contributors to this forum offer original readings of Gissing and a wide range of his texts, from short stories (see, for example, Bowlby and Stetz) to major novels (Reeves, Ue, and Vuohelainen), and in light of a broad range of contexts (Douglas, Morrison, Tambling, and Tilley). Taken together, this forum argues for the value of (re)reading Gissing and it expands scholarship on various themes, including gender (Harsh, MacPherson, and Munday), clothing (Federico, Mugglestone, and Villa), performance (Katz, Maltz, and Shaw), and class (Dennis and Lesiuk).
I thank the contributors for their submissions and for their friendship. Philip Horne patiently read early versions of my ruminations about hands in *New Grub Street*, and Kevin A. Morrison and Annette Federico encouraged me to write about the novel in their recent projects. I am particularly grateful to Rachel Bowlby, Richard Dennis, Diana Maltz, Markus Neacey, and Gareth Reeves for many kinds of help; to Allison Munday for creating the cover art for this supplement; and to the staff of Dalhousie University Libraries, particularly Marlyn McCann and Joseph Wickens, for their research help. My colleagues in the Department of English at Dalhousie University, one and all, have been consistently encouraging. This project was completed with the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through an Insight Development Grant. It is a pleasure to acknowledge this institution.

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Marriage Not *à la Mode*

RACHEL BOWLBY
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Gissing is not a fashionable author, I think we can agree; nor has he ever been known as a writer about the bright new things of fashionable life. According to an anonymous reviewer of the volume of short stories published in 1897, "all the world is drab to him" (*Gissing: The Critical Heritage*: 318). Hard words, but he (or she?) continues to sink the spirits: "we opened *Human Odds and Ends* with feelings the reverse of those one entertains in releasing the

cork of a champagne bottle" (318). Heavens! Yet with something like a reverse celebration, this writer for *The Times* has put their finger on something any reader of our reliably unbubbly Gissing will surely recognise, as much today as then. Whatever the peculiarities of your particular taste for him, you don't go to Gissing for sips of sophistication or glimpses into the latest modes of affluent display.

Yet *Human Odds and Ends* does include, at the very end and against all the odds, a story which might appear not only to go against the review's unhappy summary but also to offer Gissing's honest take on a subject undear to his heart and normally far from his pen and ken. Its title? "Out of the Fashion." There is no enigma here. Beginning with a small, intimate dinner party at a pleasant home, with a loving husband waiting to give his wife bad news – he has lost his job – it moves in a few pages through the following marital years of resilient love despite intermittent misfortune. Twice, the family is forced to downsize. First there is a move to "a Northern town" to make a new start with "a much smaller house" and the need for the wife "to do much of the work which servants had hitherto done for her"; happily, though, "the spirit was willing and the flesh did not fail" (*Collected Short Stories* 2: 401). Then again, following a second setback, but '[a]gain in a strange place, and in poorer circumstances than she had ever known, Mary shed about her the light of home" (2: 401). A double fall, but through it all, she is with him, exemplary woman that she is. She suffers her own distress, too, with the loss of a newborn baby – but gets over it (and three earlier children thrive). She willingly lets go of her piano – the instrument with which she delights the guests on the first night we see her: "Mary's music, always a great resource" (2: 400). But does she abandon her gifts? Why, no. Until it becomes possible, as it does, to purchase a new one, thanks to a new restoration of prosperity, there is still the singing voice to soothe her husband after the children have gone to bed. What a woman! What a wife!

With this unwonted exhibition of marital contentment, we may wonder whether our man may have taken leave of his Gissingly senses. Naturally, he hasn't really; the clue is in the story's name. This paragon of a woman, unchangingly constant, is not a fake. But she is the personification of one who is "out of the fashion." She is "type of a vanishing virtue. Wife, housewife, mother—shaken by the harsh years, but strong and peaceful in her perfect womanhood. An old-fashioned figure, out of harmony with the day that rules" (2: 402). Once upon a time, that is, there was a world whose continuity and security was assured by the continuation of the woman's womanly love. They just don't make them like that anymore!

Gissing's Pianos

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Pianos are everywhere in Gissing's fiction. We can observe how they are played – whether "hammer[ed]" (*Workers in the Dawn* 2: 75) or "stroked" (*Denzil*: 7) – and what is played upon them – from music-hall melodies, by way of evangelical hymns, to more esoteric classical music. What type of piano – grand, upright, "cottage"? We can also contrast the spaces where they are to be found – within the home or in more public spaces – with those where they are heard, sometimes secretly, often accidentally.

Pianos are indicators of class, education, breeding, aspiration; but not in a straightforward, deterministic correlation. Context is everything. The Vennings' "small piano" (*Workers* 2: 117), like the "instrument of the Cottage species" which Everard gives the Micklethwaites as a wedding present (*Odd Women*: 139), is as unpretentious as the respectable domestic setting for which it was designed. The Pettindunds' piano, also presumably an upright, since it is easily carried into the hall-passage, is as discordantly, stridently vulgar as its owners (*Workers* 2: 74). For Alice Mutimer, newly installed in a Highbury semi-detached villa, "what more certain sign of having achieved ladyhood" could there be than learning to play the piano in one's own home (*Demos*: 133)? When John Hewett inherited money from his brother, prior to the events recounted in *The Nether World*, one of the first things he had done was to hire a piano, hoping that his daughter, Clara, then 11 years old, would better herself by learning to play (*The Nether World*: 81). Acquiring a piano by hire-purchase was, as the pianoforte dealer, Stephen Lord, regretted, common among "persons of very small or very precarious income, who, rabid in the pursuit of gentility, signed agreements they had little chance of fulfilling" (*Jubilee*: 27). Back in *The Nether World*, when Joseph Snowdon inherits his father's entire estate, his two aspirations are, firstly to move to the remote suburbs, and secondly, for his uncouth and untameable wife, Clem, to "learn the piano, old girl? It wouldn't be amiss" (331). But the worst (or best?) examples of using the piano for social climbing are the Mumbrays, who appear to own two pianos – one in the "smaller drawing-room" where Serena spites her mother by playing "an *immoral* piece of music" (*Denzil*: 116-117), another in "the room where the grand piano stood" on which Glazzard plays Beethoven to Serena (194); and the French sisters: "All could 'play the piano;' all declared––and believed—that they 'knew French'" (*Jubilee*: 7). In practice, only Fanny seemed to make use of her skill, variously "rattl[ing] a prelude" (91), "tapp[ing]

out a new music-hall melody" (10), and "jing[ling]" "Queen of My Heart" (7) and "a melody from 'The Mikado'" (6).

The type of music one appreciates is critical. Robert Asquith demonstrates his bland middlebrow, middle-classness when he asks Ada Warren to play "something that has a tune in it" (*Isabel*: 32). Ada offers "an operatic air," not perhaps what he was expecting, at the end of which she makes her own operatic exit (32). A sign of Miriam's gradual emancipation is that she starts to appreciate piano-playing that is not simply accompaniment to hymn-singing (*Emancipated*, see Part I, Chapters 9 and 13). On the other hand, Rhoda Nunn is so advanced that she can play hymns on Sundays, not as sacred music but because "the old tunes" reminded her of "the golden age" (*Odd Women*: 160). There is no irony, however, when Mrs Micklethwaite "played simple, old-fashioned music" (141) or when Mr Venning accompanied his daughter, Lucy, in "several simple hymns, compositions which, like the overwhelming majority of English devotional hymns, had no special merit" but whose performance was "removed […] altogether […] from the reach of criticism" (*Workers* 2: 120).

I have barely scraped the surface of Gissing's piano-playing. Unlike portable violins, pianos are relatively immobile, as difficult to conceal as to manoeuvre. Whether as conscious or unself-conscious indicators of class or as fashion icons, Gissing's pianos, piano music, and piano-playing are rarely incidental, every note full of meaning. They deserve our attention.

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The Odd One or Two

CHRISTOPHER DOUGLAS
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Victorian literature welcomes heavy drinkers: the regulars are mostly men; women are admitted as long as they belong to the upper class or the labouring poor. But it is almost impossible to find a middle-class female with a glass in her hand. Working-class women boozers are to be found staggering about in droves, and there are plenty of posh girls getting giddy over a cup of punch between dances, while their mamas and grandmamas can match the men drink for drink, though they generally do so in secret. But the ordinary literate woman with a thirst is almost nowhere to be found in nineteenth-century fiction.

The omission was pointed out to me by the distinguished radio director Jane Morgan; we have been trying for years to persuade BBC Radio 4 to commission a dramatisation of *The Odd Women* (1893). That Gissing's novel deserves a wider airing is obvious to anyone who has read it (but not, unfortunately, to the

gatekeepers in the drama department). The story is pertinent, vivid, gripping and it also gives us two educated female drunks. Firstly Virginia Madden, a genteel pauper whose need for a sharpener drives her to walk unaccompanied into Charing Cross station's refreshment room. Virginia's addiction is born of desperation and undernourishment. She ends up caning the gin and water until she has to enter an institution to be dried out. In one sense, Virginia fits the New Woman label: she knows boozing is bad for her and that society disapproves, but by her own agency, she goes ahead and does it anyway. And then she gets herself into recovery. Good for her.

The second female drinker in *The Odd Women* is Mrs Luke, a socially ambitious widow: "Like most of her female associates, she had free recourse to the bottle; but for such stimulus the life of a smart woman would be physically impossible. And Mrs Luke enjoyed life, enjoyed it vastly" (133). Gissing's use of the phrase "Like most of her female associates" suggests that exceeding the 14 units a week limit was as common among socially active women in the 1890s as it is now, and yet who else but Gissing reported on this?

Dickens is a bit disapproving of female drinkers of all classes; Henry James can be disdainful; Zola sometimes allows the urban poor a little gaiety. Gissing's attitude is nuanced. He can find no cheer in the life of a lower-class drinking woman – all is misery in *The Nether World* (1889) – yet he neither judges nor moralises, perhaps reflecting his own experience of having been married to a lower-class alcoholic, Nell Harrison. After Nell died, he visited her room and noted among her effects three certificates showing that she had "signed the pledge" (23; see Gissing's diary entry for 1 March 1888). In *The Nether World*, the wall of Maria Candy's room is decorated with *five* pledge certificates: "[I]t was noticeable that at each progressive date the handwriting had become more unsteady" (75-76).

The circulating libraries imposed many absurd constraints on novelists in the Victorian period, but it is possible that authors did not need to be censored in this case. Was there, perhaps, a general squeamishness about the subject of female middle-class drinking, the mere mention of which might lead to the housework not getting done and the breakdown of the family? It is easy to smile at the attitudes of Victorian literary gentlemen but there is plenty of (often unconscious) squeamishness in writing today, not least in my world of comedy scripts: the majority of male writers appear reluctant to allow female characters to behave disgracefully; women have fewer funny lines and, if drunk, remain more or less silent until the sour put-down at the end of the scene. It is left to the female writers to deliver the alcoholic fun, which they often do with relish, probably making the male writers and producers feel even more uneasy.

Gissing would recognise our world all too easily. As in his time, only those with family money can now seriously consider a literary career. Widespread dread of destitution and disease has brought the nineteenth century closer in recent times. Drunk or sober, Gissing's creations seem more recognisable than ever.

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Walking-Sticks

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James Madison University

Stroll through a gallery of portraits by Sargent or Whistler and you may notice many walking-sticks. Every other masculine sitter seems to have one. A man's stick – how it is decorated, the way it is held, where it is positioned – hints at his personality. Its employment is both practical and emblematic. A common piece of personal equipment, a stick is also a unique form of self-expression, always open to interpretation (see figure 1).

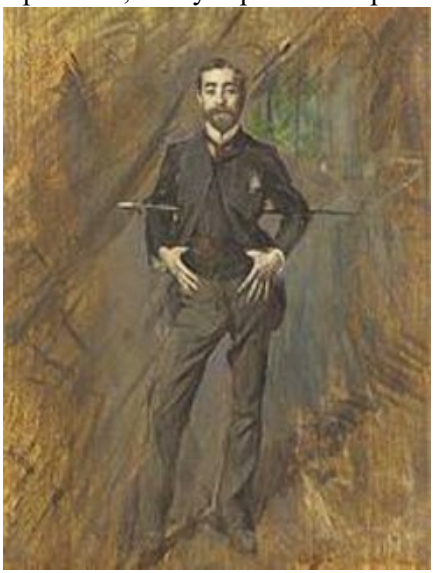

Figure 1. Portrait of John Singer Sargent by Giovanni Boldini, c. 1890. Private collection. (© https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni_Boldini_(1842-1931)_-John_Singer_Sargent(Standing).jpg.)

In literature, as in portraiture, the meaning of a stick is ambiguous. It could be a weapon (as in the Sherlock Holmes story in which a man bores a hole in the head of his stick and pours molten lead inside), or it could be a

wand (Whistler's name for his iconic slender cane). A stick could signify mastery or effeminacy, action or ennui. It may communicate a certain degree of elegance, or the possession of a comfortable income. A stick is also a bohemian accessory: Edwin Reardon in *New Grub Street* carries one. A fancy walking-stick is an adornment for the aesthete, but a London swell could easily tote a knock-off. Bohemian, banker, clerk, dandy, or mendicant – to each his own stick, and style of handling it.

In Chapter 4 of *The Odd Women*, Monica Madden is exploring Richmond on her day off when a middle-aged man sits beside her on a park bench. Is he a masher? She studies his demeanour: "[H]is clothes were such as a gentleman wears. […] Was it a bad sign that he carried neither gloves nor walking-stick?" (38) For Monica, a man idling around Richmond on a Sunday afternoon without his stick, however nicely dressed, is an incomplete portrait, a warning of insufficiency, insolvency, even sissiness – in short, "a bad sign." But Monica has a lot to learn about men and their sticks.

When they meet at Battersea Park the following Sunday, Monica observes, "To-day he carried a walking-stick, and wore gloves" (46). There are other accessories she takes in: "a little travelling-cap," "very good boots indeed," "gold links in his white shirt-cuffs, and a gold watch-guard chosen with a gentleman's taste" (48). Widdowson now conforms outwardly to Monica's idea of a man of means. She lets down her guard just a little, and this modern Othello's courtship-by-surveillance ("Widdowson did not turn away until he had *ocular proof*" (168; emphasis mine)) proceeds apace. Monica chooses marriage over a future of endless drudgery, gaining a husband and a house full of genteel accoutrements – including that stick, which is now deployed by Widdowson to signal other feelings. He "clumped to a dismal rhythm with the end of his walking-stick" (168) while his wife visits a friend. Waiting for the train at Victoria station, he "trudged about the platform, still clumping rhythmically with his stick" (169). Is it a bad sign?

Driven mad by suspicion, Widdowson becomes homicidal: "his hand closed with murderous convulsion, and the desire of crushing out her life was for an instant all his consciousness" (276). How does meek Edmund Widdowson, who did not even carry his stick to Richmond, turn into this domestic nightmare? But a template for male violence has already been mentioned, underscoring the cultural indeterminacy of men's sticks. In Chapter 18, Barfoot tells Rhoda what he would like to do to his annoying sister-in-law: "I propose to get a light, supple, dandyish cane, and to give Mrs Thomas Barfoot half-a-dozen smart cuts across the back in her own drawing-room, some afternoon when people are present" (210-211). Note

that spiteful and humiliating detail of making an example of Mrs. Barfoot in "a public caning" (210). Note the malicious irony of a "dandyish" cane.

In the 1890s, men's walking-sticks were everyday accessories. As an urbane Londoner, Gissing certainly had one. Victorian shops sold sticks for every taste, from Widdowson's respectable stick to the supple cane Barfoot fancies. Walking-sticks are on a continuum of cultural tropes for modern masculinity. Of course, sometimes a stick is just a stick. But it may also be a symbol, and in this novel about sexual equality, it can cut (pun intended) both ways.

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"For Her Own Satisfaction Alone"? Dress in *The Odd Women*

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In *Northanger Abbey* (1817), Jane Austen's narrator amusingly editorialises on "the insensibility of man towards a new gown. […] Woman is fine for her own satisfaction alone" (54). With this conventional wisdom in mind, one can more clearly see the unconventionality of *The Odd Women* with respect to dress. Men, starting with the male narrator, are quite interested in what women wear.[1]

Men's clothing does occasionally appear: Bullivant is "clad with propriety" (32), and Micklethwaite must don newer trousers before Everard Barfoot will take him to his club. Widdowson's attire is presented through Monica's eyes as she appraises his wealth and his suitability as a romantic partner. However, readers learn surprisingly little about what men are wearing, even when they are important characters with distinctive personal styles (i.e., Bevis and Everard).

In contrast, characterisations of dress reliably appear in the initial descriptions of many female characters. They are typically accompanied by other descriptions of physical traits and hairstyle. Introductions of this sort are given to Rhoda Nunn, Monica Madden, Mary Barfoot, Miss Eade, and Mrs. Luke. One might theorise that the wide range of women's styles makes their clothing intrinsically significant as an expression of character. But this does not quite fit the evidence.

Women's dress is sometimes overlooked entirely. Some of these women are minor characters: the deceased Madden sisters Gertrude, Isabel, and Martha; Bevis's mother and sisters; Fanny Micklethwaite and her sister. But others – Alice Madden, Winifred Haven, Mildred Vesper – are not so easily dismissed with this reasoning. Another explanation is available: what all have in common is their position entirely outside the range of male sexual interest.

Men as viewers are central to the representation of women's dress. Their gaze often provides the context for description. Rhoda's dress is first specified shortly after the introduction of the imagined male connoisseur (25). The judgment that Mrs. Cosgrove is "unfashionably attired" (185) comes from Widdowson's point of view, just as the observation that the newly married Monica is "dressed very prettily" (157) comes from Barfoot's. Widdowson delights in seeing Monica dressed "for his own gratification" (169).[2] Perhaps most strikingly, Barfoot enjoys a good gossip with Monica on the subject of the dress that Rhoda wore to her wedding. At this juncture, the narrator observes that Monica can describe the outfit because "no woman ever forgot the details of another's dress, on however trivial an occasion, and at whatever distance of time" (215). This heavy, gendered humour distracts from the more notable fact of Everard's intense interest in these very details.

Rhoda Nunn provides the best example of the interplay between dress and male desire. The variations in her costume register different stages in her responsiveness to Everard's advances. Initially viewing him as an archetypical seducer, she dresses more severely than usual when they meet, apparently "endeavour[ing] to liken herself to the suggestion of her name" (90). Once their relationship develops further, she wears a becoming red blouse to dinner: "so admirable was the effect of this costume that he scarcely refrained from a delighted exclamation" (199). Later, Mary Barfoot notices that Rhoda has purchased a new outfit for travel in which she knows she will encounter Everard: "Miss Barfoot had judged of its effect[; …] it became the wearer admirably" (245). In Rhoda's final meeting with Everard, her "plain dress of blue serge" (356) contrasts with his evening dress, signalling that she is now closed to further approach.[3]

Women do not dress for their own satisfaction in *The Odd Women*. Dress is less a means of self-expression than a sign of susceptibility to male attention and control. By giving men the authority to frame the assessment of women's attire, Gissing underscores the control they have in the game of heterosexual romance that women signal their readiness to play.

[1] An indication that the narrator may be plausibly gendered as male comes from the scene of Rhoda Nunn's introduction. The narrative gaze aligns itself with that of an imagined "connoisseur" who, unlike superficially judging women, "delayed his verdict" before reaching a conclusion about her attractiveness (25).

[2] She strategically plays on his taste (181).

[3] This is the sole time his dress is described.

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False Hair and Paradoxical Performance in *The Nether World*

PETER KATZ
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Rather than think of fashion as a structured system of semiotic encoding, I prefer to think about fashion as a way of shaping one's entire body (Barthes 9-10). A hairstyle does not send a particular message; rather, it is part of a larger assemblage that invites or discourages interactions with other bodies. In Gissing's *The Nether World*, characters are introduced almost always with commentary about their hair – not as a symbol, but rather as a shorthand for how their bodies extend to the world around them. Characters' use of hair as a performance – a deliberate change to present their bodies in a different manner – is particularly unsettling in a text that condemns performativity as a futile, inauthentic attempt to escape a more deterministic natural place for one's body (Cook 459). In the interest of length, I will look specifically at John Hewett's hair dye as an unethical outcome of a broken system that forces working-class bodies to modify themselves as if they were machines.

In *The Nether World*, hair communicates modes of embodiment rather than semiotic messages. By way of synecdoche: Clem Peckover bullies Jane Snowdon (a moral innocent), and manipulates Jane's father into mercenary marriage. Her hair tells all: it "was very abundant, and rose upon the back of her head in thick coils, an elegant fringe depending in front" (5). She has, in short, a moral mullet: false goodness in the front, and chaos in the back. While it became the dominant hairstyle in the 1890s, in the 1880s, more conservative fashion considered the fringe "fast" (Sylvia 28). Artificial fringes were in common employ, and provided ample fodder for those (like Gissing, it seems) who considered fringe-wearing vain and inauthentic. Clem's hair warns of her deceptive, self-serving nature.

Hair is a strange margin. It is part of fashion: one can deliberately manipulate it, change it, draw attention to or away from it, and use it to change how others encounter the rest of one's body. But it is also part of one's body, and an often unruly part at that: it grows on its own accord, shows preference for styles or patterns of its own, and has an allegedly natural colouration that reasserts itself against modification. It even sits at a strange margin on the body, growing out away from it, falling out and leaving bits of itself behind (Douglas 121, 160; Ofek 8). To think of hair as fashion is to confront its nature to be "dirty and polluted," always leaning toward being out of order (Hershman 290).

Nowhere is this truer than on the margins of society. John Hewett, an elderly working-class man, embodies this polluted border when he dyes his hair. He finds himself unable to get work because his hair has gone grey, and, as he laments,

"nowadays there's no chance for old men" (20) whose bodies are deemed unfit for labour. His unnaturally black hair underscores the artificiality of his new body when "comported with the rest of the man's appearance," for "[j]udging from his features alone, one would have taken John for sixty at least; his years were in truth not quite two-and-fifty. He had the look of one worn out with anxiety and hardship" (19). Like Clem, John's dyed hair is a false performance: an attempt to make his body more marketable by taking on a form more appealing than his natural self. But unlike Clem, this artificiality is imposed from the outside. A system of labour that prematurely ages bodies also demands youthful and useful bodies. If John wants his labour-power to remain a viable commodity, then he *must* lie with his body.

If false performance is a social evil, how much worse must be, as Gissing concludes, "those brute forces of society which fill with wreck the abysses of the nether world" (392). John is one such wreck, and his hair exposes the paradoxes of a system of labour that seems at once predetermined and artificial, and that compels falsehood to remain true to nature.

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"[They] Hung About Him Unregarded": Clothing, Social Mobility and Hope

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University of Waterloo

George Gissing, in a letter to his younger brother Algernon (7 September 1884), offered advice about "The Sewage Farm," a story Algernon had been working on. George warned his brother against expressing too much "moral loathing" or "indignation," and suggested, instead, that "to depict utter brutality as something quite to be expected under certain conditions is, you will admit, the most forcible way of condemning those conditions" (CL2: 253-254). In short, he warned, "you must not *rail*" (CL2: 253-254).

Around the same time the letter was written, the elder Gissing spent time with the Gaussens, a wealthy family with a country home Gissing much admired. According to Pierre Coustillas, when Mrs. Gaussen "promised to call upon" Gissing back in the city, "[t]he prospect of this visit threw the young novelist into confusion. […] The sharp critic of society he had proved to be in *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed* cared more for appearances now that he had tasted of high life for a few days" (*Heroic Life of George Gissing* 1: 247).

These two incidents provide insight into how Gissing contrasts the ways in which characters do or do not notice details about clothing and class. Characters

who, like Gissing, feel themselves "born in exile" or "unclassed" tend to be hyper-conscious of such details. This is partly what Pierre Bourdieu describes as the tendency to self-consciousness and "hypercorrection" of the petite bourgeoisie in their "striving for assimilation (to the bourgeois classes)" (62-63). In *Born in Exile* (1892), Godwin Peak is "shamed" by the obvious stiffness of his clothes (50). He doesn't fit in. In *The Odd Women*, Monica Madden, hoping to make a good marriage, is hyper-aware of the details of Edmund Widdowson's clothing.[1] By contrast, when narrators describe a working-class character's clothing or dress, there is often much less self-consciousness or even awareness on the part of the characters. Gissing's narrators will offer a detail about clothing precisely by saying it is needless to mention it, or that the working-class characters present have long ago stopped noticing it. This technique is important because it is how he aims to condemn certain conditions without "rail[ing]."

An illustrative example is in *The Nether World*. When describing Shooter's Gardens, a working-class tenement building, the narrator says it is "[n]eedless to burden description with further detail," only to then immediately list the "filth, rottenness, evil odours" that make such places "gruesome to the peering imagination" (74). Yet, notes the narrator, the actual residents "felt nothing of the sort" (74). One such resident, Pennyloaf Candy, "r[uns] into the jaws of this black horror with the indifference of habit" (74). This indifference carries over to characters' clothing. When the narrator introduces the reader to Pennyloaf's mother, she is described as one of the "beings that passed in and out" of Shooter's Gardens who

> seemed soaked with grimy moisture, puffed into distortions, hung about with rotting garments. […] Her clothing consisted of a single gown and a shawl made out of the fragments of an old counterpane; her clothing—with exception of the shoes on her feet, those two articles were literally all that covered her bare body. (248)

Far from worrying that one's collar is too stiff, even rotting garments go unnoticed. If extreme self-consciousness about surface details exists on one end of a spectrum, passages such as this one about Pennyloaf's mother represent that spectrum's opposite end. Gissing has sympathy for characters who are hyper-conscious of their clothing and class, because such characters, with all their social pretensions, are contrasted against characters who have given up having any social pretensions – that is, any hope – at all. This is why, at the very end of *The Nether World*, when Sidney Kirkwood has finally given up any hope of real social mobility, we are told that "the clothes he wore had done more than just service, and hung about him unregarded" (370).

[1] Patricia Ingham discusses Monica's eye for clothing details in her introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition (xi).

Fashionable Nonsense in Gissing's *The Whirlpool*

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"The whirlpool way of life" in George Gissing's 1897 novel, is a societal force so potent that all are drawn towards it, "[i]t isn't only idle people" (*The Whirlpool*: 165). The central characters of *The Whirlpool,* Rolfe and Alma, are not exempt. Their attempt to reject conventions fuelled by society's pursuit of being "too civilised" (112) causes Alma to submit to another kind of fashion: the convention of marriage. Her actual domesticity is another variant of "fashionable nonsense" (112) that simultaneously undercuts the simple life envisioned by Rolfe, an idea he projects onto Alma.

The kind of domesticity that Alma assumes demonstrates her understanding of marriage as limiting of the self. Dora Leach claims that she "know[s] very well that, if you liked, you could become a professional, and make a name," to which Alma quickly admits that it is something she "*might* have done," a path she might have followed had marriage not "put an end to that" (198; original emphasis). Alma is defined by her limitations: she is one "to be admired and liked, not to be imitated" (197). Her perception of the self routinely rests on the opinion of others as she "delighted in praise, and never hesitated to ask for it" (40). Through her characterisation, Gissing poses the difficult question of whether this wound is self-inflicted or a consequence of fashion's dictates. The plight of Alma's father deeply circumscribes her opportunities. She accepts, but is unwilling to compromise with, her limited options – revealing the whirlpool's toxic cycle. How Alma understands the world, and herself, perpetuates what has been prescribed to her by convention.

In the early stages of Rolfe's relationship with Alma, he is taken by her apparent agreement with him that it is "possible to be too civilised – to want too many comforts, and become a slave to them" (112). She states that the pursuit of "fashionable nonsense" has made "wretched slaves, [of] most of us" (112). Despite Rolfe's hope "that she would say more to the same purpose," Alma falls "silent" (112). She even goes so far as to question the notion of simplicity, and how it might effectively be adopted when one is not "born to simplicity" (112), revealing, partially, her differences with Rolfe. This too suggests her profound understanding of being born into circumstance. She believes that a simple life without poverty entails "disregard for other people's foolish opinions; living just as you feel most at ease – not torturing yourself because it's the custom" (113). Yet Rolfe still envisions a future with Alma shaped by the kind of simplicity he idealises; and Alma, in turn, challenges his ideals, causing their eventual unrest.

Alma's feeling of "secret envy" at the Carnaby mansion and the way she looks upon Sibyl's hairstyle with "wonder and admiration" (182) confirm her desires. During this same visit, Sybil's remarks about the Carnabys' trips to Honolulu and Queensland, that "[c]ivilisation is a great thing" and how "[i]t's good to have been in savagery, just to appreciate one's privileges" (182). These utterances recall Alma's earlier question: "Can we be simple by wishing it? [...] Don't you think we have to be born to simplicity?" (112) The opposite of surrendering to convention is giving in to one's own nature. Rejection of convention in favour of one's own nature can only truly result in happiness or satisfaction if said convention actually contradicts that nature. Alma desires comfort comparable to that found in the Carnabys. Yet, she resigns herself to complacency by subduing her wants, by not realising her professional potentials, and by assuming the traditional, gendered role of wife – just as Rolfe assumes the traditional role of husband by stipulating the terms of their marriage. Through this attempt to reject convention and "fashionable nonsense," she gives in to another kind, only to later realise her desire for that which she sought to reject.

Gissing suggests that conventionality is perhaps the root of such nonsense. Fashion will inevitably submit to the dictates of convention as the two are inextricably intertwined, thus making the evasion of its ordinance moot. Likewise, institutions shaped by the whirlpool, and the individual and collective understanding of it, are reinforced by those who surrender to its pull. Gissing seems to suggest that to reject the influence of the whirlpool is to reject a world entire. However, it is a world shaped by the limits of conventionality that enable the stifling of the self.

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"Of Course It Was Meant to Be Vicious": *Poses Plastiques* in *Workers in the Dawn*

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In Gissing's *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), a debauched gentleman roughly disdains a former singer and mistress who has capitulated to drink: "I'm sorry for Fan. […] She's so devilish good-looking. I s'pose she'll have nothing else for it now but to take a turn at the *poses plastiques*. She'll always draw there" (2: 274). His brief comment anticipates the climactic scene several chapters later when Arthur Golding discovers his missing wife Carrie Mitchell performing in a low gentleman's club. She stands on a raised, slowly revolving

circular platform wearing only a flesh-coloured body stocking. She enacts a scene of Eve tempting Adam with an apple in the Garden of Eden. The twist here is that both performers are women. An audience of thirty to forty men stare, emitting occasional "coarse laugh[s]" and "foulest indecencies" (2: 382). The performance is outrageous both for its blasphemy and for its hint of a more explicit lesbian pornography.

What were *poses plastiques*, and were they always defined by vulgarity? The practice seems to have originated in the eighteenth century, found a public audience in the late 1840s, and hit its peak in the 1890s. *Poses plastiques* were an offshoot of *tableaux vivants*, in which costumed performers imitated famous paintings, often acting out elaborate scenes from mythology, literature, and history. With actors clothed in body stockings, *poses plastiques* were the perfect vehicle for recreating classical sculptures (they were also called "living statuary"). Scenarios like "Venus Rising from the Sea" implied artistic pretensions, especially when performed by Madame Warton, a former model for life classes at the Royal Academy and for the painter William Etty (Donohue 8).[1] But elsewhere, as titles like "The Birthday of Bacchus" imply, theatre managers appropriated *poses plastiques* for risqué novelty acts (Donoghue 4-5).

In the 1890s and 1900s, *poses plastiques* were the subject of acrimonious debates about obscenity and censorship, as members of temperance and social-purity societies appealed to the London County Council to abolish them as indecent. Alternatively, defenders of the art claimed that female performers, posing under subtle lighting on their pedestals, elicited exactly the same reverence and appreciation that one might feel in an art gallery.[2] These advocates argued that, given the unlikelihood of the poor to visit a real museum, *poses plastiques* were the best approximation to real classical sculpture that they might ever see. Ironically, then, *poses plastiques* occupied a place in the discourse about civilisation for the masses. Given Gissing's habitual revulsion at the vulgarity of the "quarter-educated" and his devotion to classical Greek culture, he might have joined *poses plastiques'* defenders. Yet he didn't. Why not?

Gissing presents *poses plastiques* as licentious: "Of course it was meant to be vicious, and certainly was indecent in character" (2: 382). Especially intriguing is that term "vicious," meaning "[c]haracterised by depravity or spite" ("Vicious, adj.," def. I.). Who are the depraved in the scene, the viewers or the actors? And who are these performances degrading? Gissing's ogling audience, an "assemblage of gross and brutal-featured men" (2: 382), are already a lost cause; it is the performers who are at the mercy of their manager. Nearly naked, they are "shivering wretches" (2: 382), subject to each gusty draft as the door opens to admit new customers. Carrie's features are paler and thinner than before, and her teeth are chattering.

Gissing's representation, then, is as much about abjection from poverty as it is about sexuality. In this regard, Carrie lacks the agency of the famed Madame Warton, or the later celebrated modern dancers Loie Fuller and Maud Allan who were inspired by *poses plastiques*. She is more like the common working girls preyed upon by pornographic photographers.[3] The diarist Arthur Munby recalled being invited to purchase lewd pictures at a photographer's shop and the photographer confiding, "Give them something to drink, and they don't mind how they are taken, nor in what postures, however degrading" (qtd. in Smith 58). This same shopman shrewdly blurred the line between fine art and pornography, boasting that a nude photo for sale was of "Miss Peacock, the Academy model!" – a line evocative of Madame Warton and calculated to exonerate him from charges of vulgarity and profligacy. Gissing, however, would have found such a claim specious. *Poses plastiques* in his novel are a condition from which Carrie must be rescued, and the virtuous Arthur liberates her.

[1] Madame Warton's respectability was itself tenuous. If, as she claimed, she modelled for Edwin Landseer's *Lady Godiva's Prayer* (1865), then she had also infamously performed the role live at the Coventry Fair.

[2] See Brenda Assael's "Art or Indecency? *Tableaux Vivants* on the London Stage and the Failure of Late Victorian Moral Reform."

[3] Girls in *poses plastiques* troupes were solicited by pornographers, johns, and pimps. The diarist of the pornographic *My Secret Life* claimed to have a dalliance with one of Madame Warton's entourage. See Assael, p. 750, and Smith, pp. 25-36.

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Gissing's Look

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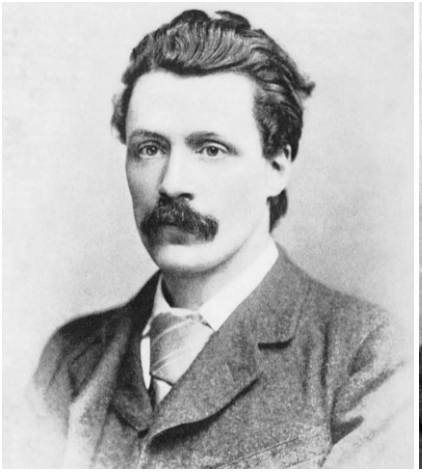
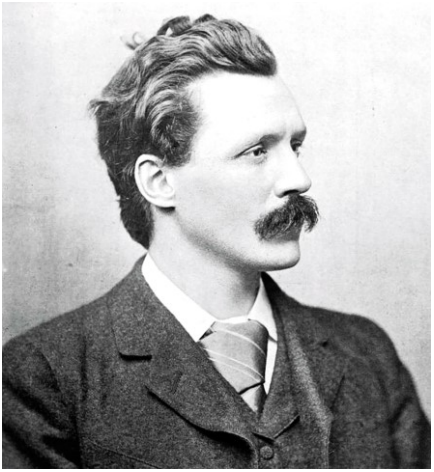
Fashion, dress, and self-presentation are routine but understudied motifs in George Gissing's fictional works. But did the novelist have his own particular look? Taken at different angles during the same sitting in the mid-1890s, these two monochromatic photographs have circulated widely over the years.[1] One was the frontispiece to *The Unclassed* (American issue of revised edition: 1896) and more recently adorned Pierre Coustillas's three-volume biography, *The Heroic Life of George Gissing* (2011-2012; see figure 2). The other (figure 3) appeared on the cover of, among other studies, Adrian Poole's *Gissing in Context* (1975). Because they have served illustrative rather than analytical purposes, these photographs have largely gone unexamined.



Figures 2 and 3. Two photographs of Gissing. (Pictorial Press Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo.)

At first glance, there is nothing particularly distinctive about Gissing's fine woollen lounge suit. His dress, as with other men of his time, is indistinguishably funereal. In a popular cartoon published in the February 1891 issue of the satirical magazine *Punch*, George du Maurier illustrates the confusion that occasionally arises from the ubiquity of black menswear. At a dinner party, two guests, both gentlemen clad in black tie, search for a knife and fork, and mistake each other for a waiter (du Maurier 95). Throughout the latter half of the century, black and dark-hued suits were the norm for men across the socio-economic spectrum. Only the trained eye, Margaret Oliphant observed, could spot that a working-class suit was "a mere reproduction in rougher material" (43-44). Black-suited gentleman, working-class men in black coats and waistcoats, and members of the managerial class appearing in "professional black" (Harvey 140), all intermingled.

By the last decade of the century, the lounge suit was worn for a variety of formal and informal occasions. Although the tailored jacket, waistcoat, and trousers that made up the three-piece garment were typically of the same material, some men in the 1890s preferred trousers of contrasting fabric. Because Gissing appears from the waist up, these photographs do not yield insight into his own preferences in this regard. There is also not enough detail to determine whether his lounge suit was made-to-measure. The moderate cut, discreet lapels, and left-hand pocket were ordinary tailoring features of both bespoke and off-the-peg jackets.

If men gravitated toward a uniform appearance in suits, some utilised minute stylistic details to express their individuality.[2] Gissing eschews the

high-standing, habitually stiffly-starched collar dress shirt, which was popular among businessmen and more generally among the aspirant classes. He opts instead for a relaxed dress shirt with collars turned down over the long-knotted silk necktie. The loose manner in which his otherwise regimentally striped neckwear has been tied is striking. It suggests a deliberately cultivated appearance of informality and subtly achieved individuality.

There is a tendency in scholarship on men's dress to consider clothes as distinct from other elements of appearance. Yet for Gissing, aspects of his self-presentation, such as hair (facial or otherwise), work in tandem to produce an overall effect. His prominent moustache has been trimmed and waxed. That is to say, it has been stylised – an inherently social act (Biddle-Perry and Cheang 3-12). Although Gissing's head of hair is suitably trimmed at the back, it is nevertheless noticeably wavy (figure 2), with some of the ends distinctly and uncommonly unruly.

Perhaps that is why the photographer chose a more individualistic form of portraiture than was typical for the decade. There is a studied, ruminative quality to these images, which document a look that was neither decidedly eccentric nor entirely conventional.

[1] Several other photographs from the same sitting have been used as well. See, for example, the cover of Ue.

[2] See Morrison for an exploration of these issues at greater length focusing on three of Gissing's contemporaries.

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"Matters Sartorial": Clothing as Social Discourse in *Born in Exile*

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Only in the 1990s, wrote Rosemary Hill, was the "idea slowly dawning that men also wear clothes and that their clothes have social meaning" (2-3). *Born in Exile*, published in 1892, was, in this respect, clearly ahead of the curve. Across Gissing's novel of social and cultural displacement, clothing is a critical element in the performance of identity. Equally salient is a sharply differentiated metalanguage freighted with social nuance, and the connotative or denotative values that different items of dress might possess. Hats, boots, gloves, coats – from *ulsters* to the soon-to-be outmoded *frock-coats* – alongside the social polarisation of fabrics from tweed to silk, all attract attention.

On one level, of course, the language of clothing is a common proxy for class. In *Born in Exile*, descriptors with *clad* or *dressed* often operate as

economic euphemisms, whether in "the *well-dressed* and well-fed offspring of Kingsmill plutocracy" (10; emphasis mine) whom Godwin encounters at Whitelaw College, or the "comfortably clad" (52) of Chapter 2 for whom "[d]inner" is identified as a defining "part of English respectability" (52). The "small pork-pie" (52) that Godwin consumes at this point of the novel is, in this light, a literally poor substitute. His clothing reveals a similar divide. Being "*well dressed*," Godwin acknowledges, "was a great step towards the finished ease of what is called a gentlemanly demeanour, which he knew he was very far from having attained' (94; emphasis mine).

Money – and mere expenditure – are, however, not enough. Taste trumps fashion. Conspicuous consumption brings fault-lines of its own; what is bought, and why, reveals complex trajectories of social meaning. *Born in Exile* might be replete with the metalanguage of contemporary male millinery, including "beavers," "felt hat[s]," and "chimney-pot[s]," but the hat purchased by Godwin's brother, Oliver, is tellingly unspeakable – a "thing," Godwin declares, a form of "head-gear" in which fashionable dictate has erroneously prevailed (6-7, 82). "[T]o imitate asses gratuitously is the lowest depth of degradation" (83), he states; mass production is, for Godwin, a signifier of the undifferentiated herd that serves to ally Oliver and the "vulgarian" (42) Andrew Peak whose "ready-made tweeds" (24) evoke similar negative connotations. Distinguished by their poor cut and too-sharp creases, the latter draw, too, on socio-linguistic sensibilities in which "tweed" was regarded as a recent – and etymological – trade-name (as opposed to historically-verified "twill").[1] Godwin's "dress suit" which accompanies him on his visit to the Warricombes is, in contrast, an uncompromisingly elite marker, a visual token of those he deems "civilised people" (176). It is tailor-made for him in more ways than one.

Other hazards attend what might be perceived as an undue attention to detail and style. "Dandiacally (adv.)" might not be in the *Oxford English Dictionary* but it served, for Gissing, as yet another reminder of the complex attitudes and images of acceptability that clothing can produce. There is, for example, a telling contrast between the fashionable "*patent-leather* boots" (375; emphasis mine) which shine by artifice as worn by Bruno Chilvers, and the shine secured through honest endeavour ("*propria manu*" (31; as Gissing confirms) which characterise those worn by Godwin's father. The "*West End* tailor" (375) favoured by Chilvers yields similarly negative reverberations in which style rather than substance comes into play. As the *OED* confirms, *West End* might be a synecdoche for high fashion, but the "[t]rustworthy sartorial skill" (156) that marks Godwin's attire later in the novel is, inferentially, very different. His own emerging confidence in the "*decency* of his apparel" (165; emphasis mine) is

imbricated in Victorian meanings in which being "decent" is itself a signifier of social propriety and restrained good taste. In speaking to Sidwell, Godwin might dismiss dress and clothing as "common things, […] trifles" (396). Nevertheless, across the novel, "matters sartorial" (15) reward careful scrutiny, emerging as an integral part of social praxis in Gissing's hands.

[1] See "Tweed, n." in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Tweed is a mid-Victorian coinage, based on a misreading of Scottish "tweel."

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Gissing's "Foolish" Virgin: Rosamund's Predetermined Fate

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In Gissing's "The Foolish Virgin" (1896), Rosamund Jewell, seeks to escape life as "a useless creature" who has "*never* had a purpose in life" (*Collected Short Stories*: 2: 357; original emphasis). By tracing Rosamund's journey of self-discovery, from an aging and unmarried woman to someone with a "purpose," Gissing explicitly addresses the dire living and working conditions for lower and middle-class women, focusing in particular on those who are unmarried. In comparing Rosamund with Mrs. Halliday, I argue that Gissing sympathises with both women, and advocates for the education of women and for their living a more independent lifestyle – one where they are free to pursue their passions and purposes.

When we are first introduced to Rosamund, she is described in these terms: "Nature *meant her* to be graceful in form and pleasantly feminine of countenance" (2: 351; emphasis mine). Gissing's narrator dwells on what she lacks and elaborates on how she falls short of nature's promise: "She had no colour, no flesh; but an agreeable smile would well have become her lips, and her eyes needed only the illumination of healthy thought to be more than commonly attractive" (2: 351). Gissing's narrator does not value intelligence alone as an important quality in women, but rather independent "healthy" thought. Rosamund is past her prime. Nearing thirty, she resides in a boarding-house full of young girls "intent upon disowning their womanhood" (2: 354). She states that the other women "cultivated masculine habits, wore as far as possible male attire, talked loud slang, threw scorn (among themselves at all events) upon domestic virtues; and not a few of them seemed to profit by the prevailing fashion" (2: 354). Rosamund's attempts at these tactics bring her no closer to marriage. Their lifestyle at the boarding-

house is expensive. Rosamund, whose income derives from her brother-in-law, even tries to model herself "in feminine extremes" (2: 354). Gissing's decision to follow Rosamund's journey through to her ultimate destination – spinsterhood – reveals his interest in what happens to women who do not succeed in securing a place in society through marriage.

Gissing describes Mrs. Halliday as someone who should "front life as a rational combatant" (2: 361). Despite her position, "she discharged with ability and content the prime domestic duties" required of her (2: 362). It is here that the narrator distinguishes the educated woman from the "ignorant" one (2: 362). Where "[a] woman of the ignorant class" can live contentedly in poverty, the educated woman's life is far more "complex, more trying," because she has "conscientiousness," and is therefore aware of her poverty (2: 362). In this way, Gissing suggests a dichotomy – with two versions of womanhood – and makes the case for new kinds of awareness to which the educated woman is privileged.

Rosamund's transformation surrounds her decision to take up residence in the Halliday's home in exchange for her servitude to the family. She decides to offer her domestic services in hopes that Geoffrey "would admire greatly" the selflessness of her act, and declare his love for her – a last attempt to marry and build a household of her own (2: 361). She is once again disappointed, and returns with resignation to her domestic duties in the Halliday home. While Mr. Halliday is sympathetic to Rosamund's position, Mrs. Halliday is less so, stating bluntly: "[T]here are plenty of people more to be pitied. Work she must, and there's only one kind of work she's fit for. It's no small thing to find your vocation—is it? Thousands of such women—all meant by nature to scrub and cook—live and die miserably because they think themselves too good for it" (2: 370). To which Mr. Halliday replies, seemingly in the voice of Gissing himself: "The whole social structure is rotten!" (2: 370) This statement detracts the story's focus from Rosamund herself, by universalising her experience into one that many women suffer.

Gissing is lamenting the societal constraints women faced at the time. Mr. Halliday views Rosamund as the product of a broken society, which does not allow women the opportunity to reach their full potential and, in turn, stops them from gaining a true purpose. Mr. Halliday's position highlights Gissing's own sympathy to the plight of women in the story – and within society more broadly. The female struggle to secure a place in society is a difficult one, as there are few good options from which to choose. Rosamund accepts her fate because she understands that there is no better option. As she puts it, when her final chance at marriage is ruined, "The whole hateful world had conspired against her" (2: 366).

Fashion in Sixth-Century Rome

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Although it may surprise modern readers, "fashion and pleasure did not fail to revive in Rome soon after the horrors of the [Gothic] siege" (Gissing, *Veranilda* 112). George Gissing's *Veranilda*, an unfinished historical novel set in sixth-century Italy during the war between the Goths (led by King Totila) and the Byzantine Greeks (led by Emperor Justinian), features a leader of fashion, Heliodora, whose details are fed tantalisingly throughout the novel.

She is first described as Greek, whereas later the description is expanded to "a Neapolitan Greek of uncertain origin" (112, 154). She is beautiful, a *femme fatale* – owing something to the historical figure Theodora, the defamed wife of Justinian – and is capricious and cruel to her servants (341). She is the widow of a city prefect, and has maintained an opulent lifestyle in a great house on the Quirinal, surrounded by suitors and servants (173). Her litter, "gaudy and luxurious," matches her costume, whereas other descriptions linger on her overabundant jewellery (140-143). By contrast, one of Basil's cousins, Silvia, kind and honest, wears only one ring on each hand (162); Heliodora, and her like, are the antithesis of Veranilda, who is "gentle, meek, pious" (256). Furthermore, she represents Basil's Greek-sympathising past, since he was her sexual partner for a short time.

Heliodora desires Basil, but she is acutely aware that he now loves Veranilda. The 18-year-old Vivian, who appoints himself Basil's rival, is a "spark of fashion" (169). Basil considers him a "debauched boy" (170), essentially a parasite, selfish and spiteful, yet fashionable. Gissing describes his clothes and hair at some length:

> His attire followed the latest model from Byzantium: a loose, long-sleeved tunic, descending to the feet, its hue a dark yellow, and over that a long mantle of white silk, held together upon one shoulder by a great silver buckle in the form of a running horse; silken shoes, gold embroidered, with leather soles dyed purple; and on each wrist a bracelet. His black hair was short, and crisped into multitudinous curls with a narrow band of gold pressing it from the forehead to the ears. (176)[1]

Whatever the imperial (purple dye) and luxuriant (silken shoes) qualities of this description, they are deftly undercut by Muscula's patronising insult: "Oh, look at little Vivian! […] He has the eyes of an angry rat" (176). The young man's subsequent botched attempt to stab Basil with a small dagger is another joke at his expense.[2]

In the final chapter that Gissing wrote, Rome has been besieged for six months, and Heliodora sits alone amid her statues. Invited by one of Justinian's commanders, Bessas, she visits the Circus Maximus for entertainment, in a near-

deserted city, where she "sat amid her like, the feline ladies and the young nobles, half brute, half fop, who though already most of them fasted without the merit of piety, still prided themselves on being the flower of Roman fashion" (341). The absurdity of the fashionable elite priding themselves on their status as their country lies in ruins represents Gissing's humour at its ironic best. Heliodora's fate is tragic and just: her house is ransacked, and she is forced to become Bessas' mistress. This is as much as we know in the novel itself; however, Gissing's notes suggest that she would have plotted against Basil through Bessas, and died at the hands of Marcian's treacherous servant, Sagaris (Coustillas lxxvii).

We do not know Basil's fate.[3] His past, however, is one of allegiance to Italy's Greek rulers, stationed in Byzantium, but he is torn between them and the Gothic invaders. Heliodora, the leader of a soon-to-be unfashionable elite, represents his past, whereas Veranilda offers a future fighting for the Goths. To be fashionable is to be idle and self-satisfied, and thus easily manipulated; Basil, for better or worse (and both options appear to have been viable to Gissing), is ultimately not ruled by fashion.

[1] Gissing's preparatory notes for *Veranilda* contain details of male and female costumes (see Coustillas lxvii-lxviii); for instance, "Mourning dress not black, but of undyed, gray [sic] wool" (Coustillas lxvii).

[2] To this author's knowledge, there has been no queer reading of *Veranilda*. Such a reading could make much of Gissing's portrayal of Heliodora and Vivian, as well as a later scene in which Athalfrida and Veranilda discuss the beauty of a statue of Antinous (325), a male homosexual icon referred to in the first chapter of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891).

[3] For contradictory suggestions from Gissing's third wife Gabrielle Fleury and his son Alfred, see Tom Ue, "Inaction, Indecision, and Public Politics in Gissing's *Veranilda*."

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Women's Fashion: The Deceit in Dress

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Dress is used by characters throughout *The Whirlpool* to embellish, disguise, and alter their appearances. Gissing's minute description is often revealing. In what follows, I focus on Alma Frothingham and Sibyl Carnaby's dress styles to suggest that they reflect the characters' opposing dispositions, particularly in matters of deceit.

Sibyl is described as a careful, considerate dresser:

> When dining alone or with Hugh, she dressed as carefully as for a ceremonious occasion. Any approach to personal disorder or neglect was inconceivable in Sibyl. Her husband had, by accident, heard her called 'the best-groomed woman in London'; he thought the praise well merited, and it flattered him. (61-62)

Sibyl's meticulous attention to detail not only demonstrates her concerns for outward appearance but also her guarded, perceptive nature. Her cautious personality is revealed when Alma and her husband Basil Carnaby suspect her of having an affair with Cyrus Redgrave. Like her dress, Sibyl pays close attention to what her movements give away, and how others would view them. It is never certain whether Sibyl had an affair: Gissing keeps the reader as well as the characters in the dark. That she is described as "the best-groomed woman in London" suggests how deeply admired she is. That Basil heard this praise "by accident" hints it was not meant for *his* ears. That it "flattered him" speaks volumes about the couple's relationship. Sibyl represents herself intelligently and cautiously in society. Alma recognises Sibyl's controlled handling of dress, situations, and people's opinion of her. When Alma was found at Redgrave's house and suspects Sibyl of the same, she vehemently declares: "Quite natural. You have done it very cleverly till now, and perhaps you will to the end" (460). Alma's comment foregrounds Sibyl's cunning, manufactured self-portrayal: it is, in fact, anything but "natural." Her considered dressing habits allow her to fabricate and exhibit a particular image of her character and her state of mind, shielding her actual self.

Alma's dress is held in contrast to Sibyl's: "For Alma was not like Sibyl Carnaby in perpetual regard for personal finish; she dressed carelessly, save when the occasion demanded pains; she liked the ease of gowns and slippers, of loose hair and free throat; and this taste had grown upon her during the past months" (74). Alma's increasing enjoyment of "the ease of gowns and slippers" instantiates not only the negligence of her appearance but also the carelessness of her actions, and this is further evidenced by her "loose hair and free throat." Her "loose" and "free" manner offers an insight into her psyche: she lacks Sibyl's aptitude for manufacturing her self-impression and allows her guard to slip on occasion. This thoughtlessness is punished: her flirtations with Redgrave are discovered, while Sibyl's are not. Alma's "loose" dress is accessible, allowing an observer to peer through the gaps of her loose-fitting garments. Her liaisons with Redgrave are not airtight, and neither is her dress. After Alma has been detected, she attempts to plead innocence, but her clothing reveals her discomfort: "Upon that, in the same moment, followed a loud hysterical cry; then sobs and wailing, with movements as if to tear open the clothing that choked her" (461). Alma's clothing is no longer "loose" and "free," but close-fitting, corresponding with her wish to disguise what is underneath. Her desire to "tear open" her clothing demonstrates her agitation, her deception, and her wish to escape the uncomfortable situation. After Alma's outburst, she somewhat recovers and, on leaving the room, she "walked to a mirror, at which she arranged her dress" (461). Her immediate

concern, despite her troubled condition, is her appearance. In arranging her dress, she prepares herself for the eyes of the outside world, and her clothing operates as her armour. Alma uses it to conceal the troubled woman underneath, willing that, for all appearances, she is now beyond reproach.

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Art and Dress in "A Victim of Circumstances"

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As Shahidha Bari writes in *Dressed: The Secret Life of Clothes* (2019), to "disregard dress, relegating it as a superficial concern," is to "obstruct a mode of understanding ourselves and others" (9, 17). That attending to clothing may provide a valuable source of knowledge is, however, hardly a new idea, for when fictional figures in George Gissing's short stories dismiss the importance of dress, it rarely reflects well on their character or intelligence. Those who claim to find an interest in clothing to be low and trivial often prove rather low and trivial themselves.

This is never plainer than in "A Victim of Circumstances" (1893). There, Horace Castledine, the protagonist whom Rosemary Jann rightly labels a "self-deceiving dilettante" (Jann: 92) but who is also a blowhard puffed up with faith in his imaginary genius, pontificates to a more successful painter on the subject of how to render historical scenes: "It will occur to you—what about costumes and that kind of thing? Here my principle comes in. It seems to me that our modern painters attach far too much importance to these accessories" (*Collected Short Stories* 2: 8). Instead of becoming acquainted with the styles of the past and representing them accurately, he prides himself on his know-nothingness: "I allow my imagination free play. No one really knows how Joseph of Arimathæa and his companions were dressed; I have devised costumes which seem to me appropriate" (2: 8).

When Godfrey Banks, the well-known artist to whom he has been boasting, views Castledine's unfinished canvas, he sees nothing but "an example of pretentious amateurism" (2: 9). Worse yet, there is "not even a hint of the imaginative faculty" on which Castledine has staked his rejection of the study of so-called "accessories" such as dress (2: 9). It is clear to Banks, moreover, that in clothing the figures in this historical painting, the would-be artist has engaged in unconscious copying, rather than invention: "Castledine seemed to have been influenced by a recollection of Raphael's 'Feed my Sheep' cartoon; the drapery, at all events, was Raphaelesque" (2: 9), although no one would mistake

the result for work by that master. That Castledine's talents fall far short of his own appraisal of them does not come wholly as a surprise to Banks for, as we hear, the sight of this failed painting "sufficed to confirm his worst fears" (2: 9). Why did he already entertain such "fears" about a man whom he had just met? Perhaps it is because Banks, unlike Castledine, pays close attention to dress.

When Banks arrives unexpectedly at Castledine's house – led there by curiosity after encountering the latter's children – it is late afternoon. Castledine's state of dress is inappropriate for that time of day; yet to anyone who, like Banks, is a close observer of visual details, it also speaks volumes about the wearer and his condition: "He wore a dressing-gown which had once been magnificent, of blue satin richly worked; time had faded its glories, and it showed a patch here and there. On his feet were slippers, erst of corresponding splendour; but they, too […] seemed ready to fall to pieces" (2: 6).

Castledine's outfit is revealing in numerous ways. Though the breadwinner, he has allowed his family to fall on hard times economically; the shabbiness of his garments, and the fact that he probably saves more respectable clothes for outdoor use only, to keep them in good repair, suggest this. His "pretentiousness" and sense of entitlement, too, are obvious from these "magnificent" lounging clothes. Most of all, a dressing-gown in the daytime shows that he is doing no painting; if he were, he would be in an artist's smock.

All this information is available to Banks. Only Castledine refuses to recognise how much his clothing gives him away as a *poseur,* because he believes himself above attention to dress. Yet the lesson lost on Castledine is not wasted, for Gissing's story teaches its audience how to read dress and, moreover, shows why this is a worthy occupation for men, as well as women – and even for artists.

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Gissing and the Modern Idea: A Thought

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One difference between Gissing and French novelists, such as Balzac whom he liked, and Baudelaire, is that the latter deal with the city as a unity, and look at it from the centre, even in Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877), which explores Paris in the territory of the Gare du Nord, while Gissing, when not writing about seaside places, such as Teignmouth or Bournemouth, so often turns to the suburbs, such as Camberwell in *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), and writes as if from the outside looking in. Not that this diminishes the power of his observation, but it makes for a strange authorial alignment with suburbia, as

when the house of Stephen Lord and Nancy is introduced and Gissing writes that "[t]he furniture was old, solid, homely; the ornaments were antiquated, and in primitive taste. Nancy's bedroom alone displayed the influence of modern ideas" (24). The decorations, it is said, "on the whole did no discredit to Nancy's sensibilities" (24), but that is scant praise for someone who is finding her taste with no encouragement: it is hardly generous. Mr Lord is a dealer in pianos, many of whose customers have bought on the "hire-purchase system" (27) and the text is scornful of those whose need for "gentility" have made them buy a piano for lodgings which are no more than "two top-floor rooms" (27). The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives 1895 for "hire-purchase," intriguingly, in relation to the sale of pianos, so Gissing is certainly modern here ("Hire, n.," def. C2). His satire works against the taste of what we might call the aspirational, but though it doubtless captures something ridiculous, it is also too much like the negative voice of Mr Lord.

It is not the observation which is missing; on the contrary, Gissing is the best chronicler of South London: the problem is with the word "modern" which in Baudelaire (in the essay "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863), where he uses the term *modernité* for the first time), or in Rimbaud's prose poems *Une Saison en Enfer* (1873) would be the marker of something essential about the possibilities within being urban. The phrase and the implicit assessment within "modern ideas" come from a voice which *sounds* suburban, a word which gathered momentum throughout the nineteenth century, and which sounds mistrusting of the new. It knows that it does not speak from the heart of modernity, perhaps because it feels that London has never been modern – in which assessment, Gissing would seem to be in agreement with Dickens on London, and the opposite of Henry James, for whom the standard is always the cosmopolitan, though that does not imply anything uncritical in James on London. Perhaps that makes James, despite all his loyalty to England, more the foreigner, or more Parisian, even more American, just as it makes Dickens more angry, as he goes on writing, about London, willing, wanting to affirm something more about the lives which it threatens to reduce.

Luckworth Crewe, of course, talks to Nancy about "the modern science and art of advertising" (74). Is there anything between the suburban reading of the modern – which hobbles something in Gissing, and makes him suspicious of the grand gesture – and the commercial sense of the modern, which of course means nothing except to encourage consumerist purchases on the hire-purchase scheme? Samuel Barmby thinks that Burne Jones and William Morris ought to give popular lectures on the elements of art (66). The satire against Philistinism in the half-educated views of Barmby is neat and understated, and since he wants to know what Ruskin would think of the

Jubilee decorations – not a lot, one suspects – it also ironises one of Camberwell's most famous residents, making Ruskin suburban. Which is not without its truth. Nonetheless it does not get away from the sense that "modern" does not mean enough for Gissing in his writing. He claims too little for it, as being too much outside it himself, stuck with the values of London suburbia. Unless the point is that London is nothing but the suburban.

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Blind Beggars

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As the ambitious journalist Jasper Milvain edges out of his engagement with Marian Yule, he recoils from her "attire of encroaching poverty," symbolised in "her mantle out of fashion" (*New Grub Street*: 481). Clothes reflect their wearers' capacity to return profit from their work – and in Gissing's *New Grub Street,* it is the profitability of the literary marketplace that is under sharp scrutiny. Marian's clothes begin to fade – along with her romantic hopes – following the collapse of the legacy inherited from her uncle's paper manufacturing business. Gissing also invokes the legacy of the blind beggar, as Marian's descent towards poverty is compounded by her father Alfred Yule's encroaching blindness from cataracts. This plotline finally relegates this branch of the Yule family beyond the borders of Grub Street. Alfred Yule is notably perceived by his contemporaries as an older species of critic. He is hostile towards "the multiplication of ephemerides" (82) in contemporary literature, and continues to produce pedantic, laboured essays. Rather cuttingly, the narrator informs us that his "mordant" writing style has achieved a certain unwelcome celebrity: upon seeing his name in a journal, "not a few [readers] forbore the cutting open of the pages he occupied" (120). A "battered man of letters" (66), he has long been falling out of fashion, and his struggle to maintain a footing in the rapidly changing literary landscape of the 1880s (when the novel is set) is finally overwhelmed by the prospect of blindness.

The representation of Yule's blindness recalls a long visual and literary tradition of associating blind people with mendicity, including the blind beggar of Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1805) and Paul Strand's iconic Modernist photograph *Blind Woman* (1916). Gissing's treatment of Yule's blindness draws on the same iconography of suffering, despair and constraint, often materialised in the shabbiness of the beggars' clothes, as this 1816 illustration of a blind beggar by the antiquarian John Thomas Smith signals (see figure 4).

Yule resignedly believes that the progression of cataracts will leave him "disabled from earning my livelihood by literature," and he instructs the family to abandon "trivial expenses" (416-417). Yule cannot imagine being able to continue to research and to write in the same rigid manner with impaired eyesight and anticipates a contracted future of hardship and material loss. The Yules' impoverished circumstances (including Alfred being diagnosed by a surgeon himself reduced to "pauperdom" (404)) are tightly interwoven and contrasted in the final book with the economic and sartorial ascendency of the previously little-regarded, failed novelist, Whelpdale. His success with *Chit-Chat* – a new journal format promoting light and frothy short pieces for the newly-literate Board School generation – is reflected in the purchase of a new suit of clothes: "a cream-coloured waistcoat, a necktie of subtle hue, and delicate gloves; prosperity breathed from his whole person" (445).

Figure 4. A blind old man holding out his hat begging for alms is supported by a boy in tattered clothes. Etching by J. T. Smith, 1816. (© Wellcome Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)).

Yule equates blindness with *disappearance*: both from publication in print and from visible participation in London's literary circles, as his family moves to a provincial town. News of his death is announced by an unnamed novelist of "circulating fame" (492), who, recalling Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1674), informs Milvain: "He died in the country somewhere, blind and fallen on evil days, poor old fellow" (492). Gissing thus accentuates the disabling effects of blindness, in contrast to prominent contemporary campaigns by blind organisations and public figures which stressed the industry and educability of blind people: campaigns frequently supported by photographic portraits of smartly-attired blind people. As I have argued elsewhere, blind people used portraiture to re-orient public perception of blindness as a condition inherently marked by passivity and inaction (qualities anxiously associated with beggary by Victorian middle classes) (Tilley). Particular prominence was given to blind people's literacy, with portraits often composed to depict sitters in the act of reading by touch. This photographic

portrait of the embossed alphabet inventor and printer William Moon is an apt example: it was published as a frontispiece to Moon's self-promotional autobiography *Light for the Blind* (1873) (figure 5). It depicts a comfortable, professional Moon authoritatively reading a book placed upon an ornate desk, his blindness indicated by the dark glasses he wears. Contrary to Yule's association of blindness with invisibility, it suggests how contemporary blind people inserted themselves into visible, public spaces, fashioning their image away from the lingering, and damaging, tradition of the blind beggar.

Figure 5. Portrait of William Moon, published in William Moon, *Light for the Blind: A History of the Origin and Success of Moon's System of Reading (Embossed in Various Languages) for the Blind* (London: Longmans & Co., 1873). Credit: Author's collection.

Gissing's Hands

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It should come as no surprise that Gissing references hands so regularly throughout *New Grub Street*. The novel is, after all, about writing, and writing demands a fair bit of finger-work. A closer inspection of hands, I suggest, reveals particular insights into his project. Midway through the novel, Reardon incorporates a sewing analogy to describe to Amy his inability to write: "Suppose you pick up a needle with warm, supple fingers; try to do it when your hand is stiff and numb with cold; there's the difference between my manner of work in those days and what it is now" (225). Reardon's words are poorly selected: it is Mrs. Yule who sews, and sometimes Mrs. Milvain and Milvain's sister Maud. When Amy does, she is only "affecting to be closely engaged upon some sewing" (183). Reardon and Amy are linked by their fidgeting when they are drifting apart: the former's "fingers worked nervously together behind his back" (351), even as the latter "twisted her fingers together impatiently" (159) in response to how discouraged he is. Amy doesn't see his fingers, but does he hers? The shaking of hands (or lack thereof) can be interpreted in terms of intimacy: Reardon and Milvain will nod rather than shake hands when they grow distinct (281), while Reardon and Amy do neither in their failed attempt at reconciliation (348). Reardon's heart is "wrung" at this meeting (353), and Amy's many pages later (439), but not then, not yet. If only.

Marian is rather embarrassed by her ink-stained fingers. In their first meeting, Milvain "saw that she doubted for an instant whether or not to give her hand; yet she decided to do so, and there was something very pleasant to him in its warm softness" (67). Once seated, Marian again conceals her fingers: "she had linked her fingers, and laid her hands, palms downwards, upon her lap – a nervous action" (67). In her next meeting with Milvain, she "let[s] one of her hands rest upon the rail" (73), the suggestion being that her fingers are bent forward; and in the meeting after that, she "had seated herself on the sofa, and her hands were linked upon her lap in the same way as when Jasper spoke with her here before, the palms downward" (88). Her hands will be enveloped by Mr. Quarmby's "red, podgy fingers" (122), and it follows that he is among the company eyeing her inheritance in the hopes of starting up a monthly review: "No enormous capital needed […]. The thing would pay its way almost from the first. It would take a place between the literary weeklies and the quarterlies" (319).

Meanwhile, Alfred Yule's "fingers itched" (135) for an editorial pen to settle old scores. Marian makes a lucky escape: her father and suitor are likened in their encouraging her to "try [her] hand at fiction" (394, 412). The irony is not lost on Marian: "She started, remembering that her father had put the same question so recently" (412).

The ever-perceptive Milvain reads her like a book, and he tells Amy at the novel's end: "Do you know, I never could help imagining that she had ink-stains on her fingers. Heaven forbid that I should say it unkindly! It was touching to me at the time, for I knew how fearfully hard she worked" (494). For his part, Milvain has always associated the piano with domestic bliss. Milvain's sisters are both musical. Maud is a teacher and Dora is a pianist: "Dora did not play badly, but an absentmindedness which was commonly observable in her had its effect upon the music. She at length broke off idly in the middle of a passage, and began to linger on careless chords" (79-80). The wealthy Miss Rupert, who rejects Milvain, may not be "exactly good-looking" but she "[p]lays very well, and has a nice contralto voice; she sang that new thing of Tosti's—what do you call it? I thought her rather masculine when I first saw her, but the impression wears off when one knows her better" (305). Conversely, Milvain laments the fact that Marian doesn't play (85). Accomplished musicians such as Miss Rupert and Amy should not, however, make us overlook Marian's laughter which is, to Milvain's ears, "music" (329). But he is finally connected to Amy: "So Amy first played and then sang, and Jasper lay back in dreamy bliss" (494). We find ours in the hands of a master.

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Biffen's Overcoat

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Harold Biffen's avant-garde poetics of the "ignobly decent" (*New Grub Street*: 175) cites shortcomings in the sartorial department as illustrative of the "paltry circumstance[s]" (175) that beset the lives of the many – as with "poor Allen, who lost the most valuable opportunity of his life because he hadn't a clean shirt to put on" (176). Dickens, he explains, did have an eye for such "trivial incidents" (176), but his *penchant* for melodrama and humour prevented him from writing "seriously" about them. Conceived in the earnestly mimetic mode, *New Grub Street* includes a number of

references to clothes and their painful relevance. Biffen's "long grey overcoat" (172), "purchased second-hand three years ago" (235) and occasionally worn indoors (when it is very cold, or when the lighter clothes he would normally wear underneath have been pawned), may be considered as evidence of Gissing's wish to represent life as it is, with its bitter material constraints.

If one looks closely at the passages concerning attire, one may notice that they are very concise, and – visually speaking – convey little information. There are few tiny chromatic exceptions, such as Milvain's "lilac-sprigged" necktie (53), but, overall, Gissing's eye is more for quality (of material and cut) and use (new vs. worn-out) than colour and ornament. Thus, typically, "[t]he clothes [Milvain] wore were of expensive material, but had seen a good deal of service" (53), or "Amy was much better dressed than usual, a costume suited to her position of bereaved heiress" (362). Invariably, the implied information is the price of such items, or their diminished value after prolonged use. There is hardly any suggestion of personal taste. We are what we wear, because we are what we may spend. Given a certain income, and a shared, educated middle-class background, we are bound to be dressed more or less the same. Money, the universal mediator, renders qualitative differences immaterial, making (Georg Simmel would argue) for abstraction, and comparability/fungibility – of people very much as of things.

Indeed, in *New Grub Street*, clothes usually require description when there is something amiss with them. Biffen's are repeatedly remarked upon, since he is the character that resists conformity most strenuously. He is also – in spite of his poetics – the character that precipitates the only Dickensian sequence in this very un-Dickensian fiction, as if his stubborn individuality unsettled the novel's mimetic poise. This occurs in Chapter 31, in which Biffen lovingly completes "Mr Bailey, Grocer," and risks his life in rescuing it from fire, his overcoat serving as a protective bundle to convey the precious "papers" to safety, and himself emerging blackened all over with "the aspect of a sweep" (424) from the ordeal. This "fiery adventure" (427) is so gratuitous (so irrelevant to the progression of the story) that one might be tempted to construe the manuscript-threatening flames as a melodramatic eruption, in externalised form, of emotional contents otherwise repressed – in the same way as, say, Miss Havisham's white dress suddenly catches fire in Chapter 49 of *Great Expectations* (1861).

Be that as it may, when visiting Reardon two days later, Biffen is described as looking "more like […] a bankrupt costermonger than a man of letters" (426): he has lost his collar (the last vestige of middle-class

respectability), which has been replaced by "a dirty handkerchief" (426); his boots are soiled; and his (originally grey) trousers are black. The main surviving item is his overcoat: it has "been brushed, but its recent experiences [have] brought it one stage nearer to that dissolution which must very soon be its fate" (426). Perhaps to emphasise this impending doom, a couple of pages later Biffen reappears "white from head to foot" (430) – as if the sudden snowfall (soon to be fatal to Reardon) had already rubbed out his characteristic garb. This seems to herald Biffen's sad demise, which will occur after he has provided himself with a new set of clothes. There is, in fact, a touch of the apotropaic in the old overcoat: throughout, it faithfully shields its owner from embarrassment and climatic acerbity, and saves his novel. It is when it finally "dissolves" that death holds sway.

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From 'Native Rags' to Riches? Sartorial Aspiration in *The Nether World*

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"In the social classification of the nether world," George Gissing's narrator observes in an early chapter of *The Nether World*, "[…] it will be convenient to distinguish broadly, and with reference to males alone, the two great sections of those who do, and those who do not, wear collars" (69). While a social "analyst" could "discriminate" "subtle gradation[s]" between these two "orders," dress nonetheless visibly and rigidly codifies male identity (69). The same is not true of the novel's female characters, who wear and adjust their dress, not always successfully or permanently, to articulate personal aspiration and social mobility.

When we first meet the "cold, subtle, original" Clara Hewett, she is simply, inadequately and yet becomingly dressed without "any pretended elegance" in modest but well-made clothes that accentuate her gracefulness (26). They also reveal her vulnerability by offering "poor protection against the rigours of a London winter" (26). Clara is about to enter into employment at the Imperial Restaurant and Luncheon Bar, where she "contemptuously" changes her "simple, but not badly made" day dress for "cheap," "vulgar" "evening attire," while dreaming of "genuine luxuries" instead of such "shams" (78-79, 26). This combination of public display

and private ambition leads Clara to abandon her "slavery" for the life of a provincial actress, an existence that confirms her ability to dress performatively but also signifies social disgrace and concludes in disaster when her face is ruined in a vitriol attack (88). Ironically, while Clara's social aspiration has been articulated through her sartorial choices, she now finds her career options curtailed by her practical inaptitude as a needlewoman, and a final, desperate "piece of acting" is designed to win her a husband (287). Arranging her abundant hair "as she had learned to do it for the stage" and using her "well-fitting" and "sober" dress to display "her admirable figure," Clara conceals "her veiled face" and pre-meditated marital scheme "in shadow" to secure a miserable but sheltered existence in shabby Crouch End (282-283, 285). The end of the novel pits her "grace and natural dignity" against her dishevelled hair, suggesting mental anguish at missed opportunities (375).

If Clara's sartorial aspirations come to nothing, Pennyloaf Candy never contemplates an escape from the "nether world" she regards "with the indifference of habit" (8, 74). The daughter of an alcoholic mother and a violent father, the "meagre, hollow-eyed, bloodless" Pennyloaf nonetheless possesses "a certain charm—that dolorous kind of prettiness which is often enough seen in the London needle-slave" (72). Her appearance signals an effort to keep her "miserable" attire "in order": "the boots upon her feet were sewn and patched into shapelessness; her limp straw hat had just received a new binding" (72). Later decked out in gaudy splendour as Bob Hewett's bride, Pennyloaf grotesquely revels in the trinkets that Clara spurns, "sh[i]n[ing]" in a "blue, lustrous" outfit "hung about with bows and streamers," "with the reddest feather purchasable in the City Road" gracing "[h]er broad-brimmed hat of yellow straw," and a "gleaming" "real gold" ring on her "scrubby small finger" (105). This "most unwonted apparel" is of course later "rent […] off her back" by jealous Clem Peckover in a brutal fight on Clerkenwell Green, and the bloodied and "filth-smeared" newly-weds "grop[e] [their] way blindly up to the black hole" of Shooter's Gardens to commence their equally ragged domestic life by "pawn[ing] her wedding-ring" (105, 112-113). Unlike Clara, whose sartorial skills are limited to consuming fashion, Pennyloaf eventually achieves a precarious independence as a seamstress, helping another young widow run "a certain poor little shop" "heaped with the most miscellaneous" "second-hand-clothing, women's and children's" (387). Although Pennyloaf confesses to feeling "a bit low," she is nonetheless gainfully employed in transforming "native rags" into usable goods (if not exactly riches), safe from domestic abuse, and part of a supportive female network – a fate as close to a happy ending

as Gissing is able to muster in this bleak novel (387, 116). While both Clara and Pennyloaf articulate social aspiration and status through fashion, the ability to produce proves, in the end, more conducive to modest happiness than the desire to consume.

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