

THE GISSING NEWSLETTER

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

– George Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*

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*Demos*

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*Demos* (the novel of Gissing’s which I least enjoy) has attracted much attention because of its subject. Like *Workers in the Dawn*, but infinitely more maturely, it debates the “social question” in terms of specific theories: this has the consequence that these two novels “date” more than his other working-class novels, the universal in them tending to be overwhelmed by the contemporary; but since the leading idea in *Demos* is Socialism, of current interest, instead of a long-dead Positivism, this is not so noticeable as it might be. Undeniably, since he was an observer of his own time, all Gissing’s work stands at that risk; one might instance the predicament of Godwin Peak as one

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possible only in a specific time; universality is attained in these cases by isolation of the essence, rather than the details, of a human or social problem, and by its embodiment in character. This is evidently of critical importance in assessing *Demos*, and Gissing by no means failed here; however, the fact remains that criticism of this novel tends to be drawn to its specific rather than its general implications.

Subordinate themes of the novel also have plentiful staying power: industrial development versus what we might to-day call “conservation,” aestheticism, religion, radicalism, moral prudery, the case for aristocracy, the power of money over rich and poor (seen not in a Marxist way but very much as Dickens saw it, – a moral problem extending from the individual into society as a whole). As usual there are rather too many themes, but one notes some improvement in this respect over his previous novels: the neat and economical way in which all themes are introduced in little more than a chapter is not a false promise, for in this book the various ideas are much more closely related in a thematic pattern than formerly. We can reasonably say that the kind of unity of theme which marks Gissing’s best books has been mastered so early.

Unfortunately no parallel advance in embodying theme in structure is shown. The usual nineteenth-century faults of sensationalism and irrelevance recur once more. There are the signs of padding or stretching to three volumes: the necessity of many scenes is doubtful, for instance, Chapter IV of Volume III; there are unnecessary characters, such as Letty Tew – and although the existence of Emma Vine, the deserted fiancée, is important to the study of Mutimer, the sub-plot concerning her and her sisters seems to have no function. Similarly, knowledge of the profligacy of Eldon is decisive in bringing about the marriage of Adela, who loved him, to Mutimer, but a mere rumour would have done that; there was no need for detail of his affair with an actress, the sensationalism of a bullet wound, or the wild coincidence of his having been picked up after the duel by Mr. Wyvern. Coincidences and chances are as numerous and improbable as ever. There is the common misplaced ingenuity, in the investment swindler who finally ruins Mutimer being his brother-in-law Rodman under another name. Had Rodman functioned symbolically as Mutimer’s evil genius, as probably he would have in the hands of Dickens, then the question of improbability in this recurrence of the character would not have arisen; but the reference of the novel is as usual to real experience, in which Rodman is too minor a character and Mutimer too strong a one for such a relationship.

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There are the usual “properties” of the sensational novel – a lost will, a marked newspaper, letters. I think we can accept the riot at the end without complaint of sensationalism, however; it is not sensational in presentation; it is founded on actual occurrences, it develops logically and, although in its neatness of poetic justice it may remind us too much of the death of Woodstock in *The Unclassed*, it has the justification of being a forceful catastrophe. The question is, not the manner of Mutimer’s death, but whether death was an appropriate ending.

That thought brings us to the most evident fault in *Demos*, the mechanical plot: the familiar apparatus of legacies which by arbitrarily changing the situation direct the action in a manner neither logical nor related to character. Who in possession of his senses could swallow twice in the same novel (although circumstances and results differ) the contrivance of a benefactor of Mutimer dying intestate? About the second, and minor, instance I cannot say anything very sensible: only that I suspect that in the third volume Gissing found his plot running out of steam, and was compelled externally to modify the circumstances of poverty into which he had written his hero in order to reactivate him and permit him to continue till the end.

About the first occurrence of this contrivance, the apparent intestacy of Mutimer’s great-uncle: this I think must be accepted. It is after all the datum of Gissing’s concept, to explore the consequences of the sudden accession, to a doctrinal socialist of the level we might now designate “shop steward,” of the wealth and power to realise some of his ideals. Had Mutimer earned the money himself, his thoughts must have undergone modifications during that process which would have invalidated the sharp contrasts which Gissing intended. So while feeling the

inheritance to be a somewhat improbable chance we are prepared to go on from that point. It is over the second major accident we stumble, when the missing will is recovered and the situation reversed. It strains our powers of acceptance – not least because of the melodramatic symbols, circumstances and confrontations surrounding it; and naturally all succeeding chances are by this made even less welcome.

The finding of the will fails the first test that, in studying plot structure, one can apply to any mechanical or external device: whether it accomplishes anything that could not have occurred through logical development of situation and character. It was not necessary that Mutimer should have been thus violently deprived of his wealth, for he was fully capable of losing it through his own financial incompetence; was, in fact, in process of doing so, Gissing showing that the Wanley

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industrial project, conceived in socialistic theory and in the teeth of the business world, was not viable. We cannot avoid the old suspicion, that this event was included because it was more sensational than a more probable way of reaching the same result. We could argue, as before of the original inheritance, that there is a significant difference between an instantaneous and a gradual process in its effect on character. Certainly; but this would imply that Gissing consciously subordinated probability to the statement he wished to make. The story would then be a moral fable more than a study of real life. Gissing's novels were both these things and perhaps he never clearly separated the two, but as a rule reality predominates. I will return to this point later.

Temporarily putting aside the matter of probability, we can ask a more general question, what is this novel (or any of Gissing's) actually "about"? the characters, or the social problems in which they are involved? Both, evidently. There can be no separating characters from the concerns which they embody. But there is a difference between that structure in which theme is predominant, and even the main characters are illustrations of the theme, and that in which the characters as individuals hold the stage whatever their thematic significance. *The Odd Women* is an example of the former; *Demos* like most of Gissing's work is of the latter kind. It is not mainly about socialism, even fictional socialism, it is about Mutimer. Although he has qualities intended to be typical of what he represents – *demos* – he is not a type in the sense that he primarily illustrates an aspect of socialism. Almost all the other characters are such types, and properly so, to form the framework of society in a recognisable way, but Mutimer (to apply a rule-of-thumb test) can be imagined existing in circumstances other than those of this book.

This interest in the individual, and the recurrence of the familiar theme of marriage between classes, is connected with one of the basic premises of socialism which concerns Gissing very much more than, for instance, social justice: the question is whether men can be in any true sense equal.

“He was not of her class, not of her world; only by violent wrenching of the laws of Nature had they come together. She had spent years in trying to convince herself that there were no such distinctions, that only an unworthy prejudice parted class from class. One moment of true insight was worth more than all her theorising on abstract principles. To be her equal this man must be born again, of other parents, in other conditions of life.” Vol. III, Chap. III, p. 54.

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These are nominally the thoughts of Adela, a character, but there is little doubt they are the thoughts of the author also, at least in some moods. It is to express them that he takes an individual,

representative in that he carries the inherited and acquired faults of his class, but exceptional in all other respects, and gives him the opportunities of wealth, power, marriage to a lady – the “advantages” that some would say are all that distinguish classes – in order to show that despite them he is incapable of functioning as a gentleman. Superficially he may succeed in doing so. Korg takes the entertaining scene of Mutimer struggling with the etiquette of table manners, when first dining with the gentry, as a “significant betrayal”; revealing it is, but to me it seems meant to demonstrate Mutimer’s ability to acquire with some ease the external traits of his new position. Other things lead to the same conclusion. Mutimer’s failure as a gentleman is at a deeper level; one might say, in morals, not manners.

It follows from this general intention of the novel that the proper structure is dramatic, not episodic; not a survey of society or a debate on socialism, in which views and attitudes are expounded by means of static representative characters (although that is done also), but a progressive development of the main character from the original situation through an enchainement of logically successive scenes, in order to explore that failure to move between the classes that Gissing attributes to Mutimer. A strictly Aristotelian structure with beginning, middle and end and a series of appropriate climaxes marking the stages. The three previous novels, and many later, can be fitted into this pattern more or less, at least so far as the central thread of action is concerned, but few so clearly as *Demos*. Despite the due proportion of irrelevancies and distractions, the affairs of Mutimer are kept continually before the reader. The first act, or exposition, occupies exactly one volume: it describes the effect of wealth on Mutimer, with special attention to the growing possibility of marriage with Adela, and the complex of misunderstandings, intrigues and betrayals surrounding it: the climax of Chapter XII is Adela’s acquiescence to Mutimer’s proposal. The complication, again exactly one volume, begins as it should quietly after the climax of Volume I, builds through the growing problems of business, politics and marriage that beset Mutimer, particularly developing the conflict with his wife; its climax, which joins all these strands of interest, is that scene in which Adela challenges Mutimer to be honest over the discovered will. These two major climaxes have each the needed effect of satisfactorily completing the previous movements while leaving potential tensions for what is next. Again quietly, the resolution begins as Mutimer

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attempts to re-establish himself after his loss. There is desperation here, for it is no longer possible for him to be what he was before; his ideas have changed, and besides people of whatever class will no longer accept him as one of them – a form of tragic isolation; so with inevitability the action moves towards the final catastrophe.

Strongly conceived, then, despite mechanisms of plot; and it is worth note that the true climaxes are the internal ones of character in decision, not the external ones of chance and contrivance. Admittedly there are pages in which what should be a clear rhythmic movement of interest from climax to climax drags and flounders; this, if not caused by some irrelevancy, is a consequence of the padding of the book for length. Generally, though, there is much that is competent; good social scenes, effective satires.

Contrast is implicit in all Gissing’s handling of social problems, especially where social classes are involved, but in many books it is more or less left to make its own effect; here in *Demos* there is some return to the strong pointing of contrast by juxtaposition that Gissing used to excess in *The Unclassed*. A sign of increasing competence – perhaps confidence – is the occasional omission of scenes structurally unnecessary or distracting even though they could be interesting or sensational in themselves (a revealing reflection): particularly I note the time-shift between Chapters VI and VII of Volume I which overleaps all the first stages of Mutimer’s access to power,

returning to the action only when the first shocks are over, and the preliminary complications under way. Similarly, Mutimer's marriage to Adela is omitted as unnecessary after the climax of her accepting him. Such restraints contrast oddly with the sensational elements.

It is clear – must be from much that I have said – that Mutimer is a potentially tragic character, whose story has fallen naturally into dramatic form. But this is only a potential. Mutimer touches on the tragic because it seems at times that he is opposing an inimical Fate even more than the failings in himself. We must ask why this is so, unusually in Gissing, and also whether this was the effect the author intended.

I have said something of Mutimer's character as viewed in the framework of contemporary psychological theory (1). Such observations while valid obviously do not convey the totality of a complex character invention; there is more to Mutimer than the phenomenon of the power-seeker that I outlined previously. That concept, unqualified, tends to imply hypocrisy in Mutimer, in that he would be using the socialist ideal for his own ends. Such hypocrisy is one of the charges,

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superficially justified laid against him by his political opponents. But he does truly hold by the socialist ideal, on at least one level of his mind; his adherence to it is modified by circumstances and is secondary to his personal desires, so that he has no integrity, and in consequence supplies foundations for accusations. He does have a proportion of genuine enthusiasm, goodwill and honour, a fact which his wife is aware of even when she is most unhappy in the marriage; these elements in him she stimulates and encourages partly in order to make her own existence as his wife morally bearable – a subtle touch.

His failings from the ideal – explicable to us as the impulse to power superseding those more conscious purposes but not explicable to Mutimer, incapable of such reflections – involve not hypocrisy but self-deception.

Despite the topicality of his subject, Gissing has made it universal by seizing a type of socialist – or reformer, or what you will – that is prevalent to-day. The particular doctrines and practices to which this type adheres are not important to the concept, and Gissing can have felt no qualms about inventing suitable ones. I refer to the kind of person who for his own peace of mind needs always to be found in what may be interpreted as a sound moral stance. It is important that he should always be on the side of the Good and the Right (as popularly understood); in his own eyes, certainly; even more, in the eyes of the public. The goodness and rightness may be only apparent, but the appearance must be sufficiently convincing to allow of this deception and self-deception. The posture is more important than the fact. This man is of course lacking in the ruthless self-confidence of the simple power-seeker; he needs supporters, followers, he needs approbation to bolster his belief in himself. For this reason Mutimer can be manipulated by his wife, by opinion, by meetings, newspapers, even by those he despises, providing the appeal is to this imaginary rather than real virtue.

Like most politicians, he may find expediency controlling his actions, but is not hypocrite enough to recognise this for what it is; he must justify, must deceive himself. He must always be right. For this reason his rejectipn of Emma, an undesirable but not absolutely wicked act, becomes inflated in importance. Gissing shows clearly that one of Mutimer's major faults is lack of sympathetic imagination, whoever he is dealing with; he can escape therefore any great feeling of guilt about Emma; he can persuade himself that fulfilling his promises to her would be an error, which objectively may well be true; but for all this he cannot face her himself. To do so would be to assume of necessity a posture which could not by, any stretch of the imagination be described as

virtuous. The scene in which he persuades Alice Mutimer to convey his rejection is worth study. "I feel ashamed of myself," he says (Vol. II, Chap. III, p. 60), but this "shame" has no power over his actions, and is less important than the fear of public obloquy. Presumably he has appealed to Alice because she is inherently sympathetic to him, but he dislikes intensely showing even her that he is not faultless:

"Richard had a suspicion that he was irretrievably ruining himself in his sister's opinion, and it did not improve his temper." (p. 64)

From this scene dates his loss of influence over Alice, for reasons of course based on both their characters, but in his case largely consisting of an inability henceforth to adopt with her a superior pose.

It is this act of deserting Emma which returns to defeat him in the end – a good peripety; but it is not guilt that defeats Mutimer, it is the consciousness of public condemnation:

"As soon as he knew what the man was about to speak of, Mutimer felt the blood rush back upon his heart. It was as when the criminal hears delivered against him a damning item of evidence. He knew that he was pale, that every feature declared his consciousness of guilt. In vain he tried to face the mob and smile contemptuously. His eyes fell; he stood without the power of speech." (Vol. III, Chap. XII, p. 250).

The thing to notice is that Mutimer is neither guilty nor speechless until the accusation is brought out in the open; but as soon as it is he feels all the emotions that one would suppose he might have felt privately, but didn't. It is not merely that Mutimer has been able to forget his guilt so long as no one refers to it, a trick of mind common to us all; there is a more complicated balance between being justified in one's own eyes and in those of the world, in which the security appropriate to the one somehow functions in the other sense. The phenomenon has been noted in other fictional figures – Meredith's Egoist, for instance. It is the more curious when one sees how little either the internal or the external "conscience" has to do with guiding actions, such decision being rather left to expediency, ambition, propaganda requirements and the like; this is hardly a matter of morality in a practical sense at all, rather of moral postures. Such attitudes are current in the twentieth century, especially in extremes either of the right or left in political and social matters, where it is easiest to claim high principles without much concern with practice. I suspect it is common as a defence against the difficulties of an age lacking in firm beliefs and of great complexity in practical action. If that is so now, it was equally true of Gissing's time.

Keating is scathing about Gissing's condemnation of the limited education of Mutimer, who has read mainly polemics.

"Richard Mutimer is to be out of place in upper-class society because he has not read the right books. He will fail to help the Socialist cause and his character will be corrupted because he does not possess the key to Paradise – a knowledge of imaginative literature." (2).

I think this is an over-simple interpretation of Gissing's intention. We must not allow our opinions to be polarised by sympathy for the working class or other reactions to Gissing's prejudices, so as to

forget that whatever the importance to his work of class differences and the like the problems of the individual always override them. The *déraciné* character, in various manifestations of which this is one, is at the root of Gissing's work; book after book expounds the need for an allegiance in a time of lost faiths; and such allegiance must have the emotional force of a religion. The *Hope of Pessimism* tells us that clearly, and the previous novels have demonstrated this from the moment when Arthur Golding begins to look beyond the ideals of Noble, Mutimer's predecessor, to the point at which Emily Hood finds her religion of beauty has failed her, precisely, as a religion. Gissing is telling us that socialism, as conceived by Mutimer in terms of conflict and practical measures, with "men as trees walking," is not and cannot be a religion; that defects of sensitivity and imagination are emotional and moral, not merely aesthetic, defects.

These perceptions are worthy, and the best that *Demos* has to offer. This study of a man struggling by grasping at externals to fill gaps in himself that he has no means of clearly understanding to exist, because the worst of them is lack of the power of understanding, could have been eminent. However, it is spoiled by the intrusion of Gissing's personal involvement. The novel promises so much at the beginning, and so fails, that I cannot read it with pleasure. Beginning well, Gissing progressively withdraws from Mutimer the necessary sympathy, in proportion as Mutimer gains wealth, position and marriage. It is as if his bias against the character, as representative of a class and a type of mind both of which he detested, will not allow him to credit him with even those things in him which can be admired. While persisting in his plan of the novel, he seems to resent permitting a working man the social and sexual success which he and his various intellectual characters have failed in. He alternates oddly between objective analysis of the character and expressions of prejudice; and this shows correspondingly in his attitudes to others: to Eldon, for

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instance, who at first is repellent in his narrow arrogance and prejudice, no doubt intentionally so; but who is commended as Adela's ideal (not just the man she loves, who would not necessarily be ideal); and whose prejudices are visibly shared by the author from time to time. The result is that we feel that, objectively, he is being used to express the faults of "aristocracy," but that we are expected to overlook those faults, this being exactly opposite to the attitude to Mutimer. Uncertainty of tone reaches a climax in the scenes of his winding up the Wanley project, which seem to avoid rather than present the conflicting claims of humanity and conservation. Adela too is indefinite in many ways, though a much more fully developed character. Commencing with the faults of a narrow education, general ignorance and prudery – mental limitations which give Mutimer easy early victories over her – she transfers her essential seriousness to Socialism in lieu of married happiness; then develops with the aid of Stella an understanding of beauty and love, and begins to recognize what she has lost in marrying Mutimer instead of Eldon. She comes to understand her husband, even to manipulate him, being now the stronger character. On the face of it, a good and rational development of character; but it is less satisfactory in practice.

The problems are many. For instance, so strong an impression of superficiality and mental shallowness is created at the beginning that it is difficult to change one's attitude to her as the author expects one to change it. I think Gissing meant us to take all her states of mind seriously, and does so himself because he is biased by that familiar idealisation of the "young gentlewoman"; but it is all too easy to interpret each stage of her development the first one as superficial as the last. Her period of socialist enthusiasm is false; she loses interest as soon as another matter enters her mind, and while we know that Gissing is arguing throughout the book that socialism is barren, he has taken little care in Adela's case to explore or justify the change. The relationship with Stella (quite apart from its equivocal overtones) seems a silly infatuation, its themes of love and beauty

adolescent – and seems confirmed so when the feelings are transferred to Eldon, who has not been developed to justify a grand and idealistic passion.

Conflict between judgement and bias is clear if we attempt to attribute “blame” for the failure of her marriage. Objectively (and we must remind ourselves in these arguments that all the information we are considering is provided by the author, so he must have at least with part of his mind intended this) the fault is equally distributed between the two. This is what we would expect;

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Gissing is no fool about such things, and even as early as, and in such a personal matter as, the marriage of Golding in *Workers in the Dawn* could see both sides of the case. Mutimer’s deficiencies of sensitivity and imagination, his marrying Adela for ambition without love, of which he is probably incapable, are basic causes of the failure; but Adela married also without love, or, evidently, any real understanding of the demands of marriage, under pressure from her mother and in prudish rebound from disappointment in Eldon. Her main failure, however, was in not dismissing Eldon from her life, but continuing to hold him as a sentimental ideal, etc. – so that when much later Mutimer accuses her of hypocrisy (Vol. III, Chap. V, pp. 8 1-2) she cannot defend herself.

“Had she not many times concealed with look and voice an inward state which was equivalent to infidelity? Was not her whole life a pretence, an affectation of wifely virtues?”

However, while we have before us the material for an unbiased study of this marriage, in feeling it is not disinterested; sympathy for Adela, dislike for Mutimer, inform the presentation. Even this passage just referred to, in which Adela sees her own fault, is imbued with implied justification for her, none for Mutimer. I think Gissing is emotionally involved with the need to prove that Mutimer cannot possibly be a gentleman; and having married Mutimer to a gentlewoman – that possibility about which he himself had such complicated feelings – he is guided by a kind of jealousy: Mutimer must not only fail in his marriage, he must be shown to be totally unsuited to such a marriage, to have forced a law of nature in making it. And this because of his class.

We have noted that Gissing dislikes the kind of mind that Mutimer represents; this however is no prerogative of the working man, and moreover it is not beyond the working man to surpass it, as does Grail in the next novel. Failure because of lack of imagination, etc., and failure because of belonging to the wrong social class, are of quite a different kind; the first is susceptible to logical analysis; the second no doubt might be also, but is not here – it is a matter of illogical prejudice. Stronger in Adela than either regret for the loss of Eldon or perception of Mutimer’s limitations is a positive distaste – implied, a physical distaste – for Mutimer which has no rational explanation. When during the engagement Mutimer offered to kiss her, “a ghastly fear flashed upon her soul,” (Vol. II, Chap. II, p. 37). In the oft-quoted passage about the “laws of nature,” we learn “their married intimacy was an unnatural horror” (Vol. III Chap. III, p. 54), and note that this is linked with class rather than personal differences.

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A difficulty here is Victorian reticence, of which Gissing had (a trifle sporadically) his due share. It was outspoken of him to introduce these thoughts of the bedroom at all – he did not see fit to expand them. Adela’s fleeing Mutimer’s bed when he is drunk (Vol. II, Chap. IX, pp. 226-7) could be a reaction to the drunkenness only; her rejection of his caresses on another occasion (Vol. II, Chap. XII, pp. 288-9) is part of a quarrel and hides as to cause behind the words “brutal” and



“degrading.” These scenes remain hints only.

There is no psychological improbability: it is very credible that Adela should have an irrational sexual repulsion from a husband married without love; more, it is credible that Mutimer as described to us might have personal habits, or sexual indelicacy, that would avert the charge of irrationality in her disgust; but hints and nods are not enough to support such a possibility. We are rather being asked – for once, and uncharacteristically in Gissing – we are being asked to accept wholly the theory of the superhuman sensitive delicacy of the Victorian maiden, and please not to pry. If we take a sexual estrangement as the probability, then there is logic in a substitute homosexual relationship with the gentle and beautiful Stella as a stage in development towards a full sexual experience with Eldon; but I am using the terms a modern novelist might use; I simply find myself unable to decide whether Gissing consciously meant to convey this idea or whether Stella is to be taken as a symbol, only, of Adela’s development.

I am therefore not certain; have not been allowed to be certain; that Adela’s loathing for Mutimer has an objective cause or explanation. What is conveyed in its place is a non-logical class prejudice, with overtones of physical disgust, more akin to the colour prejudice of a racial bigot than anything else I can think of.

We are speaking much of Adela, and this is because the withdrawal of sympathetic understanding from Mutimer is accompanied not only by the corresponding increase in sympathy for Adela, but by the substitution of Adela for Mutimer as focus of attention; from approximately the middle of the novel Mutimer is seen almost entirely through Adela’s eyes, and her states of mind are explored much more than his. Structurally, this – almost a change of main character – is a serious fault; it ruins the promising study of Mutimer by subordinating him. It spoils the study as a psychological analysis, because we cease to have an intimate view of his thoughts, or even an unbiased external view of them; it spoils it as an emotional experience, because we are led to feel

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against instead of with him. What it does do is convert him into a specimen, externally viewed, of something rather disgusting risen from beneath the observer.

With uncomfortable attitudes to the character like these, and with the suppression of the noble elements in him, we could not have tragedy even though we have the framework of it. Any study of failure is potentially tragic; the handling is what counts in making it so. The impression of tragic effect in *Demos*, is an illusion. It is created by a feeling that the Fates are against Mutimer, that the scales are weighed against him so that we are bound to stand by him and extend the sympathy that the novel denies – curiously, an adverse reaction by the reader against the undisguised bias of the author. Gissing’s calling upon melodramatic chances to decide the sequence of events may be just the recurrence of bad habits, but because of the mood of animosity towards Mutimer one feels that Gissing is using them, in addition to other denials, to prevent and hinder his own character. So little opportunity, circumstantially, of success does he permit him that we cannot hold this to be a fair study of failure; and by making circumstantial what could have been a logical development from Mutimer’s character Gissing weakens his own criticism of it. Altogether, in departing from probability in order to make points Gissing has defeated himself.

Had Mutimer been allowed to retain our sympathy and to remain in the centre of the action, tragic effect might have been possible; for he does have one essential of the tragic hero which very few of Gissing’s characters have – a will to action. Had the novel been tragic, the ironies and the catastrophic ending would have been acceptable and appropriate; conversely, simple verisimilitude would omit the apt chance of Mutimer’s death together with other chances; the study of reality calls for endings that lack finality, as Gissing knew and said. It is difficult (and the difficulty illustrates

the uncertain tone of the novel) to say whether Gissing killed Mutimer off for sensational effect merely; because he was partly aware of the tragic pattern; just to abolish him and release Adela; or because he could not visualise a further possible existence for Mutimer after he had deprived him of everything he had lived for. If the last was the case, both the deprivation contrived in the teeth of reality and the inability to realise imaginatively Mutimer's human existence are consequences of the radical antipathy of author and character.

1 - Francis, "Gissing's Characterisation: Environment," *The Gissing Newsletter*, June 1967, pp. 5-6.

2 - *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, p. 70.

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### Gissing's Imagined Audience

#### A Note on Style

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In his *Critical Study* of Dickens, Gissing stigmatizes the earlier novelist's dependence on the approval of a wide popular audience as thoroughly "antiquated," and in his own novels he took pains to make clear that, far from making any concessions to the undiscerning taste of the multitude, he directed his work to an intellectual elite. The fact that, as he wrote, he thought of what he called "my best readers" (1) is everywhere reflected in Gissing's novels, and particularly in his style.

In the working-class novels of the eighties, no other single factor so emphasizes the created distance between the reader of these slum novels and the characters who appear in them as the scholarly diction employed by Gissing in his narrative. Both in the erudition of his English vocabulary and in his habitual use of words and phrases from foreign languages, he demonstrates his willingness to foster a cultural alienation of audience from subject, and to perpetuate those peculiar tensions of his social novels which stem from the conflicting impulses of sympathy and antipathy aroused in his reader. Despite his own humanitarian feelings, the unforgivable ignorance of the common people is never far from Gissing's mind, and it offers him numerous opportunities for sarcasm at the expense of his characters, as for instance in *Demos*, where he reports that the socialist newspaper edited by Westlake has been named *The Tocsin*; it is, he adds, "no bad name, if socialists at large could be supposed capable of understanding it." (2) His audience, by contrast, is invariably assumed to be sufficiently well educated to cope without difficulty not only with such relatively common English words, but with the Gissing vocabulary drawn from his life-long classical studies.

It is intriguing to examine the diction of Gissing's novels and to discover the complex ways in which the novelist, though his every page must present the details of a debased modern civilization, maintains his distance from his subject. Latinate words and Greek derivatives came readily to Gissing's tongue and to his pen, and he uses them freely in his novels, often in a way so inappropriate to the subject at hand as to produce a mock-heroic effect. Culturally superior readers

might be expected to savour Gissing's reference to Roodhouse, the socialist agitator, as "the heresiarch" (*Demos* II, 135), his description of a slum-world quarrel as an "uproar of commination" (*The Unclassed* I, 284), and his scornful aside in the report that "Harriet Casti had saturated her mind – or whatever succedaneum for mind her constitution comprised – with the fiction of penny weeklies" (*The Unclassed* I, 289). The same assumption of special knowledge underlies his descriptive similes: to Gissing's eyes, the form of Michael Snowdon's felt hat is "exactly that of the old petasus" (*The Nether World* I, 2), and young girls at play "leap along with shrieks like grotesque maenads" (*The Nether World* I, 269). Going beyond the use of derivatives, Gissing does not hesitate even to create his own English loan-words from Greek by the process of transliteration, so that we read in *Thyrza* of Egremont's "eirenikon" (II, 6) to Bunce, and in *Demos* of Rodman's reliance on "a mere parergon" (II, 265). And it is of course the concept of the common people represented by the Greek noun "demos" which becomes the eponymous protagonist of an entire novel.

Gissing's implicit comparison of the illiterate modern proletariat with the people of ancient Greece is especially strong whenever his characters are called upon to speak in public or to communicate with each other in writing. To his distress, the only "modern Agora" (*The Nether World*, II, 149) is Clerkenwell Green, and the leaders of men, in *Demos*, are incapable of effective speaking. The novelist ensures that the reader's response to the demagogues will be detached and even supercilious, by the device of introducing rhetorical terminology which would be meaningless to the uneducated characters: the syntax of Roodhouse's sentences is "anacoluthic" (II, 135), while Richard Mutimer (unwittingly, of course) uses "the device of aposiopesis" (I, 123). A classically educated audience, reading of the opening ceremonies at the New Wanley Public Hall, will appreciate the ironic bitterness behind Gissing's description of the speech-making as "the noble truths of democracy delivered as it were from the bema" (I, 283). Elsewhere, in *The Nether World*, Gissing draws on his knowledge of the history of oratory to describe a family squabble: "The room rang with uproarious abuse, with disgusting language, with the terrific threats which are such common flowers of rhetoric in that world, and generally mean nothing whatever" (I, 94). The same deliberate disjunction between the intellectual sophistication of Gissing's descriptions and the actions described extends to the episodes in which his characters struggle to compose letters. Lydia Trent and Ida Starr, for instance, earnestly attempt to express themselves with pen and paper, unaware that the result is, in the one case, "one long hyper-Attic sentence" (*Thyrza*, III, 14), and in

the other a letter whose spelling "was managed on *a priori* Principles not given to most people to understand" (*The Unclassed*, I, 60).

Latin words and phrases, in Gissing's narratives, occur frequently, and he drew on his knowledge of modern languages as well: French, German and Italian. One may distinguish two particular narrative situations in which these appear; Gissing may simply indulge himself as narrator in those expressions which seem apposite and which he assumes his reader will understand, or he may, more deliberately, use foreign phrases in direct connection with individual characters in a manner calculated to belittle the character by emphasizing his ignorance.

In the first case, it is not unusual for his text to include such stock Latin phrases as "*hinc illae lachrymae*" (*The Unclassed*, II, 30); he refers in an aside to the Regent's Canal as "*maladetta e sventurata fossa*" (*Demos*, I, 47), and describes one socialist newspaper as an organ of "what is called in Germany Katheder-Sozialismus" (*Demos*, III, 178). When Herr Egger, in *The Unclassed*,

sings a Swabian song, Gissing transcribes two complete stanzas of German lyrics, just as he includes in his text of the same novel the passage from Virgil's *Georgics* which Waymark reads aloud to Julian Casti. Much more pointed, on the other hand, are the instances in which he wields expressions from other languages against his own characters. Here it is that his knowledge of French is exploited, for he seems to have felt that the language of refinement and diplomacy best exposed his characters' deficiency in the personal qualities he valued most highly. The vulgarity of Bob Hewett's relations with the opposite sex is stressed by Gissing's juxtaposition of English slang with a French phrase in the following example, from *The Nether World*: "His self-conceit was supreme, and had always stood him in such stead with the young ladies who, to use his own expression, were "dead nuts on him," that his lovemaking, under whatever circumstances, always took the form of genial banter *de haut en bas*" (I, 84). A similar sense of the absurdities of certain figures emerges from Gissing's references to a harridan's remarks as "*bonnes bouches*" (*The Nether World*, I, 18), the forgery of a cheque as "an unhappy *contretemps*" (*Demos*, I, 251), and Mrs. Pettindund's habit (in *Workers in the Dawn*) of stopping in at the public house and purchasing "as it were, *en passant*, a quart bottle of brandy" (II, 292).

On only one occasion, in writing *The Emancipated*, did Gissing employ a foreign language in a way that would suggest that his reader's knowledge of the language, in this case Italian, would serve to aid his identification with and increase his sympathy for the novel's major figures. Not only does he assume that his readers have studied Italian; he presents a middle-class heroine, Miriam

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Baske, whose true emancipation from the deadening Puritanism of her upbringing in the north of England is effected through her receptivity to Italian civilization, and in particular through her study of Dante. And although many of the incursions of the Italian language into Gissing's English text occur naturally, in his reference to features of life in Naples as viewed by the types of "English abroad" with whom he peoples the novel, there are several instances in which Gissing goes so far as to make an ability to read Italian essential to an understanding of his own commentary, and of scenes between his characters.

In Chapter Six of the first volume, Ross Mallard, the artist-hero of the novel, after brooding for some time on the troubling attraction he feels for his youthful ward, Cecily Doran, impulsively decides to flee Naples for Pompeii, and sets out for the railroad station, all the way humming to himself a tune he has heard in the streets. "He does not know the words," says Gissing, and adds that it is "a pity, for the refrain ran – '*Io ti voglio bene assaje E tu non pienz' a me!*'" (I, 195). Roughly translated, the Neapolitan dialect yields the sentiment "I am in love with you, but you think nothing of me" – an exact description of Mallard's dilemma, though only Gissing and the reader are able to enjoy the appropriateness of the song Mallard has unknowingly chosen, and to comprehend why his not knowing the words should be "a pity."

Another example of Gissing's reliance on the reader's education comes in an early scene between Cecily Doran and Miriam Baske, the two contrasted figures of female emancipation. Cecily, visiting Miriam on a quiet Sunday, afternoon, picks up the open copy of Dante's *Inferno* from Miriam's table, and asks:

"How far have you got? This pencil-mark? '*Amor ch'a null' amato amar perdona.*'"

She read the line in an undertone, slowly towards the close. Miriam's face showed a sudden and curious emotion. Glancing at the book, she said abruptly:

"No; that's an old mark – a difficulty I had. I'm long past that."

“So am I. ‘*Amor ch’a null*’ —” Miriam stretched out her hand and took the volume with impatience.

“I’m at the end of this canto,” she said, pointing. “Never, mind it now...” (I, 289).

Francesca da Rimini’s declaration that “No one who is loved can help loving in return” has a dramatic impact on the scene which would be lost to any reader unaware of the import of the quotation Gissing has singled out for the women’s attention. The profane subject of “*amor*” in

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itself demonstrates the way in which Miriam’s rigid Sabbatarian principles have been relaxed. Her emotional reaction to Cecily’s repetition of the line alerts the reader to its suggestiveness. Had the pencil-mark really been a stopping-point, or perhaps an indication that Miriam had found in this passage material for meditation? The twenty-four-year-old widow of an elderly pietistic mill owner, she has never before thought of love in connection with herself, but the novel will trace her education in the life of the emotions as well as in Italian literature. It is ironic that Gissing makes both women dismiss the question of reciprocated love as a difficulty “long past,” for in the course of the novel the same problem will bring about Cecily’s tragic disillusion and Miriam’s ultimate fulfilment.

In concluding *The Emancipated*, Gissing gives the last word of the novel to no less a commentator than Boccaccio. Edward Spence and his wife Eleanor, discussing the deplorable death in a street fight of Cecily’s estranged husband, take differing view-points. Eleanor is conscious of a sense of waste, and of the ruin of Cecily’s life attendant on her too-early emancipation and impulsive marriage. Spence, however, tells her, “First love is fool’s paradise. But console yourself out of Boccaccio. ‘*Bocca baciata non perde ventura; anzi rinnuova, come fa la luna.*’” (III, 308) (A mouth that has been kissed hasn’t been spoiled; on the contrary, it is born anew, like the new moon). Through the medium of the Italian poetry, Gissing is here able to include a covertly approving reference to honest sensuality, as represented discreetly by the happily married Spences throughout the novel, and also to leave the reader with a hint of future happiness for Cecily, in a second marriage. Full understanding of the novel’s themes and its plot is thus made dependent on the reader’s fitness to approach the work.

One grave difficulty faced by Gissing throughout his career as a novelist appears to have been his own sense that he had little in common with most members of the vast middle-class reading public, who so eagerly received the novels of Ouida, H. Rider Haggard, or Marie Corelli. In order to maintain his self-respect as a sincere writer, he took the original step of imagining a fit audience for his work, and of directing his narrative and commentary to the limited group of initiates who could be expected to appreciate the novels fully. The importance of Gissing’s solution to this problem lies not only in the coherence of tone it imparts to his own novels, but also in the way it foreshadows the development of the “severely stratified” (3) reading public for the modern novel, analyzed by Q. D. Leavis in *Fiction and the Reading Public*: such internal evidence as is here drawn from Gissing’s

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novels corroborates the beginning of a trend which Mrs. Leavis identifies by means of other, external evidence. Gissing’s practice of writing for his “best readers” signals the disintegration in the late nineteenth century of that immense and relatively homogeneous reading public which had come into existence at the time of Dickens’ first novels.

1 - *Letters to Members of His Family*, p. 196.

2 - *Demos* (London, 1886), II, 117. All subsequent references, by volume and page number, are to the first edition of the novels discussed.

3 - Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), p. 169.

### Reviews

Gillian Tindall, *The Born Exile : George Gissing*. London, Temple-Smith, 1974, pp. 295.

Announced as *George Gissing, Writer*, Gillian Tindall's book appeared last January under the attractive title *The Born Exile : George Gissing*. This is a clever title, and an interesting one. Clever because it suits so well the novelist's personality, with its paradoxes and inborn contradictions; interesting because it is one more valuable attempt to sum up Gissing in a striking phrase. We have all heard of "the idealist realist," the "permanent stranger," "the born outsider," "the spokesman of despair," "the apostle of pessimism," etc. etc., and we now have "the born exile." There is much to please in the book beside the body of criticism *per se*. The jacket, with critic and author facing each other – the critic looking at the author who in turn looks at the reader, is in perfect taste. Gissing seems to be asking whether we approve of the contents of the book. But this is a mere illusion. He of course looks at the photographer of Messrs. Elliott and Fry in 1901 – not 1895 as so many people have been led to believe since Robert Shafer's edition of *Workers in the Dawn*. The illustrations will tempt browsing Gissingites in bookshops – besides portraits of Gabrielle Fleury, Clara Collet and Gissing, we see photographs of the houses in which the writer was born and died, with one of his Epsom home in between, facsimiles of the first manuscript page of *Veranilda* (first draft), and of the title-page of *Workers*. Views of the New Cut, Lambeth, and of bill-posting in the 1870's complete the lot. At the end of the volume, the reader will find a faultless list of Gissing's published

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works up to the posthumous *Stories and Sketches* (minus the two collections of American pot-boilers), a very useful list of Gissing works currently in print, and a roll-call of acknowledgments ending in a semi-farcical confession. Also, an appendix on "the three-volume novel and the role of Mr. Mudie" throws light on a question which is crucial to an understanding of Gissing's fiction. But all these adjuncts are tit-bits for epicures and scholars. What about the book itself?

Gillian Tindall's book is neither a biography nor a critical study and cannot therefore conflict with any forthcoming volume of either description. It springs from the indisputable statement that "all writers are two people, writer and ordinary person" – Siamese twins as it were –, and "it is the inter-relation between these two persons, their points of communication and their failure in communication," which is the subject of the volume. A ten-page biographical digest serves as a springboard from which to plunge into the subject. It is a very good summary of Gissing's life, objective and well-balanced. Of the few inaccuracies it contains only two worth noting – Gissing did not go to Calabria in 1890, and his Wakefield relatives were Anglicans, not Unitarians. The introduction is a statement of Gissing's special case in perspective, a review of his reputation up to

the present day, a gentlewomanly declaration of war on those critics who have unduly simplified the pictures of Gissing's life and work. Miss Tindall justifiably regrets that there has been in the last dozen years too much writing about the life and not enough about the work. No one is nominally taken to task, but scores of readers will have no difficulty in reading between the lines. Surely everyone will agree – more spontaneously perhaps – when Miss Tindall says that one should not make the vulgar error of assuming that Gissing's novels are simple *romans-à-clef* – that Carrie is Nell, that Miriam Baske is Ellen Gissing and so on. Indeed I wonder whether anyone has ever meant that literally. Can these equations have been taken *au pied de la lettre* by any cultured reader? "Writers," we are told, "– born compulsive writers like Gissing – simply do not write like that." Of course they do not, but some people will disagree, as I do, when the argument is stretched into an apology for Roberts's lively but erroneous and condescending life of Gissing. *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* is the slipshod work of an intimate friend who often thought he knew more than he did, who assumed posthumously the attitude of a mentor that he never was in actual life, and who misinterpreted many facts and attitudes in Gissing's life. I would not attempt to edit *Henry Maitland* unless I were given for editorial comments as much space as Roberts granted himself.

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Gillian Tindall's study proper is divided into six big chapters reflecting the manifold aspects of Gissing's alienation. The titles of the various sections are suggestive – the rural dream, the real home, the lost father, the unknown Mrs. Gissing, the Nell theme, the theme of help, the guilty secret, the woman question, the jealousy theme, Mrs. Grundy, domestic strife etc. As we go through the 250 pages of compact but highly readable discussion of these matters, we are constantly aware of the critic's freshness of approach, great perceptiveness and saturation with her subject. We are led on a guided tour of the Gissing terrain by a highly sensitive, sharp-eyed and palpably intelligent analyst. The argument is primarily psychological and many brilliant interpretations of the novelist's attitudes are put forward – some material which has recently come to light, like the letters to Clara Collet, is turned to good account. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the book is the demonstration that on many occasions Gissing used his novels to test out in imaginary form possible courses of action for himself – so that his stories often read like anticipations of situations he was to experience in actual life – *Workers in the Dawn*, *New Grub Street* and *In the Year of Jubilee* offer startling examples. Because Miss Tindall has no political bias she can appreciate *Demos* in a level-headed manner (but I cannot agree with her view of old Mrs. Mutimer's evolution, on p. 104), and she makes excellent remarks about *Our Friend the Charlatan*, one of Gissing's most neglected novels. With the chapter on the guilty secret one gets deep into the novelist's personality – thirty pages are devoted to the subject but, like *Oliver Twist*, one feels tempted to ask for more. And indeed still more could have been made of this theme if the American short stories and the early pieces I published in *George Gissing : Essays and Fiction* had not been overlooked. Perhaps Gillian Tindall would revise her opinion of Gissing's treatment of the prison theme if she had read "The Warden's Daughter." The Chicago stories are of course bad as literature, but they are full of clues to the writer's state of mind after his release from prison. They simply cry for reinterpretation. Like all highly personal books, the volume under review will rouse enthusiastic approval, but also, inevitably, deep-felt reservations. Theorizing is all very well, but some theories simply won't do because they are contradicted by facts. One example will suffice: on p. 155, we are invited to believe that Gissing did not enjoy the intimacies of marriage with Gabrielle, a suggestion which is flatly contradicted by a letter from Gabrielle to Bertz, written shortly after George's death. In this

letter she says how sorry she is that she has had no child, her hopes of having one having been disappointed four years earlier. In some places, we are given the impression that psychology can explain away all mysteries and contradictions in Gissing's personality; in others we come across suggestions which seem a little gratuitous – for instance on p. 238, Gillian Tindall wonders whether Gissing's rotund manner of speech was adopted as a cover for a provincial accent. Or again on pp. 118-119 she declares that for *The Nether World* he accumulated material in a way he did not for his previous novels, a statement which is not supported by Gissing's correspondence. Minor factual inaccuracies are not infrequent, but they rarely matter. In a place or two indeed the printer is more likely to have been at fault than the author.

The book has already been widely discussed in the British press, and it is sure to command a good deal of attention in English and American scholarly journals. Gillian Tindall is right in deploring that Gissing's work as a whole has not received its due of late years. Her book, concerned as it is with the relationship between the man and his characters, will be a natural link between the extant and forthcoming biographies on the one hand and the critical studies awaiting publication on the other. It will undoubtedly prove a seminal study destined to be quoted from and referred to again and again. Copies should be found in all libraries and on the shelves of any person interested in Gissing. — P. Coustillas.

Ulrich Annen, *George Gissing und die Kurzgeschichte*, Schweizer Anglistische Arbeiten, Francke Verlag, Bern, 1973, pp. 111.

This study of Gissing's short stories begins with a survey of the present state of Gissing criticism. The author gives several reasons why Gissing has recently received increased attention. Gissing appears to be a "topical" writer. We understand his scepticism towards modern science and technology, his concern about the depersonalization of society and his anxiety about the question of environment.

No really thorough investigation of the short stories had been published so far which may be due to Gissing's own disparagement of this literary form and to the critics' uncertainty as regards these "byproducts." Mr. Annen's aim is to interpret the stories, to describe the personal impact made by some of them and to trace such elements as they may have in common. The task is a difficult one because of the heterogeneous character of the stories and their varying literary value.

The study is divided into three parts, each corresponding to a stage in Gissing's literary development. It should be added that almost inevitably Mr. Annen does not always observe this self-imposed division. As for the earliest stories, their literary value is not high. Mr. Annen finds them sensational and superficial but they are important as a milestone in Gissing's career. Admittedly, at the outset, Gissing laboured under some disadvantages. Although he had promised to provide his first publisher with stories of English life, his qualifications were slender. His own experience was limited, and he always tended to be more at home among books than in real life. Even so, Mr. Annen finds the production remarkably varied. It seems surprising that during this dark period of his life Gissing should have written so many light-hearted stories. This may be due to Gissing's character, which Mr. Annen sums up as "moody, incalculable, restless and easily influenced." It is, however, significant that this lighter tone remained restricted to the short stories. Gissing could never have carried it over into his full-length novels of the same period. Another



point made is that, on the whole, these early stories do not reproduce any direct experience of the author's. As for any features they may have in common, Mr. Annen points to a sense of contrast, often between good and bad, not surprising in an author who once described himself as a Manichaeian. Incidentally, Mr. Annen finds a good deal of evidence of contrast as a literary device in some of the later stories. Another division is that between a belief in progress inspired by Gissing's temporary positivism and resignation in the face of evil influenced by his study of Schopenhauer.

During his middle period (1891-1896), Gissing concentrated initially on longer novels. He embarked on a series of short stories partly as a result of Bertz's encouragement and partly driven by necessity. If the characters in these stories, which are difficult to classify, have anything in common, it is their experience of the tragic side of life. They suffer from their inability to react to reality in the way expected from them by society. They are, in short, the maladjusted individuals with which Gissing's fiction is often associated. These stories from the middle period also testify to Gissing's preoccupation with class. A profound dislike of the lower classes has by now become undeniable. If the middle classes are less revolting physically, Gissing feels all the more free to criticize their snobbery and their inability to appreciate social realities. He does not even believe in the perfectibility of society but sees its abuses as the result of man's deep-rooted depravity.

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About five pages are devoted to the position of women in these short stories and they form one of the most interesting chapters in this book. In his very earliest stories Gissing has tended to idealize women. "Mutimer's Choice" presaged a change in attitude. *In the Year of Jubilee* represents marriage as a kind of battlefield and this pattern is repeated in some of the stories, woman often being the more skilful fighter.

Living in the latter part of the 19th century, Gissing inevitably had to determine his standpoint as regards the "new woman." Fundamentally, he supported women's emancipation but when he was brought face to face with the product of emancipation his principles were undermined. This appears from several stories, such as "At High Pressure" and "A Daughter of the Lodge." Emancipated women had broken away from their traditional role. As such they had become outsiders in society and to that extent they link up with the typical Gissing characters who find themselves at odds with society. Mr. Annen discusses "A Lodger in Maze Pond," which combines a maladjusted character, Shergold, and the artful female in the person of the landlady's daughter. Incidentally, Mr. Annen refers to the protagonist as "Dr. Shergold, a young and promising author." Shergold, however, is a medical student and his authorship is limited to poetry "some of which was published and duly left unpaid for." In the stories written after 1896 Mr. Annen discerns a warmer tone and increased maturity. Christopherson may be an eccentric but he is cured of his mania. Humplebee is a misfit but at least he is made to face reality.

Chapter V deals with some general aspects of the stories. Mr. Annen considers that they do not fill the requirements of austere modern taste. Rejecting the popular magazine story, Gissing aimed at using the short story as a vehicle for his ideas within the framework of complex action, that is to say he tried to do something with the short story that had better be left to the novel. Theoretically, he may have been aware of this. Mr. Annen's conclusion is that generically a Gissing story is a confused mixture. The chapter on "Structure" tries to classify the stories systematically, perhaps a little too schematically. This was probably inevitable in dealing with such a multifarious body of work.

The following remarks on Gissing's style are of great interest. They deal with his preference for balanced sentences, his elaborate style and his tendency to express a positive statement

negatively, as in “She manifested no excess of feeling.” Mr. Annen criticizes Gissing especially for “stylistic incongruence,” i.e. the use of a pretentious vocabulary applied to uneducated characters. It might be added that this tendency was shared by many of Gissing’s contemporaries. Like other

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modern critics, Mr. Annen of course disapproves of “authorial interference,” another Victorian literary device.

In the final chapter, Mr. Annen sums up his investigations. He suggests that, especially at the outset, the short stories are a more authentic witness to Gissing’s personality than the novels in which the author was partly hidden from view by his zeal for social reform.

Mr. Annen also places Gissing against the background of his time. There is general agreement that the 1880’s and 1890’s were a period of transition associated with realism and aestheticism. Gissing’s realism has, of course, never been called into question. His aestheticism can be traced in the typical Gissing hero, devoted to a retreat into the cult of beauty in art and nature.

It is a pity that such an interesting book should be marred by numerous misprints in the English quotations. A great many names have been misspelt. It is also unfortunate that in a serious study of Gissing’s short stories the index of stories should contain several inaccuracies, such as “The Pig and the Whistle” (for “The Pig and Whistle”) and “The Well-Meaning Man” (for “A Well-Meaning Man”). One story (“In No Man’s Land”) has even been omitted. Nonetheless, this does not detract from the interest of the book which contains a wealth of suggestive remarks. There is no room for them in a review, but most of them would be well worth a detailed study. – P. F. Kropholler.

George Gissing, *The Nether World*. Edited with an introduction by John Goode, The Harvester Press, 1974, pp. xviii + 392.

The need for a new edition of *The Nether World* has been so obvious for years that the present volume should be greeted in many quarters with shouts of satisfaction. The book has been out of print for over forty years and it has long been, together with *The Emancipated*, *Sleeping Fires* and *Our Friend the Charlatan*, one of the author’s scarcest novels. The gap needed all the more to be filled as *The Nether World* is the last and most characteristic of Gissing’s working-class stories and as such has been the subject of a certain amount of discussion in recent years – by Jessie Kocmanova, Peter Keating and John Goode in particular.

The Harvester edition invites warm-hearted approval in all respects. The attractive binding in purple buckram with gilt titling is a model of what a library edition should be; the edition chosen for the photographic reprint, that is the first one-volume edition issued by Smith, Elder in December 1889, is the best possible; the bibliography concerning the book and the writings about it is accurate

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and adequately selected.

In his stimulating introduction, John Goode first situates the novel in Gissing’s career – after Nell’s death and before the first Italian trip, which was to bring about a deep change in his inspiration. He sees the book as both an end and a beginning and, like many commentators before him, he stresses its coherent and homogeneous nature. His main purpose, however, is to show that the book as a social document “is built around themes which preoccupy the social anxieties of the 1880s” – mainly housing, employment and philanthropy. It is placed alongside such well-known

non-fictional works as Mearns' *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, Sims's *How the Poor Live* and the gigantic enquiry of Charles Booth into the living conditions of the London proletariat. Recalling his attack on Gissing's "aristocratic bias" in *Demos*, Mr. Goode concludes the central section of his introduction as follows: "His highly anti-democratic ideology prevents him from sheering off into panaceas. *The Nether World* is a work in which poverty and scarcity is so dominant that no degree of personal benevolence can be anything but destructive." In Part III we have an analysis of some factors which go to make *The Nether World* a world in itself – the names of the streets, of the trades and the metaphoric system which, incidentally, still awaits a full-length study.

The Harvester Press are doing Gissing a signal service. We now look forward to seeing the new editions of *Thyrza* and *Sleeping Fires* as well as the novelist's diary. Other volumes are to follow and we wonder which of *Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed*, *The Whirlpool* and *The Emancipated* will be the next reprint in the series. – P. Coustillas.

George Gissing, *The Nether World*. With an introduction by Walter Allen. Dent and Dutton (Everyman's Library), 1973, pp. xx + 392.

On two previous occasions Gissing was included in Everyman's Library – in 1927 and 1964 with *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* – but twice the publishers allowed the book to disappear from their list. It was – and still is – a pity since this book will soon be the only one by Gissing that cannot be bought new. The selection of *The Nether World* in preference to *Henry Ryecroft* is easy to account for. In the last fifteen years, partly because of the new interest in social life under Victoria, Gissing's social novels, have received a good deal more attention than the belletristic side of his production. It is clear that *By the Ionian Sea* and *Henry Ryecroft* are at present eclipsed by the

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working-class stories and the novels of the early 1890's,

The present edition, published in hardback and paperback, is most welcome and it is sure to bring new readers to Gissing – readers who as a rule do not venture off the beaten track and concentrate on the "classics" selected for them by the publishers of well-established series and "libraries." The name of Walter Allen on the title-page will be a further attraction for many readers, as will also be the jacket photograph representing a Victorian slum. No indication of the edition used for this reprint is given but the quality of the type inclines me to believe that it was one of the three 1890 editions.

Walter Allen's introduction is a rambling, congenial assessment of the book which will be helpful to the general reader. To begin with he situates the volume among the working-class stories of the Victorian age – the so-called industrial novels of the 1830's and 1840's, and in the last two decades of the century the novels of social protest, essentially those of Hardy, Moore and Morrison. Then follows an account of Gissing's life up to the writing of *The Nether World*, immediately after Nell's death. (Fortunately it is more accurate than the biographical notice facing the title-page, which contains several errors). The most part of the introduction is devoted to a long discussion of the novel as a naturalistic work, of Gissing's pessimism (C. J. Francis' well-known essay on Gissing and Schopenhauer is duly quoted), and of the story's philosophical message. "Almost inevitably, we read *The Nether World* as a novel of social protest; but it is more than that. It is Gissing's arraignment of the universe, a paradigm of the human situation, and it is in this that its tremendous power resides." Walter Allen points out the novelist's intimate knowledge of the Clerkenwell setting, his fastidious, objective prose which conveys an image of urban life reminiscent of the Waste Land, and he analyses the main characters, seeing in the portrayal of Clem

an element of social Darwinism.

Some readers will feel that nearly three pages of quotations from the novel is a little too much in a twelve-page introduction, but all who keep their eyes open will wonder why Walter Allen so gleefully misspells the names of the characters. We can recognize that Snowden should be Snowdon, that Kirkland should be Kirkwood, but no one will succeed in identifying Jane Franklin and Martin Snowden. Professor Allen's notion of accuracy, here as in his introduction to the Gollancz edition of *Born in Exile*, is wonderfully elastic. The bibliography, despite some oddities, will be useful. – P. Coustillas.

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#### Notes and News

The Harvester Press, which recently moved to 2 Stanford Terrace, Hassocks, Nr. Brighton, Sussex, announce that they have sold editions of *Thyrza* and *The Nether World* to the Associated University Presses of Cranbury, New Jersey. Both volumes will appear in the autumn. The Harvester Press will be publishing *Thyrza* at £5 and a paperback edition of *Demos* at £1.25 simultaneously, probably in June. After *Isabel Clarendon*, *Demos* and *The Nether World*, *Thyrza* will be the fourth Gissing novel reprinted by the Harvester Press. It will have an introduction by Jacob Korg. The fifth, due to appear later this year, with a prefatory note by P. Coustillas, will be *Sleeping Fires*.

The Harvester Press also announce for 1975 *London and the Life of Literature in late Victorian England : The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, edited by P. Coustillas. Very few major novelists have left personal diaries and where these exist they are a record of great interest. Gissing's diary, for his productive years 1887-1902 is an unusual document which is here set in its social and literary context and related to the themes and spirit of Gissing's fiction.

The next volume in the Enitharmon Gissing Series will be *Gissing on Fiction*, by Jacob Korg. Professor Korg has used copious extracts from the novelist's unpublished letters to Algernon as well as unpublished or out-of-the-way material. Among the other volumes scheduled in the series are *Gissing in Manchester*, *Gissing and Hardy*, *Gissing in Russia*, *Gissing and Mrs. Gaussen*, *Gissing and Clara Collet* and the uncollected short stories.

The reprint of Oswald Davis's *George Gissing: a study in literary leanings* (C. C. Kohler, publisher) with an introduction by P. Coustillas will appear in a few months' time.

The Greater London Council is to commemorate Gissing with a blue plaque at his former Chelsea home, 17 Oakley Crescent, now 33 Oakley Gardens. The plaque will probably be unveiled in the spring of 1975. Paragraphs and articles on the GLC decision appeared in the *Burton Daily Mail* (October 13, 1973), the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* (October 13), the *Guardian* (October 15), the *South Kensington News* (October 26) and the *Evening Standard* (November 8).

Gillian Tindall's book *The Born Exile – George Gissing* was reviewed on BBC Radio 3 on March 31 by Norman Mackenzie, the biographer of H. G. Wells (see *Radio Times* for March 28). A Correspondent who knew of the book broadcast in time to listen to it writes: "I found Mackenzie's

thesis of basic guilt an interesting one – driving Gissing to embrace ruin as a kind of expiation. Both the Freudian pattern, and the parallel phenomenon of the then current Evangelical theology, were adduced as possible analyses of how this may have worked out in Gissing.”

David Neal Miller asks me to announce that “there will be a seminar on the early fiction of E. M. Forster at the 1974 annual meeting of the Modern Language Association of America. Submissions will be welcomed by David Neal Miller, Merrill College, University of California, Santa Cruz 95064, USA.” Can any Forster scholar tell the Gissing confraternity whether Forster had read Gissing? The question is not an idle one – Miss White, who married Nathaniel Wedd, would seem to have been an obvious link between the two novelists.

### Recent Publications

#### Volumes

- Ulrich Annen, *George Gissing und die Kurzgeschichte* [Gissing and the Short Story], Swiss Studies in English, Bern, Francke Verlag, 1973. 22 Swiss francs.
- George Gissing, *The Nether World*, Dent and Dutton (Everyman's Library No. 362), 1973. Hardback, £2.40; paperback £1.20. With an introduction by Walter Allen.
- George Gissing, *The Nether World*, Harvester Press, 1974. £4.50. With an introduction by John Goode.
- Gillian Tindall, *The Born Exile : George Gissing*, Temple-Smith, 1974, £4.
- Pierre Coustillas, “Political Responses to *Demos*” (pp. 153-184) in *Politics in Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, Publications de l'Université de Lille, 1974, 30 francs. Discusses the political reactions to the book from 1886 to the present day.

#### Articles, reviews, etc.

Shigeru Koike, “George Gissing Saiko” [Reconsideration of Gissing], *Eigo Seinen* (The Rising

Generation), April 1, 1970, pp. 196-98. A review of the Japanese translation of *New Grub Street*, *Gissing East and West* and *Isabel Clarendon*.

James A. Rogers, “George Gissing – Alive, Unwell and Alarming,” *Presenting Moonshine*, Vol. II, no. 2, December 1972, pp. 9-13.

Cora Robey, “*In the Year of Jubilee* : A Satire on Late Victorian Culture,” *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, Vol. XVII (1972), pp. 121-27. The author sums up her article as follows: “*In the Year of Jubilee* is a valuable satiric commentary on the culture of nineteenth-century England – a

subject masterfully treated in Matthew Arnold's critical prose. Gissing begins with the idea of the Jubilee and exposes a misdirected Victorian pride. Through an effective setting and skilful character vignettes of a would-be advertising executive, a self-'educated' businessman, and an untalented young woman whose sole aim is to graduate from London University, Gissing demonstrates that provincialism, ignorance of excellence, self-satisfaction and the inability to view oneself and one's society judiciously characterized many Victorians in England's Jubilee year. His novel has relevance to our own culture as well." Miss Robey aptly comments on the comic and philosophic elements in the story. She breaks new ground when she establishes comparisons with Matthew Arnold, and suggests that Luckworth Crewe is an English precursor of Howells' Silas Lapham, Lewis's Dodworth and Babbitt, or Dreiser's Drouet, and when she finds in Samuel Barnby an echo of Podsnap. She concludes that Gissing's novel is a novel which Arnold might have written. Her essay is worth placing alongside that by Robert L. Selig on the same book.

Francesco Badolato, "Alla ricerca di Gissing," *Uomo e immagini*, 1972-73 (Anno IX, Nuova Serie, Nos. 34-38), p. 14. A review of *George Gissing : Essays and Fiction*. On the same page appears a short review of Badolato's Italian editions of *The Paying Guest* and *Six Short Stories* (Canova, Trevisa) by Orietta Quasimodo, the daughter of the Nobel Prize winner. A review of Badolato's volume *Un'Ispirazione ed altre novelle* by G. B. Giordana is printed on p. 15.

Shigeru Koike, "Recent Gissing Studies," *Eigo Seinen*, November 1, 1973, pp. 13-15. Discusses the Harvester editions of *Isabel Clarendon* and *Demos*, *Gissing : The Critical Heritage* and Dr. Badolato's, three Gissing volumes. A new Japanese edition of *Henry Ryecroft* is mentioned in the advertisements.

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Jacob Korg, "Comptes Rendus," *Etudes Anglaises*, October-December 1973, pp. 485-86. A review of *Gissing : The Critical Heritage*.

Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, *The Time Traveller : The Life of H. G. Wells*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973. Contains an unpublished portrait of Gissing (1901) and a level-headed discussion of his relations with Wells, in particular pp. 131-35, 149-50 and 180-82.

Colin Partridge, "George Gissing," in Webster's *New World Companion to English and American Literature* (ed. Arthur Pollard), pp. 287-88.

Francesco Badolato, "Gissing : due volumi di lettere," *Italia Intellettuale*, Anno XXVI, Nos. 52-53, pp. 10-11. A review of the Gissing/Hick and Gissing/Clodd Enitharmon Press volumes.

B. I. Coleman, *The Idea of the City in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973. Contains substantial extracts from *The Nether World* and *Henry Ryecroft*.

Anthony Curtis, "Collision Courses," *Financial Times*, January 31, 1974. A review of *The Born Exile* and *The Nether World*. Other reviews of Gillian Tindall's book and, as often as not, of *The Nether World*, have appeared in *The Times* (Michael Ratcliffe, January 31), the *Wakefield Express* (February 1), the *New Statesman* (V. S. Pritchett, February 1), the *Economist* (February 2), the *Glasgow Herald* (D.R.D.; February 2), the *Scotsman* (Harry Reid, February 2), the

*Observer Review* (Angus Wilson, February 3), the *Sunday Telegraph* (Rebecca West, February 3), the *Evening Standard* (Michael Foot, February 5), the *Guardian* (Gabriel Pearson, February 7), the *Spectator* (J. I. M. Stewart, February 9), the *Bookseller* (Quentin Oates, February 9), the *Morning Star* (Eddie Woods, February 14), the *Guardian Weekly* (Gabriel Pearson, February 16), the *Sunday Times Weekly Review* (February 17), the *Times Literary Supplement* (February 22), the *Daily Telegraph* (Norman Sherry, February 28), the *Yorkshire Post* (Tom Bentley, March 7) and *Books and Bookmen* (Stanley Olson, March).

Anon., "Books : *The Nether World*," *Methodist Recorder*, February 21, 1974. A notice of the Everyman edition.

Pierre Coustillas, "George Gissing," *Times Literary Supplement*, March 8, 1974, p. 239. A letter to the editor about the publication of John George Black's letters to Gissing in *Etudes Anglaises* (1963).

Herbert Van Thal, "George Gissing," *Times Literary Supplement*, March 15, 1974, p. 265. A letter

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to the editor about the unsuccessful Gissing ventures of Mr. Van Thal (*A Life's Morning*, 1947, and *The Odd Women*, 1968).

A. O. J. Cockshut, "The Sympathetic Cynic," *Times Higher Education Supplement*, March 29, 1974. A review of the two recent editions of *The Nether World*.

Charles E. Yenter, "Gissing in America," *Presenting Moonshine*, Vol. II, no. 12, March 1974, pp. 8-19. Reprints with a valuable introduction the two versions of "The Artist's Child" – a Gissing story unpublished in volume form.

Pierre Coustillas, "George Gissing," *Times Literary Supplement*, April 5, 1974, p. 369. A letter to the editor, refuting with significant figures Mr. Van Thal's opinion that for a publisher it is suicidal to publish any Gissing book.

Anthony Curtis, *The Pattern of Maugham*. London, Hamish Hamilton, 1974. Contains many references to Gissing.

Michael Collie, "Gissing's Revision of *New Grub Street*," *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. IV (1974), pp. 212-24. Discusses the revision of *New Grub Street* for the French translation.