

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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Theatricals at Lindow Grove School

A Newly Discovered Contemporary Report

Pierre Coustillas

[In *George Gissing at Alderley Edge* I gave a short account of the role played by young Gissing in the amateur theatrical performances at Lindow Grove. This account was based essentially on the testimonies of two school-fellows, Arthur Bowes and T. T. Sykes. “On the great ‘speech nights’ it was Gissing who mouthed the most brilliant Greek and Latin orations, and who filled the most important parts in the French plays,” wrote the former at Gissing’s death. And Sykes declared on the same occasion: “All the old boys of Gissing’s time (and there are several in Stockport) at Lindow Grove will remember what a great part he took in all appertaining to the two

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speech nights at the end of each autumn term (...) His acting was invariably greatly appreciated by the audience, no less than by the boys, and his recitations ever called forth the highest praise.” Since I wrote the booklet from which I have just quoted I have located the copy of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* described in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (May 11, 1931) and mentioned by Samuel Vogt Gapp in his *George Gissing, Classicist* (1936). Yale has it in the Beinecke Library. The booklet published in The People’s Penny Library by Ireland & Co., Market Street, Manchester, carries this inscription on

the cover: "George Gissing | 1873 | Acted at | Lind. Grove | Xmas 1873." The text bears a good many pencilled markings and "GRG" faces the name of "Biron, a lord attending on the King" in the list of "Persons Represented."

As I tried to decipher the marginal notes in the booklet the conviction forced itself upon me that it might be worth checking whether the Alderley newspaper had given any account of these speech nights in which Gissing had a share until after he had ceased to attend James Wood's school to become a student at Owens College. The following article is the outcome of my research. It throws new light on the school and its activities, and enables us to visualize George and his two brothers during the Christmas festivities in the presence of a local audience. The article, entitled "Lindow Grove College: Annual Soirée," is reprinted from the *Alderley and Wilmslow Advertiser* (Friday, December 25, 1874, p. 2), a paper which had been founded in August that same year. Obvious misprints have been silently corrected. A number of the persons mentioned are identified in *George Gissing at Alderley Edge*.]

The eleventh annual representation by the pupils of Lindow Grove College, Alderley Edge, came off on Wednesday evening. It was patronized by most of the leading families resident in the district, and was altogether a very gratifying event. It has been usual on such occasions, in addition to music and selections, to have a representation of dramatic pieces on a stage extemporized for the

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occasion, one of the dramas selected being given in the original French. The performance on Wednesday was no exception to that rule, a comedy of Molière's, and Goldsmith's popular piece of the "Good Natured Man" being selected. It would not become us to enter into a criticism of how each individual went through his part, suffice it to say that the representations, on the whole, bore impress of careful study and an endeavour to acquit themselves satisfactorily. The female parts were decently sustained, no attempt to burlesque them, as is occasionally the case on similar events, being visible. The programme opened with a piano duet, "Warblings at Eve," by W. Gissing and A. Jefferson. This was followed by the song of "Homeward Bound," given by Mr. J. G. Wood. The glee, "Murmuring River," in which most of the pupils joined, succeeded. Next came a recitation "Oeneid," by A. Wood and W. Alcock. G. Gissing then gave "The May Queen," a portion of it, owing to the length of the recitation, being given by him later in the evening. The following was the cast of the dramatic pieces selected:

L'Avare – Molière ; - Harpagon, G. R. Gissing; Cléante (son fils), J. G. Wood; Elise (sa fille), F. Knight; La Flèche (valet de Cléante), A. F. Gissing; Valère (amant d'Elise), C. Clayton. Domesticques:- La Merluce, W. W. Gissing; Brindavoine, B. L. Wood; Maître Jacques, A. Syms Wood.

Good Natured Man - Goldsmith; - Honeywood, W. W. Gissing; Croaker, G. R. Gissing; Mrs. Croaker, C. Clayton; Leontine, A. S. Wood; Jarvis, F. Alcock; Olivia, W. Alcock; Miss Richland, J. Nielson; Bailiff, A. Thomas; Flanigan, C. Hall; Garnet, J. G. Wood; Butler, A. F. Gissing.

The following were also included in the programme: Song, "The Wishing Cap," by J. G. Wood; Violin and piano accompaniment, "Der Freischütz," by G. B. Wood and W. W. Gissing; Glee, "Carnevale," Piano duet, "La Source," W. W. Gissing and A. Jefferson; Recitation "Ei du Land" (Fouqué), J. Sykes; Glee, "Sir Knight, ah whither away?"

It may be seen by reference to the programme that the selection of music was made with taste, and the execution of the music was at once artistic and appreciative, reflecting great credit on the musical instructors of Lindow Grove. We are glad to find English scholars following the German example of having music included amongst the routine of lessons, as it appears it is in Lindow Grove.

The choruses were very effective, and we were particularly struck with the intelligent rendering of their parts by the very youngest. That which most attracted our attention was Rossini's "Carnevale" in C minor, and however the eye might be taken by the fantastic costumes of the supposed beggars, still more was the ear pleased by the harmony and liveliness of the execution. The "pianos" and "fortes" were well observed, and the basso did his duty in such a manner as to elicit our warmest commendation. The solos by J. G. Wood were rendered striking by a really sweet voice, which is perhaps wanting in compass and power – qualities which we think, however, maturity will bring.

With regard to the piano duets, the skilled musical ear might detect some flaws, but the execution showed, nevertheless, considerable ability and purity of taste.

We cannot conclude our observations on the musical part of the entertainment without referring to the performances of J. G. Wood on the violin, which was the more creditable when we consider the youth of the performer, and the time and patience required to handle efficiently so difficult an instrument.

The "May Queen" was given with the greatest delicacy of feeling.

In the Latin speech we noticed the modern pronunciation was adopted, and great taste and feeling displayed. Mr. Gissing, as L'Avare, was the character of the evening. We believe this is not the first appearance in which his talented acting has delighted an Alderley audience.

The following is an extract from the report, read by the Principal, Mr. Wood:–

"The many 'old boys' whom we have the pleasure of seeing here tonight will learn with satisfaction that since last we met, their schoolfellow, Mr. W. Summers, has added to his already long list of honours the Shuttleworth scholarship – the scholarship of the highest value which the indigent, but eminent, Owens College, has to give. Mr. George Gissing, following in his wake, has gained no fewer than five first-class prizes at Owens, besides winning the ninth place in the first division of the matricular examination of the University of London. Messrs. Glover and Brook have also gained distinctions for their scientific attainments. I notice these facts as an encouragement to those who, though younger, must surely rise, and will maintain the honour of their immediate predecessors.

"Some small prizes were offered before the Midsummer vacation as an inducement for boys to keep up by private reading some branch of light study; fortunately, perhaps, the sunny summer offered more allurements in most cases than the studies. The experiment, however, was not wholly without result. The Examiner, a distinguished author on the English language, in awarding the prize for the study of Macbeth, reports:– 'I have carefully examined the answers to the questions on the text of Shakespeare's Macbeth, and I have no hesitation in stating that they are of a highly creditable character. They show clearly that the writer has not only grasped the outline of the plot, but that he has given close and thoughtful consideration to the details. He appreciates shades of character and motives of action, and gives an intelligent interpretation of the meaning of the author. He has laid up for himself a life-long treasure (worth many prizes) in committing to memory some

of the finest passages in one of the finest of our English dramas.' Long evenings or dark days may be provocative of greater effort, and I am induced to try a similar experiment for the winter vacation. The subjects proposed are Milton's 'Il Penseroso,' Macaulay's 'Essays,' Human Physiology, Physical Geography, and, for the juniors, Lamb's 'Tales from Shakespeare.'

"The report then touches upon the examination, and goes on to refer to the number of marks

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obtained for English in which is included orthography, syntax, and analysis, and a special study of the etymology of one of the plays of Shakespeare. No part of the examination more correctly indicated the relative thoughtfulness, judgment, and intelligence of each boy in the class.

"Each youth in the school receives a French lesson at least four times a week, and has opportunity of having a daily reading by a foreign master. Every youth of average ability should be able to read a French book with ease before leaving school.

"In classics the work of the class has been good throughout, and the result of the examination proves that what has been learned has been retained.

"In this part of the country, at least, mathematical studies need no special advocacy. The reports handed to me by the tutor are very encouraging.

"In arithmetic great advancement has been shown.

"Geometry has been pursued with great ardour.

"Chemistry, physiology, and physical geography have each had a share of attention."

We are sorry we have not further space at our disposal to give a résumé of the remarks made by many who were present. Nothing appeared to be wanting in the satisfaction all felt.

Hearty cheers for Mr. Wood, the masters, and the boys of Lindow Grove, terminated the proceedings.

The following gentlemen resident in the district received invitations, most of whom were present: A. Crewdson, Esq., B. Crewdson Esq., S. Beaumont, Esq., J. Grierson, Esq., J. Waters, Esq., J. & A. Earwaker, Esqrs., Charles Hervey, Esq., – Evans, Esq., George Taylor, Esq., W. Welsh, Esq., Dr. Booth, Dr. Crewe, Arthur Simms, Esq., George Pearson Esq., Misses Bickham, Mrs. Jenkins, Misses Ord, Alfred Fryer, Esq., – Wilde, Esq., W. & A. Barlow, Esqrs., Jacob Bright, Esq., J. W. Napier, Esq., and Alfred Brothers, Esq.

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George Gissing's Proletarian Novels

(Concluded)

Maria Teresa Chialant
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III - So far we have noticed a gap between Gissing's exceptional but ineffectual working-class main characters – constantly torn between middle-class values and their own culture – and the more "realistic" but often repulsive masses. From this we could infer that he believed that the salvation of the proletariat could come only from outside that class; in the first four novels his middle-class characters even assume a role of enlightened guides to their social inferiors. But in *The Nether World* the pattern followed in the previous novels is abandoned. This change is important to interpret the "message" of Gissing's proletarian novels, which now require to be looked at in

chronological order.

It is difficult to trace a linear development of Gissing as a novelist in his changing attitude towards the working classes, not only within the group of his five proletarian novels, but also throughout his whole production. The first consideration we have to start with is his contradictory position over the problem of the writer's social commitment. It is important to notice that his novels, family letters and various writings show a constant wavering between the affirmation of the autonomy of the artist in his search for "Beauty" and the moral need to use art as a vehicle to denounce the social evils of his time. This conflict between his devotion to a so-called pure art and his social commitment is the key to understanding his thought, not only on the function of the intellectual, but also on the various urgent issues of the day, such as socialism, trade unionism and the role of women in society.

It would be too long to follow Gissing in his contradictory statements upon these problems (of which his *Letters to His Family* are a precious witness). I shall only observe that he moved from

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progressive positions to conservative ones, from a hope in the "evolution" and progress of man (corresponding to his "Positivist" phase) to a mistrust in democracy. His semi-autobiographical volume, *The Ryecroft Papers* (1903), is the best testimony of the last stage of this process of ideological involution. Jacob Korg writes:

The contradictions sometimes evident in Gissing's opinions are due to the fact that he was committed to irreconcilable extremes of humanism and humanitarianism. His novels are constantly occupied with contemporary social problems, but he approached them, when his views became settled, with profoundly traditional convictions. In some respects, to be sure, he was a man of his century. He had had an early socialist period, he was an agnostic, a pacifist, a feminist, and, in his fiction, a realist; he was contemptuous of supernatural beliefs, and did not accept conventional ideas of sexual morality or woman's place in society. But he distrusted most of the dominant tendencies of his time, including science, democracy, social planning, philanthropy, and popular education. (18)

Gissing's position of constant conflict reveals itself also in his attitude towards the working classes. It is relevant to compare it with the more definite and clear-cut reaction of other writers of the 1880s and 1890s. Walter Besant and Arthur Morrison are two typical examples for the opposite directions they took in their analyses of the problem. While Besant, according to P. J. Keating, preached "a simple theme of inter-class co-operation based on 'joy' or 'delight,'" Morrison succeeded "in absorbing the reader in this strange and violent world, not by pointing a social lesson but by bringing the slum vividly alive." (19) Gissing, on the contrary, alternated between feelings of pity and loathing, but his personal attitude towards the working classes underwent a gradual change – if

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not a clear-cut process – from the first of his proletarian novels to the last. That is, the social reformer of *Workers in the Dawn* and of *The Unclassed* passes through a phase of criticism in *Demos* (where the attack is against a certain type of political leader rather than a political ideology, and where there is still an interest in the possibility of changing the established order of society), to

a prevailing sense of pity and compassion for the “masses” in *Thyrza*, which lapses into the fatalism and despair of *The Nether World*, whose title “signifies both the lower world of working class London and Hell itself.” (20)

The fact that Gissing is more violent and brutal in the description of the slums and its inhabitants in his first novels, whereas he is more open to an understanding of their sufferings in the last ones, is a further corroboration of what I have just noticed. His growing feeling of pity is a consequence of his mistrust in the possibility of a change and is virtually a fatalistic acceptance of the “status quo.” Moreover, whereas in the previous novels there were three different levels in the social stratification of the characters, *The Nether World* is the only one where all the characters belong to the working class. Now this means two things in my opinion:

(a) The author abandons middle-class characters as projections or spokesmen of sterile and scarcely credible discussions on art and social reform, and substitutes for them the naked reality of slum life which needs no comment. In *The Nether World*, Gissing tries to be more objective and lets his working-class characters speak for themselves. In other words, he abandons his often didactic and patronizing tone and lets the real protagonists of the novel – poverty and despair – express themselves through the environment and the people, by considerably reducing his interference as “the omniscient author.”

(b) Another significant change is the disappearance of middle-class characters who approach working people with “humanitarian” schemes in their minds. In *The Nether World* even though poverty and despair dominate the scene, the final message seems to be that hope for change can

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come only from people like Jane Snowdon and Sidney Kirkwood, who both refuse the palliative of philanthropy and accept their lives in the slums, without looking for an escape in art or social reform.

“The only personal victory in such a world,” comments John Goode, “is the ability to sustain a silent protest against the organising principle of society.” (21) In this sense the novel expresses a “materialistic” view of society. Gissing is aware that the elemental principle that controls the nether world is money, and expresses it without rhetoric. Kirkwood bitterly says: “We are the lower orders; we are the working classes.” And the author comments: “That seemed the final answer to all his aspirations.” The fact that this novel has been so often defined the most depressing of Gissing’s invites one to congratulate the author, because, “given the historical context, only a ‘depressing’ (if that means ‘hopeless’) novel could possibly be an honest presentation of the themes it contains.” (22)

I thoroughly agree with John Goode (who considers *The Nether World* the best of Gissing’s proletarian novels), when he says – implicitly referring to the question of realism – that “its strength is in the fact that the specific and the universal so closely coincide: what is local is sharply plotted, but in order to make possible an extrapolation into infinity.” (23) Using this criticism of industrial capitalism in *The Nether World*, Goode goes on to suggest the similarity of Gissing’s and Morris’s analyses of industrialism (specifically in this novel and in *Signs of Change*, both written in 1888).

IV - Gissing’s critics generally situate his proletarian novels either in the tradition of the “industrial novels” of the Forties, or in that of the slum novels of the 1890s. Both hypotheses have good points in their favour, but what I suggest is the connection of Gissing’s working-class novels with the great tradition of the XIXth century essayists – Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin and Morris – who,

in various and often contrasting ways, reacted to industrialism. Apart from their different political positions, there is one common problem that all had to face and to answer: the development of a new conception of "culture" linked with the growth of new values in an industrial society.

In Carlyle's and Arnold's works we often find an opposition between the two terms: culture and chaos (or anarchy). For both these thinkers "culture" stands for order, respect of tradition, of the State; "anarchy" or "chaos" (as Arnold and Carlyle respectively called it) stands for "laissez-faire," individualism, relationships based on "Cash Payment as the sole nexus". But "anarchy" stands also, ambiguously, for the exploitation of the working class and the new ferment of the labour movement; in other words, for all the evils caused by industrialism, by the "Mechanical Age" as opposed to the "Moral Age" of feudal times.

This is, of course, a reaction to the loss of the old values of a pre-industrial society – often idealized by such writers as Carlyle and Ruskin ; a reaction sometimes based on an irrational fear of the mob (see Carlyle in *The French Revolution*, sometimes based on an enlightened view of democracy (see Arnold's conception of the State), more rarely on a scientific and political theory – Marxism (See Morris's case, for whom chaos is equated with the capitalistic system itself).

Raymond Williams has clearly traced the development of the world "culture" in his well-known study *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, and pointed out the differences and similarities among statesmen, philosophers and novelists in the XIXth and XXth centuries.

In Gissing's case, Matthew Arnold's thought was particularly influential. Perhaps Arnoldian concepts of culture and anarchy can explain Gissing's attitude towards the working class. For Arnold "culture" did not only mean "the study of perfection," but also something less vague, i.e. the very conception of democracy. Democracy, not as the government of the people, but as the

embodiment of a strong and solid State composed by the "best selves" of each class, the so-called "aliens," that is, "persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general *humane* spirit, by the love of human perfection." (24)

When Gissing portrayed such characters as Julian Casti or Gilbert Grail or Sidney Kirkwood, he certainly thought of the "best selves" of the working class, of Arnold's "aliens." These people, whose "best self" prevails over the "ordinary self," can try to awaken the best self that is latent in all men but is obscured by the inadequacies of class ideology and habit. This is exactly what some of Gissing's exceptional working-class characters try to do, and if they all fail it is only because the forces outside them (the forces of anarchy we could say) are stronger.

If we continue the analogy, we can see that a man like Mutimer is a metaphorical battle-field of the struggle between the best self and the ordinary self going on in a working man, So that Mutimer, who starts as an exceptional representative of the working class, ends up as a worthy member of the Philistines! In this category Arnold included in fact not only the middle classes but also that part of the working classes which is

one in spirit with the industrial middle class ... that part which gives all its energies to organise itself, through trade unions and other means, so as to constitute, first, a great working-class power, independent of the middle and aristocratic classes.... it is its class and its class-instinct which it seeks to affirm, its ordinary self, not its best self; and it is a machinery, an industrial machinery, and power and pre-eminence and other external goods, which fill its thoughts

and not inward perfection. (25)

The contempt that Arnold feels for the Philistines is equalled only by his mixed feelings of pity, repulsion and fear for what he called the Populace:

that vast portion ... of the working class which, raw and half-developed, has long lain half-hidden amidst poverty and squalor, and is now issuing from its

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hiding-place to assert an Englishman's heaven-born privilege of doing as he likes, and is beginning to perplex us by marching where it likes, meeting where it likes, bawling what it likes, breaking what it likes. (26)

The Populace was one of the most tangible embodiments of anarchy for Arnold and for Gissing as well, when he started looking at the working people *en masse*. Anarchy was represented for Gissing not only by the blind and crazy mob that kills Mutimer but also by those Radicals, Socialists, Trade-Union leaders who tried to change the old order according to organized political schemes and programmes. This is particularly clear in *Demos*, of which John Goode says:

the story presents a conflict in terms of a Comtist analysis ... the conflict is not one between "high ideals" and "unmitigated egotism," but between a "noble" ("cultured") and an "ignoble" (radical) egoism.... The conflict between labour and capital is simply a battle for wealth which vulgarises wealth divorcing it from "culture." Since this is fate, however, it cannot be combated. It can only be avoided through individual escape into conditions which don't change – like those of rural Wanley and Art.... In *Demos* the escape is realised when Eldon regains possession of Wanley valley and restores it from its industrialised state to its pristine pastoralism. (27)

This interpretation of the "message" of *Demos* as the preservation of the old order is shared by John Lucas, who draws an interesting comparison between *Demos*, W. H. Mallock's *The Old Order Changes* and Henry James's *Princess Casamassima* (all written in the same year 1886). John Lucas maintains that "for all three writers the world of *Demos* threatens to rise to the vast smug surface and loose mere anarchy upon the world." (28)

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The conflict between culture and anarchy assumes, in Gissing's case, the shape of a conflict between devotion to pure art and social commitment which was to haunt him throughout his life.

Jacob Korg also agrees on the direct influence that Arnold had on Gissing:

Culture and Anarchy is perhaps the most precisely focused statement of the theory that disinterested self-cultivation was the best path to social reform.... He argued that improvement could not be brought about by political fanaticism, or the promotion of the interests of any class, or the mere extension of liberty, but only by a balanced and profound understanding of the welfare of the nation and its historical spirit.... Improvement was to be won by a kind of "wise passiveness" consisting of "reading, observing, thinking" exactly like the régime

adopted by Adela Mutimer. (29)

Arnold, being a Liberal and not a Socialist, could not help falling into the typical contradictions of XIXth century Liberal ideology which was in favour of “progress,” but within the capitalistic system. His idea of education, for example, although extremely democratic for the times (he was in favour of State education), was most equivocal. His essay *The Bishop and the Philosopher* offers strong evidence for the view that Arnold favoured an “elitist” or “minority” culture, as when he writes:

the highly-instructed few, and not the scantily-instructed many, will ever be the organ to the human race of knowledge and truth. Knowledge and truth, in the full sense of the words, are not attainable by the great mass of the human race at all. (30)

This idea was to be taken up also by Gissing in his attitude towards mass education, the extension of literacy and the growth of the reading public at the end of the XIXth century. The following quotation concerning Arnold doubtless applies to Gissing’s view of the working class:

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ambivalence is to be found throughout Arnold’s work between a professed egalitarianism and a strongly paternalistic and often contemptuous attitude towards the “masses.” His notion of “culture” reflects this ambivalence, and the term has never recovered from the vagueness with which Arnold invested it. (31)

- 18 - Jacob Korg, “The Main Source of *The Ryecroft Papers*” in P. Coustillas (ed.), *Collected Articles on George Gissing*, London: Cass, 1968, p. 170.
- 19 - P. J. Keating, *op.cit.*, pp. 94 and 179.
- 20 - John Goode, “George Gissing’s *The Nether World*,” in D. Howard, J. Lucas and J. Goode (eds.), *Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, p. 211.
- 21 - *id.*, p. 240.
- 22 - *ibid.*
- 23 - *id.*, p. 237.
- 24 - Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. by D. Wilson, Cambridge: The University Press, 1963, p. 109.
- 25 - *id.*, p. 104-105.
- 26 - *id.*, p. 105.
- 27 - John Goode, “George Gissing’s *The Nether World*,” ed. cit., pp. 208-209.
- 28 - John Lucas, “Conservatism and Revolution in the 1880s,” in *Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. cit., p. 187.
- 29 - Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography*, ed. cit., p. 93.
- 30 - Quoted in J. Gribble (ed.), *Matthew Arnold*, London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967, p. 72.
- 31 - *id.*, p. 23.

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Book Reviews

Gissing in Context, by Adrian Poole, London: The Macmillan Press, 1975, pp. xi + 231, £7.95.

This is a scholarly volume based on vast reading not only of very nearly all that Gissing ever wrote and almost all biography and criticism concerning him, but also what the author describes as his "literary context." The last two words cover many novels of significance published in Gissing's day and likewise a number of miscellaneous social studies appertaining to the period. After an introduction of twenty-eight pages and a chapter entitled "The Writer and The City," Mr. Poole devotes the remainder of his book to a close analysis of eleven of the novels, with a short concluding view of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.

There are fashions in every walk of life, even in literary circles, and somebody seems to have laid it down that it is of the greatest interest to expatiate on the influence of city life on writers, particularly novelists. This does not seem to me worthy of such essential priority, as it invites too many obvious reflections and tends to place too many writers in rigid categories. Fortunately, Mr. Poole does not tarry long theorising on this subject, and his chapter becomes enjoyable when he gives us a survey of the "Cockney School" of novelists, which flourished at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. These were minor writers who nevertheless left us an animated picture of the life, and particularly the speech, of the uneducated Cockney. I am inclined to agree with Mr. Poole that Barry Pain overdid it in *De Omnibus* in which he gave a book-full of phonetic rendering of the speech of a bus conductor, but I remember clearly that this specimen of the language did not strike me as at all unfamiliar when I first read it in 1909. I think it is a mistake to pack Kipling together with this school, as Kipling was a great writer, and I am surprised that no mention is made of perhaps the best Cockney novelist of the period, W. W.

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Jacobs, who recorded chiefly the doings of ships' crews, bargees and dockers. Perhaps some tribute might have been made to Arthur Morrison and Richard Whiteing who, while writing on sordid themes, had some pretension to literary elegance, beyond the rather colourless prose of their rivals. Gissing did on one occasion trespass on the property of the novelists just mentioned, but his *The Town Traveller*, I am afraid, is no better than the best of Pett Ridge.

It would take a very long article to discuss in detail Mr. Poole's chapters on what he considers to be Gissing's best novels. His omission of *A Life's Morning*, *Denzil Quarrier*, *The Crown of Life* and the shorter and lighter fiction is understandable, but I much regretted the absence of *The Emancipated*, which I have always looked upon as Gissing's most unjustifiably neglected work, and of that last strong and uncompromising *Our Friend the Charlatan*. The author gives admirable interpretations of Gissing's early social novels. *The Unclassed*, which I have read only in the revised edition of 1895, is dwelt on at some length, and its originality is duly acknowledged and its weaknesses unmasked with rare skill. The analysis appears nevertheless to be incomplete, as no reference is made to poor masochistic little Maud Enderby, the hero Waymark's first fiancée, to her appalling parents, to her final decision to become a member of "the true Church," and to practise thenceforth the most rigorous form of puritanism. This part of the story comes as a counterpoint to the more humanist attitudes of Waymark and Ida Starr, his future wife.

One of Mr. Poole's best chapters is on *The Nether World*, which he rightly recognises as one of Gissing's major works. He gives one of the most lively descriptions of the famous Bank Holiday revels that I have read, and his conclusion that "it is a measure of *The Nether World's* achievement that it makes Morris's *News from Nowhere* intolerably comfortable by comparison" is equally

convincing. When we turn to *New Grub Street*, all the research is very thorough and we are introduced to much new information relating to both contemporary novelists and publishers. There is only one point on which I part company with Mr. Poole, and that is when, on page 155, he claims that the final scene in this novel

so neat, so glib, is not the one demanded by the novel's internal logic. Gissing's deep humane identification with those who are left outside requires that the final scene should belong to Marian, and her lonely, loveless vigil in the provincial library.

This neatness and this glibness are deliberate, and the final scene between Jasper and Amy, a masterpiece of irony, is overwhelmingly apposite to the whole story. Any attempt to follow it with a glimpse of Marian with her wounded emotions and her provincial drudgery would inevitably lead to an anti-climax.

In general, the remaining chapters on the novels are rewarding and would provoke many a favourable comment if space were available. Class differences are well covered in the cases of *Isabel Clarendon* and *Born in Exile*, and Victorian marriage problems are discussed in their many aspects in *The Odd Women*, *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool*. The final four pages on *Ryecroft* present a fair image of the reasons which cause some readers to be enthusiastic as to its merits and others to regard it as a weak confession of rather a shabby type of hedonism. Mr. Poole plumps for the superiority of *New Grub Street* and *The Nether World*, and I would not feel inclined to dissent, yet one can return to *Ryecroft* with some pleasure and enjoy passages which remain good reading to this day.

How many of our present-day commentators have the courage to keep well away from fashionable topics such as lesbianism and homosexuality (in the latter case, so dear to lady novelists)? Mr. Poole rightly rejects all suggestions of lesbianism in regard to Adela Waltham and

Stella Westlake in *Demos*, and it is not until page 180 that we come across the word homosexuality in a quotation, which could well have been left out, and has, fortunately, no relevance to Gissing's life or work. Mr. Poole has also treated us to a merciful surprise by not even mentioning the very unreliable Freud, and although he quotes a short extract from Engels, he spares us the horror of that ubiquitous heavyweight Karl Marx.

One of Mr. Poole's comparisons between the lives of late Victorian writers cannot be accepted easily. In his Introduction, he links Gissing's expulsion from Owens College, Manchester, with that of William Hale White (Mark Rutherford) from a theological college in London, where he was accused of "heretical questioning of the orthodox interpretation of Biblical inspiration." Although these expulsions haunted the two writers for so many years, it seems absurd to make the comparison at all. The solemn tribunal which judged White for an almost laughable show of independence on a point of theology cannot be likened to the Manchester magistrates who were responsible for trying Gissing for a mean petty crime committed at the expense of his comrades. Gissing realised throughout his life, which was thereafter a model of honesty and integrity, that this was no trifling peccadillo.

Without wishing to appear impertinent, I should like to conclude with a few remarks on Mr.

Poole's literary style. He is to be congratulated on avoiding technical jargon, and his style may be described as modern academic prose, with the kind of phraseology which has entered our country only during the last two or three decades. His sentences are all neatly tied up, but I must confess that at times I was obliged to untie a few of them in order to appreciate their full meaning. There are a number of misprints, but in only one case could I detect a possible grammatical error. He is, of course, entitled to dig up his cherished word "reify" and to explain its particular relevance, but where on earth did he find the word "gaucheness," not a very good specimen of the *entente cordiale*? – C. S. Collinson.

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George Gissing: A Bibliography, by Michael Collie, Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975; Folkestone: Dawson & Sons Ltd., 1976, pp. xiv + 129, £7.50.

This is a book we should have liked to praise. For two reasons essentially: first, a bibliography of Gissing is needed (the short descriptions of first editions by Henry Danielson and Temple Scott are useful, but not easily available and far too rudimentary); second, it is known to a number of scholars, collectors, booksellers and librarians that, for half a dozen years, we have been preparing a book on the same subject, and an unfavourable review of Michael Collie's volume will inevitably lead some readers to believe that we are writing in a spirit of pique about a man who has stolen our thunder. But Mr. Collie has stolen nothing – even though he has borrowed (from our books and articles) a good deal without much acknowledgment. The bibliography on which we have been engaged is very different from that under review. Time will prove this, if fate is kind.

The book by Mr. Collie begins with a preface and a nineteen-page introduction consisting in a survey of Gissing's life followed by a discussion of the author's relations with his publishers. A technical note tackles problems involved with the description of first editions – dates, titles, collation, contents, binding variants, etc. Part I covers the "works published during Gissing's lifetime," Part II those published after his death. Appendix A is a Summary of Gissing's Revision of His Early Work, Appendix B a Chronological List of Gissing's Publications to 1905 (why not 1906, a much more natural landmark?). An index concludes the volume.

Mr. Collie views all that concerns his subject from a revisionist point of view, and it is clear that he does not like his predecessors. He would be justified if he had produced a good book, but he hasn't. What he has produced is alas! the worst that has appeared since 1912. The book teems with factual errors, biographical as well as bibliographical. Here is a batch of the former: Gissing wrote 150 short stories; he lived in London during the years 1895-97, in Italy in 1898-99; he visited Sicily

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(we are not told when for the quite sufficient reason that he never did); "although he was always grumbling about poor sales and so forth, he in fact never bothered to think about his own business interests"; he "never saw one of his books received with complete enthusiasm"; he began to write *Mrs. Grundy's Enemies* almost immediately after completing *Workers in the Dawn*; he lived at 7K from 1882 to 1891; in 1889-90 he went to Italy, then to Greece; Walter was sent for good to Wakefield in 1897, etc. etc. Besides mistakes of that kind, there are a number of extremely doubtful statements prompted by a desire to contradict (explicitly or implicitly) Gissing scholars like Jacob Korg and the writers of the present review. It is an easier course to contradict without evidence than to do one's own research. Mr. Collie would have us believe, for instance, that Gissing felt a strong attachment for Edith – a gratuitous statement which is flatly contradicted by his diary and

correspondence; or again, Mr. Collie considers that Gissing's "alleged" matrimonial mistakes are "based upon quite dubious evidence." This is sheer casuistry; he never proves anything, he has no discovery of any kind to offer – his favourite method consists in a combination of gratuitous statements and innuendoes. What does Mr. Collie mean when he declares that the copy of *Isabel Clarendon* in the Alexander Turnbull Library is probably that which Gissing used when he attempted to revise his novel? He is merely trying to cast a slur upon the Harvester critical edition of the book. Has Mr. Collie seen the copy he refers to? Similarly, when he mentions the early version of *Ryecroft* he observes that Pierre Coustillas has discussed it briefly in his bilingual edition of the book. "Briefly" is not quite suitable for a fifteen-page close discussion in which all sections of the book are examined in detail. Mr. Collie's use of adverbs is characteristic of his intentions; so is the index – when he wishes to snub someone he rules him out of the index altogether. Thus C. C. Kohler, John Spiers and Jacob Korg, whose work or activities are mentioned in the text, are not

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thought worthy of the index, which is as whimsical as the book proper. A book which depends for much of its information on the work of other people, yet dismisses these very people from its index, is sorely open to the question of why these individuals are not indexed, and the possible responses to the question hardly flatter the author.

The method adopted by Mr. Collie calls for serious reservations. He follows neither the order of composition nor the order of publication: if *A Life's Morning* comes after *Thyrza*, *Isabel Clarendon* should have come after *Demos*. Neither *The Paying Guest* nor *Will Warburton*, nor *Sins of the Fathers* are in the right place. *Stories and Sketches* (1938) is ignored, so is *Short Stories of To-Day and Yesterday* (1929). Only volumes are considered – the publication of short stories in magazines is said to have been satisfactorily discussed by Pierre Coustillas; Gissing's miscellaneous writings (essays, contributions to symposia, letters to editors, etc.) are passed over in silence. Self-contradictions are not infrequent. Here are two examples: on p. xi we read that reissues of the novels in recent years "have invariably been of the unrevised texts," but on the next page Mr. Collie is less positive: "Well-intentioned twentieth century reissues have frequently been of the wrong, this is to say the unrevised, texts." The truth is indeed simple enough: the AMS Press reprinted the first versions of *Thyrza* and *The Emancipated* (three volumes in one) in the late 1960's. The only other novel of which two English versions are extant is *The Unclassed*. Mr. Collie's Appendix A is not to be trusted – contrary to what he says, the AMS edition of *The Unclassed* is that of the revised version, and *Thyrza* is available in the revised version in both England and America. As for *The Nether World*, the difference between the Dent and the Harvester editions as described in the same Appendix is purely imaginary.

Indeed this epithet applies to many aspects of the present book. Groundless statements abound:

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we are told (p.13) that Smith Elder reprinted "one or another version [of Gissing's novels] as public demand required"; that these novels were issued at 3/6; that *A Life's Morning* appeared in a six-shilling edition; that Smith Elder's records have been lost. In one instance, the editors of the *Letters of George Gissing to His Family* are corrected silently and wrongly: where Mr. Collie read "ahem!" Gissing had written "eheu!".

The ignorance revealed by some entries is startling – the binding variants of the first English editions of *The Unclassed*, *The Odd Women*, *Charles Dickens* and *Will Warburton* are not noted, and the description of the first American editions is even less to be trusted (in the case of *Will*

Warburton it is skipped altogether). Lawrence & Bullen are described as “principal London publishers.” On p. 20, we are invited to believe that the date of some editions cannot be ascertained; on p. 38, we are told that the American and Continental editions of *Demos* were based on the second English edition, whereas they in fact appeared some six months before, a mistake which was easy to avoid since the text of the second English edition is identical to that of the three-decker. Mr. Collie errs not only in the large facts, but in the basic professional skills of a careful, observant and responsible bibliographer. His use of a ruler produces mysterious results, his inability to recognise and describe Gothic type, italic capitals and a number of other basic elements produce descriptions which will madden and mislead any reader.

Dates and figures are often wrong. Who will believe that Lawrence & Bullen bought back the copyright of *Born in Exile* from A. & C. Black for £110.10? that *La Rue des Meurt-la-Faim* (sic) appeared in 1911? that Gissing received £100 plus £10 for *Thyrza*? that *The Emancipated* appeared in 1889, *Born in Exile* and *Denzil Quarrier* in this order in 1891 (Appendix B)? Names are less frequently ill-treated, yet Glaussons for Gaussens is regrettable, and not everyone will recognize the name of Pierre Coustillas on p. 118. It is remarkable that the readers of two publishing firms in England and America overlooked the hundreds of errors contained in this thin volume. Mr. Collie

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writes on p.17 of “Gissing’s complete ignorance of Victorian publishing” – a grotesque twisting of the truth, which is not surprising considering the author’s poor knowledge of his subject, but this is only one more irresponsible statement in a thoroughly irresponsible book. – Pierre Coustillas and John Spiers.

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Recent Publications

- Jeffrey Meyers (ed.), *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975. Contains various references to Gissing. Of special interest is an article from *Scrutiny*, September 1940, in which Q. D. Leavis wrote about *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and its author: “He has even managed to write a dull novel about a literary man, which is a feat – an attempt to do *New Grub Street* up-to-date, but Gissing was an artist and Mr. Orwell isn’t.” Those readers who are familiar with Mrs. Leavis’s article on Gissing written two years before (*Scrutiny*, June 1938) will be tempted to smile.
- Jacques Ben Guigui, *Israel Zangwill, Penseur et Ecrivain (1864-1926)*, Toulouse : R. Lion, 1975. Gissing is referred to about ten times. The author is apparently unaware of some interesting material on Zangwill in Gissing’s papers.
- Alan Swingewood, *The Novel and Revolution*, Macmillan, 1975. Contains a discussion of Gissing’s five working class novels, pp. 124-30.
- Marilyn Saveson, “The Born Exile: George Gissing,” *The Cresset*, January 1976, pp. 26-27. A review of Gillian Tindall’s book.

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- Jennifer Searle, “Book Reviews: Gissing,” *Essays in Criticism*, April 1976, pp. 168-177. On

Gillian Tindall's and Adrian Poole's books.