

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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Volume XV, Number 2  
April, 1979

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The Gissing Fund

Kate Taylor  
Wakefield

[Although Miss Taylor’s name has for some years been familiar to the readers of the *Newsletter*, which has on many occasions listed articles from her pen printed in the *Wakefield Express*, a word of introduction may not be irrelevant. A teacher, a journalist and a local historian, she has, of Wakefield past and present, a knowledge which few people in her own city can boast. Her two volumes on the *Wakefield District Heritage* (1976 and 1979), quartos of 148 and 152 pages respectively, give but a faint, though most attractive idea, of her manifold activities. She has, with other Wakefield friends, devoted considerable time and energy to the promotion of Gissing’s

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Subscriptions

Private Subscribers: £1.50 per annum  
Libraries: £3.00 per annum

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posthumous interests not only locally, but in the whole of England, in ways which are indicated, directly or indirectly, by the lists of recent publications in the *Newsletter*. All Gissingites should be grateful to her. P. C.]

As was announced in the January number of the *Gissing Newsletter*, just seventy-five years after George Gissing’s death a Trust has been established with the objectives of securing the long-term maintenance of the Georgian family house, 2-4 Thompson’s Yard, Wakefield, where he

was born in 1857 and of fostering research into the literary history of Wakefield by establishing a Gissing Centre there.

This major step follows the growth of international interest in Gissing's work, reflected in the *Gissing Newsletter*, and research in Wakefield itself by Mr. Clifford Brook who has made an extensive study of 2-4 Thompson's Yard and has been able to demonstrate not only that the house, like the adjoining chemist's shop, was in the ownership of Thomas Waller Gissing from 1865 and must have been occupied by the family at least by 1861, but how the family used the different rooms. The house, acquired by the local authority originally as part of a demolition programme, was listed by the Department of the Environment and has now been included in the Upper Westgate Conservation Area.

Readers of the *Gissing Newsletter* are now acquainted with the names of the two Wakefield Societies which have joined forces with Gissing scholars to set up the Trust and with the impressive list of Patrons who have agreed to give their support to it. From England the committee was able to enlist three major novelists and a professor of English literature from Hull university as well as the foremost champion of conservation, Sir John Betjeman himself. Each of the novelists has some specific association with the Trust's aims. David Storey, playwright and author of, among other books, *This Sporting Life* (1960), *Radcliffe* (1963) and *Saville* (1976) each of which draws on his

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life in Wakefield, was born in Wakefield and attended its Queen Elizabeth Grammar School. Gillian Tindall has contributed a volume, *The Born Exile* (1974), to Gissing studies. Angus Wilson, doyen of English novelists and now also professor of English literature at the University of East Anglia, is again a Gissing critic. Professor Arthur Pollard from Hull also takes a particular interest in Victorian studies and in Gissing himself.

The support of the citizens of Wakefield is indicated by the range of local Patrons which includes both the Mayor of Wakefield and the Chairman of the Metropolitan District Council Planning Committee and the Presidents of both the Civic and Historical societies.

The Appeal, for £50,000, has already received substantial publicity. On the day it was launched, 28th December 1978, the anniversary of the deaths of both George and Thomas Waller Gissing, notices appeared in the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph*. The sad absence of the *Times* was a considerable blow. An article by Gillian Tindall appeared in *New Society* in the edition of 21st/28th December. Articles by Kate Taylor have appeared in the *Yorkshire Post* (18 December 1978), the *Wakefield Express* (29 December 1978), and the *Leeds and Yorkshire Topic* (February 1979). The Appeal has also been noticed in *Country Life* (15 February 1979) and further notices are to appear in the *Dalesman* and *House and Gardens*. Two important national societies, the Georgian Group and the Victorian Society, have agreed to publicise the appeal among their individual members.

The Appeal has begun well with a substantial donation from David Storey, four donations from America, three from Japan, one from Italy and eight from France. Further sums have come from all over Britain as well as Wakefield residents themselves. One interesting "spin-off" has been that a number of subscribers have mentioned their interest in Gissing as arising from association with his family or with buildings where he lived. These include the present occupant of the house in

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Dorking where Gissing wrote *The Crown of Life* in 1898 and two other people who lived at different times in the Thompson's Yard house. We expect some of these links to prove fruitful in

furthering our knowledge of Gissing and his family. One instance of an insight thus already gained may be mentioned here. This is a reminiscence of Miss K. Eastwood whose parents were neighbours of Ellen and Margaret Gissing at the period when they ran their boys' preparatory school in the house in Sandy Walk. Miss Eastwood still possesses a little collection of symbolic items, and the paper in which they were wrapped, which was given to her mother by the Misses Gissing just after she herself was born. The items are a piece of coal, symbolising warmth, a match (light), a six-penny piece (wealth). Miss Eastwood understands that these tokens of the blessings hoped for the new baby included at the time also a piece of bread, representing food.

So far, it must be acknowledged, funds have been slow to arrive. We shall need to raise a very great deal more money if our objectives are to be adequately realised. Meanwhile we hope that the Heritage trail, *George Gissing's Wakefield* (50p), which has been devised by Mr. Clifford Brook in association with the Wakefield M.D. Planning Department, and the walks planned in Wakefield on 10th June and 16th September (meeting at 2.30pm at the west gate of Wakefield Cathedral), will stimulate further interest. The Trust's committee hopes, too, that all individual readers of the *Newsletter* will do all they can to draw the attention of likely contributors to the appeal. Copies of the Appeal letter may be obtained from Mr. Brook, 1 Standbridge Lane, Sandal, Wakefield.

Currently the Trust committee is giving considerable anxious thought to the problems raised by the local authority's specific proposals for restoration of 2-4 Thompson's Yard. It seems that the whole house may be unsafe and that sufficient strength to preserve it can best be gained by

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buttressing the gable at the end of the double-fronted section. The northernmost bay of the house, badly damaged by vandals and fire, is held to be too insecure to retain and the authority has demolished it. This part of the house was integral to the family home purchased by T. W. Gissing at auction in 1865. The constraints of the site itself meant that servants and service rooms, normally to be found at the rear of a building, occur here at the left-hand side in this bay which contained also the dressing-room for the principal bedroom. Whilst the bay is not, then, significant for possessing the principal rooms used by the family, it is an important element if the totality of the building and the Gissing's way of life in it is to be fully understood. The question of rebuilding must be considered.

What is certain is that there is a very great deal that the Trust can and should do once it has amassed a really substantial endowment.

Wakefield, 18th March 1979.

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Gissing's *Born in Exile*: Spiritual Distance  
between Author and Character

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George Gissing, like other Victorian novelists, helped to initiate in his writings what may be called, euphemistically, the plague of modernism. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his depiction of Godwin Peak in the novel *Born in Exile*.<sup>1</sup> His works preceding this 1892 novel, and those following it – a considerable listing – show that, in many respects, *Born in Exile* was a turning point in Gissing's views toward himself and the world.

In Godwin Peak, the novel's main protagonist, Gissing comes as close as any of his

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contemporaries to espousing a doctrine of nihilism without ever completely capitulating to it. His innate Englishness, however, and his individualism, heavily coated with tradition, prevent him from succumbing to the wave of modern dissent arising from the general dependence on science and its product, commercial materialism and technology, during the last third of the nineteenth century. But Gissing's distrust of technology does not make him any more tolerant of orthodox faiths. Instead his dilemma about what he believes in remains unresolved throughout a life filled with ambivalences, and his idiosyncratic outlook on the world develops in him a form of aestheticism that makes him one of the most self-conscious novelists among his nineteenth century counterparts. All in all, his work demonstrates a struggle between conflicts of purpose (some, like his friend Morley Roberts, have said obstinacy) and inherent humanism.<sup>2</sup>

*Born in Exile* starts out as a union between author and character. But as Peak's uncompromising way – a way not a little admired and shared by his creator – becomes ever more obsessive, one notices a spiritual distance emerging which eventually separates the character from his author as the book progresses. The distance between the two is more significant than one might admit; for it portends a kind of confrontation with the real sympathetic man and the would-be philosopher-rationalist, as well as with the sensitive artist that represents Gissing's personality.

Throughout the early portions of the book, we watch Peak struggling to hold his own in school and in the contests for intellectual supremacy over his social betters. At home, he shows disdain toward his family. In his condescension toward his few admirers whose friendship he keeps at a distance, we see a mixture of arrogance, pride and self-satisfaction in him with which Gissing can identify.

As the story develops, and Peak's young manhood is depicted in a heroic posture of rugged intellectual individualism, he tries to maneuver and determine the best way to lift himself, not so

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absolutely out of his exile, but out of his consummate poverty and deep-rooted self-hatred of his economic and social insignificance. He craves a world of prominence and respectability that he feels only money and class distinction can afford. These attributes of Peak are identifiable with those of his creator.

In a rather telling scene between Peak and his brother – after Peak's hopes for academic distinction have been threatened by the arrival of a jolly but half-illiterate kinsman who desires to open up a small restaurant across from his nephew's college – we see how arrogance of youth helps shape the man to come. Peak says, with callous but bitter indifference:

“What is the brute [his uncle] to us? When I'm a man, let him venture to come near me.... I hate low, uneducated people! I hate them worse than the filthiest vermin.... They ought to be swept off the face of the earth!... (47)

This utterance, childish as it is, represents the conceited malevolence of ignorant, however gifted, adolescence. But it contains the kernel of Peak's (and Gissing's) dilemma – his self-hatred extended to all those who lack his talent, but mostly to those whose unfortunate mediocrity becomes synonymous with poverty and social inferiority.

The connection between Peak's isolation and Gissing's is voiced by Oliver, Peak's ordinary,

less talented brother, whose simple remark to his angry sibling is that, "You're an aristocrat, Godwin." And what Godwin does, of course, is endeavour to maintain this aristocratic stance: "I hope I am," he answers his brother. "I mean to be, that's certain. There's nothing I hate like vulgarity." It is this last sentence that indelibly links Gissing with his character in the early stages of the novel. No work of Gissing's, no comment recorded or ascribed to him ever relinquishes his loathing of the "vulgar." Gissing does not mean it pejoratively or loosely. As a Greek and Latin

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specialist, he uses the term in its classical sense. It is the use of this word primarily that places the author in spiritual union with many of his characters. But at the same time Gissing's "other" nature, his inherent humanism (that remains stillborn in Peak) is the insidious virtue, if you will, that paradoxically causes the author to back off from his character later in the novel. For this division within Gissing's own character, the conflict between ideals – the inherently noble and the basically decent – distends and contracts to the breaking point, as if he were an elastic band grown fragile from overuse.

The bond of sympathy Gissing has with Peak is not an easy one to sever. The narrator's (Gissing's) comment early in the novel on his character's remarks is one of several hints of the schism to come: "This was perhaps the first time that Godwin found expression for the prejudice which affected all his thoughts and feelings."

The opening of Chapter III shows how Peak's arrogance is sublimated by his creator:

With the growth of his militant egoism, there had developed in Godwin Peak an excess of nervous sensibility which threatened to deprive his character of the initiative rightly belonging to it. Self-assertion is the practical complement of self-esteem. To be largely endowed with the latter quality, yet constrained by a coward delicacy to repress it, is to suffer martyrdom at the pleasure of every robust assailant, and in the end to be driven to the refuge of a moody solitude. (60)

Again the sympathetic urge is noted when the narrator comments, as Peak leaves home, humiliated by his ignorant relative, and having allowed himself to be a part of some students' revelry, that his repressed sensuality makes him aware of a latent dissoluteness in his character:

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He perceived very clearly how easy it would be for him to lapse by degrees of weakened will into a ruinous dissoluteness. Anything of that kind would mean, of course, the abandonment of his ambitions. All he had to fight the world with was his brains.... Godwin Peak must make his own career, and that he would hardly do save by efforts greater than the ordinary man can put forth. The ordinary man? – Was he in any respect extraordinary?... It was the first time that he deliberately posed this question to himself and for answer came a rush of confident blood, pulsing through all the mechanism of his being. (66)

Each of the previous references address Gissing's own predicament, as Peak represents his vehicle of expiation.

Some ten years later in London, after having suffered frustrations in finding suitable work, Peak, despite his talents, is alone. During one of his numerous walks about the city he finds himself in Hyde Park, "shoulder to shoulder with boors and pickpockets." He is attracted to the beautiful upper-class women taking an outing in their coaches. Unable to stem his self-contempt as he watches these finely coached women, Peak thinks that they, in fact, are his equals:

With such as they he should by right of nature associate.... He hated the malodorous rabble who stared insolently at them and who envied their immeasurable remoteness. Of mere wealth he thought not; might he only be recognized by the gentles of birth and breeding for what he really was, and be rescued from the promiscuity of the vulgar! (130)

Again we see the close relationship between character and creator: Gissing and Peak are one.

It is, therefore, ironic that, given Gissing's negative attitude toward religion, Peak decides to

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adopt religious chicanery as a means by which to achieve his goal of prominence in the aristocratic world. Yet one can readily believe, at this early stage in the novel, that Gissing's sympathy remains with Peak. He wants to create a situation for him by which he can overcome his frustrations by aligning him with the correct class of people. It is from among such a class that Peak will eventually find his "equal" female partner. Paradoxically, this would balance Peak's character intellectually and physically in fiction in a way Gissing could not do in his own love life.<sup>3</sup>

At this point in our discussion it is necessary to understand a little the importance of ideology behind Gissing's development as a man and artist if we are to locate where in his novel he separates himself from Peak. For this we must look at an early essay of his called "The Hope of Pessimism" to see just how the author and character relate to one another.<sup>4</sup> The essay, never published in Gissing's lifetime, was written during his young manhood in the early 1880s, when he was reassessing his attitude toward current social issues.

According to Gissing specialist, Pierre Coustillas, this essay is "an unparalleled achievement" (11). It is only one of a very few in which Gissing reveals his struggles with philosophical abstractions which have definite application to his own development as a writer and a man, and where he "ceases to cloak his thoughts in the garb of fiction" (12).

In brief the essay counters the prevalence in the nineteenth century of the Comtean philosophy of Positivism, or "the religion of Humanity," and the belief in human perfectibility. Its tone is ironical, for the most part, as it seeks to analyze man's desire to account for his dismal existence through various mythological and supernatural philosophies and religions. Gissing lumps religion and philosophy together with a Schopenhauerian glibness as "agnostic optimism," a faith in "the solid-seeming accretions of human knowledge, seeking its guarantee in the most obvious tendencies of what we call modern progress, declaring itself tolerant with the tolerance of scientific

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investigations, making its supreme appeal to what has ever been confessed the noblest of man's instincts, that of self-forgetfulness in devotion to others' good" (77-78). This "agnostic optimism" represents itself as "the first serious attempt to replace the old supernatural faiths by a religion consonant with the new intellectual attitude" of the time. In short, man's faith is self-oriented and

his salvation rests on his scientific capabilities alone.

As a man who holds little regard for religious orthodoxy, making use of supernaturalism in the form of a deity, one might expect that Gissing would find Positivism an advancement in man's progress to a healthier existence. And for a time he tries to adopt this "faith" in man's progressiveness. But Gissing soon realises that this "human religion" suffers from the same faults as its predecessors. Its greatest fault – besides its reliance on materialism – is that it overlooks the realities of man's behaviour, of man's nature, and the nature of the world itself. All religions, including Positivism, promise something they can never deliver – hope that there is something better for individual man and ultimately for the whole of mankind. But it is a hope doomed to failure, since all religions, Gissing asserts, tend to reject the "eternal truth that the world is synonymous with evil" (88). This evil is at the core of man himself and is reflected in his egotistical nature.

If Positivism is mankind's savior, the final triumph of which can manifest itself only in the belief that man is his *own* Redeemer, then to avoid the irrationality of perfection, in anyone's given lifetime, a man must find his true salvation by renouncing his selfness, that is, his egoistic ideals. Here lies the paradox in it for Gissing: The promise of science, as man's tool to achieve perfectibility, instead, will eventually lead man to his own destruction. This basic thesis, he feels, underlies Positivism, and thus it falters and fails in its goal – as have all idealistic religions in the past. Only when man recognises that "life is no longer a good to him," Gissing exclaims, will he

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achieve the peace he so long has sought (91).

In contrast to the absurdity of Positivism, Gissing holds that only in art and in the artistic temperament can man find salvation in life. For it is in "the mood of artistic contemplation the will is destroyed, self is eliminated, the world of phenomena resolves itself into a picture of absolute significance." Only once before has such a time been known to man, and that was during the period of the Greeks, when such a phenomenon found essence under "the Hellenic religion; it was the faith of a people of artists" (95).

How then does this essay relate to *Born in Exile*? One answer is given by looking briefly at Gissing works preceding this important novel. Next we can examine closely the development of Godwin Peak and the schism that eventually separates the character from his creator.

Up until the publication of *Born in Exile* in 1892, Gissing had published nine novels. Among those nine several have thematic patterns that chart a state of mind consistent with their author's ambiguous attitude toward pessimism. The first two, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and *The Unclassed* (1884), are novels with extremely sympathetic protagonists and idealised women. They are cross sections of stark grubbiness and romantic aspirations, each involving the hardships and degradations of the artistic temperament pitted against ultra-realistic social and personal degradation. Regardless of the autobiographical content, Gissing evidences sympathy with the plight of the downtrodden, the hopes and dreams of the hopeless. His fears for and of the so-called vulgar are evident, but there is bitterness toward the economically privileged who are identified as the chief culprits in such deprivation.

After one frustration and another, for example, Arthur Golding, the protagonist in *Workers*, despite his great talents as a painter, loses his desire to live and commits suicide by jumping into Niagara Falls. Whilst his death, however, is not necessarily the result of the negative idealism espoused in "The Hope of Pessimism," it does suggest the thoughts which find utterance in the

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essay approximately two years later.

In *The Unclassed*, misery and degradation greet us again. The portrayal of the painful humanity of the Shelleyan-like Italian writer, Julian Casti, whose great hope was to recreate a historical romance of the ancient world, is devastatingly bitter. He becomes the weak and unwilling dupe of the base-natured Harriet Smales, whose coarseness represents the pits of vulgarity and evil self-indulgence, and exemplifies the overly sensitive weakness of the artistic temperament whenever it associates too closely with the real world. But the chief protagonist, Osmond Waymark, whose sensitivity and devotion to the fallen prostitute, Ida Starr, serves to show the best in personal hopefulness for the forgiveness and the redemptive qualities of human faith. Waymark is a fighter with a conscience. Despite Casti's sorrowful end, Waymark brings a sense of hope to the human condition. And in this book one senses Gissing's struggle against the pessimism advocated in his essay.

In *Demos* (1886), a different and decisive picture emerges with respect to Gissing's social outlook. In this book Gissing's view of socialism as a positive ideal is attacked with a vengeance. He portrays the ineptitude of the common man because of his low birth and poor education to lead any kind of reform movement either for himself or for others. Here then we begin to see definite features of the future Godwin Peak emerging, split, if you will, between the two protagonists, Eldon and Mutimer, the middle class sophisticate and the parvenu, respectively.

The next book, *Isabel Clarendon* (1886), adumbrates the Godwin Peak prototype in the person of the melancholy Bernard Kingcote. Like Peak, he is a loner with scholarly inclinations, but lacks decisiveness or a clear-cut ideal of what he truly wants. He suffers a kind of hopelessness that borders on the maudlin that the more complex Peak would have condemned. But despite this, Kingcote embodies all the prejudices and arrogance of singular elitism that are the ingredients we

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find honed to near perfection in Peak.

Like Peak, also, Kingcote is a paradoxical creation. Gissing both sympathises with and rejects him for certain weaknesses of character. Unlike Peak, however, Kingcote feels self-pity that is palpably presented. His iconoclasm is a struggle between an inborn monkish disposition and a nervous sensuality; his craving for peaceful isolation synergises with his wanton desire for Isabel, and this conflict nearly drives him mad.

The real effects of Gissing's ideas on pessimism are felt in the scathingly bitter *The Nether World* (1889). The plight, degradation and hopelessness of all the characters in this book reach a depth of squalor that make the worlds of Studs Lonigan and Bigger Thomas look almost idyllic. The book is completely devoid of light. Its chief protagonist, Sidney Kirkwood, is as somber and tortured a character as any found in a Dostoievskyan novel. It contains any number of Dickensian characters stripped of their humor; and while we feel pathos for several of the characters, the feeling of guilt it arouses makes us, if not hate them, wish to forget them in our own need for relief. Surely it is a book for the sado-masochists among us. No one, including the most miserable in life, can happily acknowledge sympathy with these hopeless and helpless creatures. Yet while their despair is too mortifying, oddly enough a peculiar fascination prevails in the work, attributable to the sheer power of the writing itself.

Elements of this sense of hopelessness are found throughout Gissing's works, and the books referred to follow, more or less, the basic tenets held forth in the essay "The Hope of Pessimism." In 1892, by the time *Born in Exile* had been published (the year after his greatest book, *New Grub Street*), Gissing was undergoing still other changes, and his subsequent works reflect these



modifications within himself, which find embodiment in the kind of uneasy resignation to life as it is presented in the semi-autobiographical book *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, published

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shortly before Gissing's death in 1903.

While resignation is a theme found in "The Hope of Pessimism," the form it takes in *The Private Papers* is not quite as bitter or negative as reflected in the essay. The reason for this has to do with the changes in Gissing's view of himself as both man and writer over the years, and with his constant re-evaluations of the world. Indeed, his philosophical outlook on socialism and on materialism, society and other issues were in constant flux at all times. But it is in *Born in Exile* that he directly confronts his own personality.

Gissing's point of departure from identification with Peak in *Born in Exile*, however, comes when his protagonist decides to exalt his deep-rooted cynicism, self-hatred, and bitterness to a philosophical experiment. Peak determines that his one means of achieving status and equality among those whom he feels deserving is through marriage. He exhibits in this the kind of cynical egomania that Gissing deplors in his essay on pessimism. Peak, on the one hand, is a calculator, a charlatan, whom Gissing denigrates more than he does the unfortunate vulgar. But that Peak has the courage to do something positive about his condition, on the other hand, Gissing can admire. Yet Peak's insensitivity toward others is the weak link in his character, and one of the major factors leading to his eventual demoralisation. A second factor leading to his fall is his inability to suppress totally his latent sensuality. In logical conjunction with these factors is Peak's inability finally to judge the motives of others with respect to himself. One can recognise in each of these factors the conditions that make for egoism. Faced therefore with such a negative character – an alter-ego, one might say – Gissing projects a monster-in-the-making in Peak.

A key to Peak's decline and Gissing's abandonment of his character is found in the handling of certain minor characters, chiefly that of Marcella Moxey. Marcella is a "new" woman, one of many filling the pages of late Victorian fiction, who, in one guise or another, appears regularly in most of

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Gissing's books. Her intellectual powers, her independence, her quickness and unfeigned sensitivity simultaneously attract and repel Gissing. Peak's treatment of Marcella, his refusal to see in her what he most needs in the kind of woman to help toward a successful career, illustrates a defect of character that was not unfamiliar to the author himself. Marcella's one problem for Gissing-Peak is her sexlessness. Both the author and his protagonist have difficulty in accepting a woman unless there is a surface attractiveness. Brains alone in a woman are suspect, yet acceptable only as they complement her physical attributes. As a result Marcella Moxey poses a dilemma for Peak.

We first meet her when Peak, as a youth, visits her brother Christian. At this time she is seventeen and lacking in "sprightly grace ... her pale and freckled visage expressed a haughty reserve, intensified as soon as her eye fell upon the visitor [Peak]. She had a slight but well-proportioned figure, and a mass of auburn hair carelessly arranged" (75). From this initial description one cannot say Marcella is especially unattractive, if one excepts the freckles. But herein lies a clue as to how Peak sows the seeds for his later undoing.

When Peak notices Christian Moxey's attentiveness to his homely cousin Janet, a girl "whose plain features" are not to his own liking, he is "astonished." For he "deemed it incredible that any man should conceive a tender feeling for a girl so far from beautiful." (76)

Although one must be careful not to associate Gissing with such ludicrous feelings – at least in

the novel – they do characterise the shallow views self-centred men hold toward women as physical objects. And to that extent, Peak and Gissing have much in common. But Peak indeed sees Marcella only as a girl who has brains, and as such, she is a curiosity, “like a man,” as he later remarks.

The next meeting between these two occurs in the London apartment of the Moxeys some

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years later. Marcella, now mature, is a “shy, awkward, hard-featured ... woman whose face made such declaration of intellect and character that ... one became indifferent to its lack of feminine beauty” (114-15).

There is much sympathy in the narrator’s words here. But it is a pitiful sympathy. For even without reading the book to its conclusion one senses that unless something radical happens to Peak – or, rather, by turning the book into a mediocre romance – to bring these two together in the end, happily or tragically (as Dickens or Hardy might have done), Marcella will not, despite her best attributes, get the man. In short, Peak practically ignores her throughout the book. She is so very remote from his great ideal and his studious campaign to reach the upper rungs of social eminence.

Thus we have another view of Godwin Peak. Marcella Moxey, unusual and complicated in her own way, has a heart that accompanies the subtleties of her personality, which could have well complemented the more austere features of Godwin Peak. But she is held off, an object of scorn if not outright fear. And Gissing’s view of Peak at this point is more critical than admirable.

The next important break between Gissing and his protagonist occurs when Peak’s hypocrisy is perpetrated on the Warricombe family, especially Sidwell’s old father. After having been invited by Sidwell’s brother Buckland to the Warricombe home, Peak soon declares himself an enlightened Christian and a candidate for church office as a parson. This acknowledgment is accepted by all of the Warricombe family, except Buckland, who, as a radical in politics and a long-standing agnostic, had known Peak some ten years earlier as a somber scientific-minded student.

It is at this juncture that Gissing begins to objectify his account of Peak’s apostasy, and sets him up in an almost too obvious fashion for the inevitable deflation of his egoism. Indeed, from the moment Peak crosses the line between common decency and arrogant ambition, one feels the novel’s abrupt change. Before this, the sympathy, the sharing of misunderstood hopes and motives

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springing from inherent talent and ability, the author and character are more or less one. But the novelist becomes aware now that Peak, pushed to an extreme state as an “agnostic optimist” or cynical pessimist, can turn out to be a monster of a high order.

If Gissing had gone forward, taking Peak to his limit, he might have succeeded in creating a new kind of character for English literature, but at the expense of something much dearer to him than he had probably realised before – his own common decency. This means, of course, that Gissing recognised the growth in himself over the ten-year period since the writing of “The Hope of Pessimism”. In Peak, one might say, Gissing’s reflections on himself had reached a point of shock, and his pulling back from the character had interesting side effects in the novel’s concluding chapters.

Earlier mention was made of the too obvious manner in which Peak’s hypocrisy becomes a moral lesson. This is true, but another point is that the author’s own sympathies, after recognition of what Peak threatens to become, appear to expand, or, better, to proliferate through the other characters who know of or have had contact with Peak. There is, in effect, a diffusion of effort that makes every character we meet speak words that seem to contain ironic meanings pertinent to Peak

(who, in essence is the only major character in the novel).

Peak, from the outset of his venture, strangely, never consciously condones the odious nature of his scheme. But while one can, or may, accept that he is not implicitly evil, or, even more important, not necessarily unmoral, he takes every opportunity to rationalise his actions. For example, he is comfortable among the Warricombes and decides that, while none of them is his intellectual equal, at least they have the social connections that will form a base for his rising in the world. Like many before him, he believes that the church represents a seeding ground for divergent opinions, the only firm commitment required of its constituents being a broad acceptance of the

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Thirty-nine Articles of faith. Attached to this faith is the rooted conventionality of genteel society, of which the Warricombes are a part, and among whom Peak feels he belongs: "I look to the Church, not only as a congenial sphere of activity," he declares to Buckland Warricombe, the bewildered witness to Peak's conversion, "but as a means of subsistence" (175).

And a little earlier, while enjoying the hospitality of the Warricombe family, Peak has been turning over in his mind the various concomitants that have led him to his good fortune. He begins to feel the true meaning of English patriotism is shown in its domestic life. The "English home," he reflects, "was it not surely the best result of civilisation in an age devoted to material progress? Here was peace, here was scope for the kindest emotions. Upon him – the born rebel, the scorner of average mankind, the consummate egoist – this atmosphere exercised an influence more tranquillising, more beneficent, than even the mood of disinterested study" (169). And before this, filled with wonder at his luck when Buckland first points out the Warricombe home, Peak "exulted in the prerogatives of birth and opulence, felt proud of hereditary pride, gloried that his mind was capable of appreciating to the full those distinctions which, by the vulgar, are not so much as suspected" (159).

Under such warmth, Peak's mind and spirit are at ease, but he recognises the price – the Faustian gamble? – involved: Should he renounce this proffered prize for the "unending struggle with adverse conditions?" Such a resolve would require a heroism he was unwilling to exert. And "how was heroism possible without faith?" he asks. Thus the index to Peak's character reveals itself, and it serves to answer for the author, as well as for Peak: "Absolute faith he had none; he was essentially negativist, guided by the mere relations of phenomena" (169).

This Schopenhauerian reasoning appears to be more than just narrative expedience. It has the tone espoused in the essay "The Hope of Pessimism" of Gissing's youth; but with this exception:

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the novel is less emotional, more abstract, and out of the context of the essay. But there is an echo almost of a past uncertain condition that now, some ten years since the essay was written, has a hollowness for its author. Peak is shown to be a shallow fellow beyond redemption; he is not admirable any more, nor does he ever again find admiration conveyed through his narrator-creator to the reader. Specifically, it is here that Gissing confronts himself. For example, after confessing his hopes to Warricombe of entering the church, Peak is left alone, and by means of a Peak (Gissing) soliloquy, a kind of thought juxtaposition takes place: "[A] turbulence in his brain gave warning that it would be long before he slept.... What had happened seemed to him incredible: it was as though he revived a mad dream, of ludicrous coherence.... What fatal power had subdued him?... Shame buffeted him on the right cheek and the left.... To pose with unctuous hypocrisy before people who had welcomed him under their roof, unquestioned, with all the grace and

kindliness of English hospitality! To lie shamelessly in the face of his old fellow-student, who had been so genuinely glad to meet him again!" (176-77). Peak therefore becomes Gissing's scapegoat, a cathartic projection of the author's own curious thoughts from his past life onto his character. Although "The Hope of Pessimism" as a reasoned treatise is a forced work for the most part, Peak, speaking of his own case, is a reverberating of the essay, which itself has come to be looked upon by Gissing – in Peak's voice, however, as a "mad dream, of ludicrous coherence."

Conversely, Peak is not actually as conscience-stricken as his seeming guilt-ridden inner monologue in the above passage might appear. Indeed, Gissing himself speaks again through Peak in subsequent paragraphs, almost in relief. It seems now he grasps fully Peak's potential if taken to an extreme:

At the time of his profound gloom, when solitude and desire crushed his

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spirit, he had wished that fate would afford him such an opportunity of knavish success. His imagination had played with the idea that a man like himself might well be driven to this expedient, and might even use it with life-long result.... Life is a terrific struggle for all who begin it with no endowments save their brains. A hypocrite was not necessarily a harm doer; easy to picture the unbelieving priest whose influence was vastly for good, in word and deed. (177)

This passage is less equivocal than it sounds. Peak's rationalizing, in fact, is Gissing's spiritual purging of his identification with the character. And, as if to lessen the pain in giving up the character, Gissing substitutes pity for admiration, in the lamentable phrase, "A hypocrite was not necessarily a harm-doer." In the final paragraph of the chapter, Gissing leaves Peak blatantly transparent.

But he, he who had ever prided himself on his truth-fronting intellect, and had freely uttered his scorn of the credulous mob! He who was his own criterion of moral right and wrong! No wonder he felt like a whipped cur. It was the ancestral vice in his blood, brought out by over-tempting circumstance. The long line of base-born predecessors, the grovelling hinds and mechanics of his genealogy, were responsible for this. Oh for a name wherewith honour was hereditary! (177-78)

The tone, the language, the apostrophic wail – everything in this passage is mockery, and self accusatory. If Peak mirrors Gissing at one time, what he now says of the experiment in pessimism can no longer be attributable to youthful rebellion. In what Peak is doing against the inherent tenets of human decency, Gissing can have no part.

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The remainder of the book, while somewhat overly long with respect to Peak's downfall – interlaced as it is with subsidiary plots – is anti-climactic. One is made most conscious of how awful a thing it is to see an author abandon his creation, to withdraw his sympathy from him, and to take such an embarrassingly long time to watch him deteriorate into a moral leper. Again and again Peak's egoism, his charlatanism, his wilful calculation is brought into view, not only by his behaviour, but by the comments about him – ironic and pithy in their apparent innocence – from his

friends. And the chief irony here is that Peak is not presented as an unlikeable fellow. Those of his friends who have known different sides of him, while never grasping the whole, accept him for what he is, or appears to be.

The major ingredient used to bring Peak low in the succeeding chapters is his own pseudo-idealism. Pseudo-idealism because, firstly, since cynicism is a basic characteristic of his make-up, he therefore cannot function properly in the realms of the ideal; and secondly, his rationalised view of femininity is just that – a calculated ploy to further his self-interest, which is used to cover his inherent sensuality, and, one might add, his fear of women.

The two women in Peak's life are Marcella Moxey, plain, intelligent, and independent, and Sidwell Warricombe, wealthy, retiring, beautiful and uncomplicated, the latter his concept of the "ideal woman." With regard to Marcella, "he could not think emotionally; indeed, she emphasised by her personality the lack which caused his suffering." But Sidwell "suggested, more completely than any woman he had yet observed, that companionship without which life must to the end taste bitter" (168).

Here are more views on Peak's "typical woman," as reflected in Sidwell:

[She] might be held a perfect creature, perfect in relation to a certain stage of human development. Look at her ... soft candlelight upon her face; compare

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her on the one hand with an average emancipated girl, on the other with a daughter of the people. How unsatisfying was the former; the latter, how repulsive! Here [in Sidwell] one had the exquisite mean, the lady as England has perfected her towards the close of this nineteenth century. (168)

This is Peak in the process of romantically manufacturing an ideal, an equal – a partner suited exactly to his specifications. While we witness the rationaliser at work, he must not be construed as a true romantic. He is, in fact, a logician, syllogising.

Later, well into his proposed "life of deliberate baseness," Peak continues constructing stepping stones to achieve his ends. Having conceded that "his place was in the hierarchy of intellect" he has but to "anticipate distinction." But he must have at his side a crown to mark his achievements – the ideal and the correct companion: "The woman throned in his imagination was no individual, but the type of an order ... a class. The sense of social distinction ... breeding.... In Sidwell Warricombe this ideal found an embodiment.... Her influence had the effect of deciding his career" (212-13).

But even such a hoped-for union must have a standard to live by, and Peak feels that "the deception he had practised must sooner or later be discovered; life-long hypocrisy was incompatible with perfect marriage." To balance any possible ill will from his mate when such a time of confession arose, he recognises that the woman he marries must be completely subordinate to his wishes:

The wife whom he imagined ... would be ruled by her emotions, and that part of her nature would be wholly under his governance.... Godwin had absolute faith

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in his power of dominating the woman whom he should inspire with tenderness.

This was a feature of his egoism, the explanation of those manifold inconsistencies inseparable from his tortuous design. He regarded his love as something so rare, so vehement, so exalting, that its bestowal must seem an abundant recompense for any pain of which he was the cause. (213-14)

Buckland Warricombe, the dissenting, suspicious member of the family, in his frantic efforts to discover the impostor in Peak, becomes the author's buffer between his dissembling friend and the trusting world he inhabits. In another sense, he is Gissing's wedge between himself and Peak, as well.

But while Buckland Warricombe is a deliberate antagonist to Peak's schemes, it is Marcella Moxey, the woman scorned, who becomes an unwitting agent of revenge against him. Also, she becomes the catalyst against Peak's misuses of the kindnesses shown to him by sympathetic friends, especially women. In a way she strikes for her sister-rival Sidwell, as well as for all women whom men fail to acknowledge as beings only somewhat higher than mechanisms of pure pleasure on their behalf. Her weapon against Peak, to extend the irony, is kindness.

It is by chance that Marcella learns that Peak is staying in Exeter, near the Warricombe estate. Through a series of inquiries gained while posing incognito and by accepting an invitation to attend a dinner at the Warricombe home, she meets the surprised Peak. They exchange gestures and plan a rendezvous to discuss his activities since leaving his London friends. During these exchanges, however, Buckland surreptitiously observes them.

Peak meets Marcella and seeks to enlist her aid in his deception after confessing to her his

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hopes and future plans. While incredulous, Marcella agrees to keep his secret, if for no other reason, she acknowledges to herself, than that she is in love with him. Also, as she now realises his designs toward Sidwell, she has him in her power.

From this point the narrative moves toward its inexorable conclusion. All that remains is the manner of Peak's unmasking, and during these scenes the novel loses much of its power as it deteriorates into melodrama – or at best an old-fashioned love story.

Through Buckland's persistent inquiries, and the inadvertent blatherings of a Moxey cohort, Peak's comeuppance is imminent. But forewarned by Buckland's growing hostility toward him and by Marcella's reappearance, Peak anticipates the threat to his plans and pleads his case rather pitifully before Sidwell. Temporarily he succeeds with her, for she admits her love for him. That she is willing to have him as a husband despite the evidence against him and the overriding objections of her family either tells foolishly of Sidwell's naiveté and gullibility or it places her in the equally untenable position of insipidity. The former is more the case, since Peak's rather maudlin confession of love, his "coming clean," so to speak, in front of Sidwell, works incredulously as a defense against the defenseless.

Once again Marcella Moxey intervenes in Peak's life. She knows of his failures with the Warricombes. After absolving herself from having taken a hand in his unmasking, she offers to help him become the man he once promised to be by giving him financial support. Pride, mixed with humiliation and his inherent sense of superiority to all persons, prompts him to refuse the offer.

Hoping against hope to retrieve his lost character and thereby triumph in the advantage of Sidwell's love, he makes an unsuccessful effort to rehabilitate himself far away from Exeter or London. The letters exchanged between him and Sidwell are less than candid; they are filled with reticence and superficial encouragement, as both seek ways of maintaining their hold over one another.

Some months ensue and Peak learns that Marcella has died suddenly, and she has indeed left him a substantial legacy, wherein he will be independent and able to pursue worthy ambitions. Peak, unable to recognise Marcella's revenge in this act of charity, blesses her. He writes to Sidwell telling her openly and without restraint of his new-found wealth, and asks her to share it with him. Recriminations from her family and friends against Peak – along with her own humiliation for having been so duped – forces her finally to reject him.

Now more isolated than ever, Peak leaves England to travel the Continent on Marcella's legacy. Without purpose to his life, racked by loneliness, he succumbs to a succession of fevers. He has died as he lived, according to his friend, Earwaker, "in Exile."

As I have said, the basic premise of this essay is to point out this book's importance as a pivotal novel in the Gissing canon. The book, while unmistakably good reading, and not without power in both ideas and artistry, falls short of its total promise because Gissing is not able to carry through its inherent characteristic – "the hope of pessimism" or its "agnostic optimism" – as a viable philosophy. There are several reasons why this is so, some of which have not been covered here. Some of them, however, have been suggested, such as Gissing's maturation as a man and artist; his personal feelings, while often replete with bitterness against his society and his status in it, are fundamentally opposed to the negativeness toward life he held as a young intellectual.

Some persons may maintain that Peak's demise is an affirmation of the ideas Gissing held in his essay on pessimism, since one of the tenets he stresses in that essay is Schopenhauer's assertion that when life ceases to be good, one should be willing to yield it up. But there are other questions in this respect that are not quite in keeping with Peak's case. He gives up on life, yes, but only after he comes to a realisation that his perfidy is to no avail. Questions may arise concerning whether or

not he truly repents his rascality; but nowhere in the novel is such a position revealed. His attitude toward Sidwell is much as he has postulated it when he constructed his conception of his ideal woman. This is not to say that Sidwell would not have accommodated him, for she is not the most courageous of women. But Peak's self-centeredness is so complete that he miscalculates the power of conventional society to maintain its hold over what it considers correct behaviour. Also, his conceit so insulates him that the worthiness of such a woman as Marcella Moxey completely eclipses his intellectual insight.

The moral tone of the novel eventually has to keep separate Peak and Gissing, the character and his creator. Whether from the too closeness of the identification, on the one hand, or from the demands of the fiction-writer to tell a story, on the other, Peak's hypocrisy, his overbearance and intellectual meanness is not wholly part of Gissing.

Despite his claims of intolerance toward many aspects of his world, Gissing remained essentially an idealist and a man deeply committed to moral principles. His writings, his thinking, his life, on the whole, made up a paradox of sentiments in quest of an ideal.

And in proportion to the suffering his humane heart endured, self-inflicted or not, his pains against the ills he saw and felt took on the guise of arrogance, much like Godwin Peak's, but without his insensitivity. Nevertheless, had he pushed Peak to succeed as he could have done, the price for the writer (which might have challenged his own sanity) may have been enormous. By withdrawing from the experiment, by separating himself spiritually from his character, Gissing became a better writer, on balance, in several of his later books, than he had been before *Born in*

*Exile.*

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Notes

<sup>1</sup>*Born in Exile* (1892; rpt. London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1970). All page references are from this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912). See also Frank Swinnerton, *George Gissing* 3rd ed. (1912; 1923; rept. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1966).

<sup>3</sup>Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1965); Gillian Tindall, *The Born Exile: George Gissing* (London: Temple Smith, 1974). Both books are excellent critical biographies, each in its own way, on Gissing's life and works.

<sup>4</sup>See *George Gissing: Essays & Fiction*, ed. and introd. Pierre Coustillas (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp.75-97. All references to the essay are from these pages.

<sup>5</sup>Jacob Korg, "The Spiritual Theme of 'Born in Exile,'" *Collected Articles on George Gissing*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1968), pp. 131-41.

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Abstract of the Dissertation

*Maidens and Matrons: Gissing's Stories of Women*

by Sandra Solotaroff Enzer, Ph.D., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1978.

Approximately one-third of Gissing's hundred published short stories employ female protagonists or illustrate various aspects of women's experience. This study examines the social, autobiographical and literary elements that influenced Gissing's portrayal of women in stories

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written from 1893 to 1903. For descriptive and analytical purposes, I have arranged the stories into four groups: The Spinster, The New Woman, The Wife, and The Working-Class Woman.

Gissing's stories anticipate many themes that have become the staples of modern feminist fiction, including woman's social and spiritual alienation, her struggle for selfhood, and her reaction to the sterility of marriage. Gissing's approach, however, was not that of the radical feminist. He advocated neither militancy nor covert rebellion against traditional male supremacy. But these stories implicitly demonstrate the necessity for a serious reevaluation of female education as the most effective means for alleviating the repressed condition of women. Gissing's negative characterisations of women as irrational and frivolous creatures clearly illustrates the results of inadequate training not only upon the individual, but also in the larger social ramifications of this failure concerning employment, marriage, and family stability.

Beyond the question of education, Gissing also scrutinised other social phenomena reflecting the problematic state of contemporary womanhood. He was one of the first writers to portray the spinster in terms of economic and social deprivation. His satire of her personal idiosyncrasies did



not preclude a larger compassion for her plight which mirrored the prejudices of a society still viewing wifehood as the only fitting role for women.

Gissing's stories of the New Woman reflect the emotional and social disjunction which he believed to be typical of many women who reject domestic ties. Nowhere in these stories does he denigrate the aims of serious feminism, but he does illustrate how the faulty comprehension and misapplication of feminist principles often are used to justify selfishness, rudeness, and hedonism under the guise of "independence." In addition, he sympathetically describes the problems of the educated professional woman in pursuing a self-sufficient existence.

In stories of Wives and Working-Class Women, Gissing's conservatism is most apparent. He

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believed that the roles of wife and mother offered the greatest fulfillment to women. Beyond femininity and intelligence, his ideal woman evinces strong domestic capability. Measured against this standard, most of his fictionalised wives fall short, but paradoxically even the best of them cannot assuage the boredom which Gissing feels inevitably descends upon marriage. Yet he can conceive of no viable alternative to the marriage state. In several closely autobiographical stories that reflect Gissing's unsuccessful efforts to educate his own wives, the triumph of fictionalised husbands over immature or shrewish wives represents obvious wish-fulfillment.

Unlike many contemporaries, Gissing refused to sensationalise or sentimentalise his working-class characters. Whilst he judged their vices somewhat harshly from his middle-class viewpoint, he could still sympathise with their economic struggles. But he saw their depressed condition as so pervasive and profound that even widespread educational reforms would have had little beneficial effect.

Gissing was ambivalent about his short story career. He feared commercialism and doubted his ability to produce short fiction of high quality. Yet the requirements of brevity and tautness of the story provided a much needed corrective to the prolixity of many of his novels. The short story offered opportunities to experiment with brief impressionistic sketches, techniques of foreshortening and compression, and interior monologue. In tone and point of view, Gissing's short stories avoided the outright pessimism of many other 1890's writers, offering instead a more tempered and humane assessment. Of equal significance is their lucid documentation of an important era in the social history of women,

The appendices include brief discussions of Gissing's customary habits of writing and revising, his opinions of the stories, his periodical readership, and a summary of his critical reputation.

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### George Gissing's Wakefield

This is the title of the attractive poster – published by the Gissing Trust – financed by the Wakefield Historical Society, and designed by the Planning Department of the Wakefield District Council, Wakefield. It is a remarkable pictorial document devoted to the local sites of interest to anyone concerned with the novelist and consisting of cleverly laid out photographs, drawings, maps and reproductions of old postcards and engravings, with short relevant comments (by Clifford Brook). The whole thing amounts to a guided tour through Wakefield and nearby places like Heath and Sharlston.

The following is a list of the documents used:

- 1 - a portrait of Gissing taken in Wakefield in September 1888 and signed by him.
  - 2 - the Mechanics' Institution, which appeared in an oblique way in *Denzil Quarrier* and "The Invincible Curate." Both T. W. Gissing and his son Algernon were honorary librarians of the Institution.
  - 3 - a map of central Wakefield, with figures indicating six places worth visiting.
  - 4 - a drawing of Back Lane School where George was taught by Miss Milner, then by the Reverend Joseph Harrison.
  - 5 - Sandal Castle – ruins on an old postcard – which appears in *A Life's Morning* as Pandal Castle.
  - 6 - Cliffe Hill House, Sandy Walk, where George's sisters ran their Boys' Preparatory School from 1904 to 1910.
  - 7 - a photograph showing various recent books by or on Gissing.
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- 8 - a drawing of St. John's House, St. John's Square, the residence of the fictional Mr. Baxendale, M.P., in *A Life's Morning*, and home of R. B. Mackie, M.P. for Wakefield 1880-85, a friend of Thomas Gissing's.
  - 9 - an old engraving of Wakefield Cathedral, where George was baptised when it was still called the Parish Church.
  - 10 - a fine photograph of Upper Westgate, taken about 1900. The birth-place, sold to Chaplin & Son, can be seen on the right.
  - 11 to 13 - drawings of 60 Westgate, 2-4 Thompson's Yard and 2 Stoneleigh Terrace, where Gissing wrote *The Emancipated* in the garret.
  - 14 - New Sharlston Long Run, the Pit Row of the story "The Fireband."
  - 15 - an old postcard of Heath Common, which appears in "The Quarry on the Heath" and *A Life's Morning*.
  - 16 - a map of the neighbourhood of Wakefield, with figures indicating four spots worth seeing.

This 17 ins. by 24 ins. poster, of which every Gissingite should order a copy, can be obtained from Clifford Brook, 1 Standbridge Lane, Sandal, Wakefield WF2 7DZ at the following price including postage:

Folded: U.K. 60p, overseas (surface mail) 70p.

Rolled in a cardboard case: U.K., 80p, overseas (surface mail), £1.

As this poster is being sold in aid of trust funds, it would be appreciated if all subscribers to the *Newsletter* tried to push sales in their part of the world.

P. C.

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#### Notes and News

As a means of fund-raising the Gissing Trust has arranged two guided walks in Wakefield to take place next summer when Clifford Brook will take visitors to various sites in the centre of the town which have associations with Gissing's life. The walks have been scheduled for June 10 and September 16, and those interested are asked to meet in Upper Kirkgate precinct at the west gate of the Cathedral. There will be a charge of 50p to go towards Trust funds.

Jacob Korg's *George Gissing: A Critical Biography*, first published in America sixteen years ago and in England in 1965 is to have a new lease of life in paperback form. Publication by the University of Washington Press will, it is hoped, take place in the Autumn.

The Harvester Press are to bring out the new critical edition of *Denzil Quarrier*, ed. John Halperin, this spring. The next titles in the series will be *Will Warburton* (ed. Colin Partridge), *The Paying Guest* (ed. Ian Fletcher) and *The Town Traveller* (ed. Pierre Coustillas).

The editor of the *Newsletter* gave lectures on *New Grub Street* in five French universities during the Easter term – Montpellier (January 24), Lyons (January 25), Strasbourg (February 28), Paris XII (March 13) and Rennes (March 15).

Alfred Slotnick, the Brooklyn collector, has found a book which has escaped the notice of all Gissing scholars, it would seem – *I Speak for Myself: An Editor in his World*, by Edwin Francis Edgett, with a prefatory note by William Lyon Phelps (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940). There is a chapter in it entitled "Gissing the Romantic Realist" which contains a minor anecdote. Edgett, a journalist on the *Boston Evening Transcript* from the days of the Henry Maitland scandal to the Second World War, discovered one day that a compositor on that newspaper had once known

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Gissing when he taught at the Waltham High School. Alfred Slotnick, who has identified the house in which Gissing lived early in 1877, also reports that he has found a photograph of Martha Barnes, another of his pupils in the same school.

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#### Recent Publications

##### Volume

*The Crown of Life*, edited and with an introduction by Michel Ballard, Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1978, pp. xx + 341; £7.50. Brown cloth in orange dust-jacket. Contains a bibliographical

note on the book's publishing history, textual notes and a bibliography.

Articles, reviews, etc.

- Anita Miller, "Introduction to the Arnold Bennett Bibliography," *Arnold Bennett Newsletter*, II, no. 2, Winter 1976-Spring 1977, pp. 6-75. Contains many references to critical pieces on Gissing by Bennett. This is the same text as that which appeared in *Arnold Bennett: An Annotated Bibliography of His Periodical Work* by Anita Miller (Garland Publishing, Inc.). Anita Miller is the editor of the *Arnold Bennett Newsletter*, whose purpose is to disseminate information about current work on Bennett and other Edwardian novelists. Interested librarians and individuals may write to her at 334, Hawthorn, Glencoe, Illinois 60022, U.S.A.

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- George Joseph Mecherly, "Literary Influences on the Novels of George Gissing," *Dissertation Abstracts International*, XXXVII, no. 12, June 1977, p. 7764A.
- Francesco Badolato, "Schede," *Ausonia*, XXXIII, no. 3-4, May-August 1978, pp. 90-100, 102. Reviews of *The Emancipated*, *La Nouvelle Bohème* and *Le Roman anglais au XIXème siècle*.
- Martha Vicinus, "Reviews," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, December 1978, pp. 390-91. A passage on Gissing in this review of two recent books which contain discussions of *The Odd Women*: Jean E. Kennard's *Victims of Convention*, Archon Books, 1978, and Nina Auerbach's *Communities of Women*. See below.
- Francesco Badolato, "Il Romanzo inglese nell' interpretazione francese," *Italia Intellettuale*, July-December 1978, p. 9.
- Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction*, Harvard University Press, 1978. Contains many references to Gissing's works and a substantial discussion of *The Odd Women*, pp. 141-57.
- Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, London: The Macmillan Press, 1978. Again various references to the works and a long discussion of *The Odd Women*.
- Yukio Otsuka, "La Nouvelle Bohème," *Bulletin de la Faculté des Sciences Humaines de l'Université de Fukuoka*, Japan, 1978, pp. 941-42. Review of the French translation of *New Grub Street*.
- Leslie Hampshire, "Memories Rekindled." *The Express* (Wakefield), January 12, 1979, Second

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Section, p.17. A letter to the editor about 2 Thompson's Yard, Wakefield.

- Anon., "Trust gets a cheque from George Gissing's old home," *Evening Post*, January 18, 1979, p. 6. The home referred to is 7 Clifton Terrace, Dorking, where the novelist lived in 1898-99.

- Anon., "Gissing donor lives in author's Dorking home," the *Express* (Wakefield), January 19, 1979, p. 6.
- Anon., "Broadsheet sets out Gissing's Wakefield," the *Express* (Wakefield), February 9, 1979, p. 2. On the poster described in the present number. The *Yorkshire Post* for February 10, p. 14, had a paragraph entitled "Briefly" on the same subject.
- Anon., "Restoring George Gissing's Birthplace," *Country Life*, February 15, 1979, p. 381. With photographs of Thompson's Yard and of Gissing (1895).
- Anon., "Commemorating the achievements of novelist George Gissing," *Leeds and Yorkshire Topic*, February, 1979, pp. 48-49. Again with photographs of Thompson's Yard and of Gissing (1895).
- Anon., "Gable Demolition Plan at Historic House," the *Express* (Wakefield), March 23, 1979, p. 6.
- Anon., "Il 75° della morte di George Gissing: Giu le mani da quella casa," *Euro* (Rome), March 1979, p. 129.
- Anon., "The Gissing Trust," *L'Esagono* (Periodico della Brianza), March 1979, p. 13.

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- Jean-Paul Hulin and Pierre Coustillas, eds., *Victorian Writers and the City*, Publications de l'Université de Lille III, 1979. Contains a long essay on "Gissing's Variations on Urban and Rural Life," pp. 113-44. The other essays include a general survey of the theme, and pieces on Kingsley, Ruskin, Kipling, Frederic Harrison (by Martha Vogeler) and Arthur Morrison.
- Kate Taylor (compiler), *Wakefield District Heritage*, volume II, published by Architectural Heritage: Wakefield District Group. The Gissing family appears, with illustrations, on pp. 30-35. Other articles, all reprinted from the *Wakefield Express* with many illustrations, are of interest to students of Gissing. This volume will be reviewed in one of the next few numbers.