

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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The Gissing Symposium

John Harrison
Oxford

Over thirty Gissing scholars and enthusiasts – representing at least five different countries – attended the Gissing symposium which was organized by the Gissing Trust and held at Bretton Hall College, Wakefield on the week-end of the 4th-6th of September, 1981. Both the charming atmosphere of Bretton Hall – picturesquely situated amidst a thickly wooded countryside and a small lake, it still bears the air of the country house it once was (an appropriate setting indeed for discussing the creator of *Isabel Clarendon* and *Born in Exile*) – and the delightfully warm and

Editorial Board

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Editorial correspondence should be sent to the Editor:
10, rue Gay-Lussac, 59110-La Madeleine, France,
and all other correspondence to: C. C. KOHLER,
12, Horsham Road, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2JL, England.

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sunny weather (as Gissing would undoubtedly have noted in his diary) conspired to make the week-end as enjoyable as it was edifying.

The symposium, which was chaired by Patrick Parrinder, concentrated on both Gissing the man and author, and papers were presented by a number of well-known scholars: P. J. Keating, Jacob Korg, Gillian Tindall, John Halperin, Christopher Heywood, David Grylls, and, of course, Pierre Coustillas, the dean of Gissing scholarship.

A wide variety of topics were discussed – ranging from Gissing’s strengths and weaknesses as a novelist to his own view of Dickens as a novelist. Christopher Heywood focused his attention on Gissing and realism, whilst David Grylls discussed the conflict in Gissing’s novels between an overt pessimism on the one hand, and a belief in willpower on the other, giving particular attention to that often neglected, yet significant book, *The Emancipated*.

Jacob Korg, who spoke on Gissing’s experiences in America read a poem Gissing wrote while teaching at the Waltham High School, near Boston, Massachusetts in early 1877. The poem, entitled “The Candy Store,” is reminiscent of Poe’s “The Raven” in its construction and shows Gissing to be in a cheerful and rather frolicsome mood.

All of the papers were of a consistently high standard and it would be extremely difficult here to do them the justice they deserve. It is hoped, therefore, that at least some – preferably all – of the papers presented will be published in one form or another in the not too distant future. The debates the various papers gave rise to testified to their interest.

John Goodchild, Wakefield M.D. Archivist, discussed the historical background of Wakefield and the Gissing family. This was followed by a tour of the local Gissing sites, many of which figure prominently in both *A Life’s Morning* and *Denzil Quarrier*. The tour was conducted by Clifford Brook, whose research on both the novelist and his family has proven remarkably fruitful in recent

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years. Mr. Brook also played a major role in preventing the author’s family home in Thompson’s Yard from being demolished. The tour was then followed by a very entertaining and enlightening public lecture by Pierre Coustillas in one of the local Wakefield Libraries.

The small exhibition which was held in Wakefield last year had been remounted by Clifford Brook and his local friends, and since the printed word held such a large place in Gissing’s life, it was quite appropriate that books, particularly his own works and criticism about them, should have been on display—thanks to Chris Kohler.

The symposium was an unqualified success, and special thanks should go to all the members of the Gissing Trust, and principally to Ros Stinton, without whose help this week-end conference might never have taken place.

In noting the increasing number of articles and books which have appeared in the last two decades, Pierre Coustillas concluded – with a touch of irony worthy of Gissing himself – that Gissing is as alive and well today as he has ever been since his death – thanks largely, one must add, to Professor Coustillas’s own scholarly contributions.

(Other accounts of the Gissing Symposium have appeared in the *Wakefield Express* and in the *Times Literary Supplement*. See “Recent Publications.” A report by Pierre Coustillas is to be published in the *Bulletin de la Société française d’Etudes victoriennes et édouardiennes*. – Ed.)

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Gissing’s *The Whirlpool* and Schopenhauer

Gisela Argyle
York University

In 1893 Edmund Gosse wrote, “the Anglo-Saxon race is now the only one that has not been touched by that pessimism of which the writings of Schopenhauer are the most prominent and popular exponent.” (1) Gissing was a notable exception. The high regard in which he held

Schopenhauer, who played a major role in his intellectual life, is evidenced by an 1894 note in his

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diary in which he proudly recorded of his three-year old son, “the boy is beginning to learn the names of portraits and pictures hanging round the room: Michael Angelo, Shakespeare, Schopenhauer, Kant, Turner, Daudet, George Sand, etc.” (2) It helps define Gissing’s place as a serious experimental novelist, “the Gissing who disappeared,” (3) to study his use of Schopenhauer. Hardly any sustained work has followed C. J. Francis’s general survey, “Gissing and Schopenhauer,” which gave a first comprehensive account of Gissing’s knowledge of Schopenhauer’s philosophy and its pervasive presence in Gissing’s work: “the ideas of Schopenhauer manifest themselves more or less clearly in all the ... novels; partly ... in the form; very noticeably, in the view of life presented.” (4)

In his introduction to Gissing’s essays Pierre Coustillas (5) summarizes what can be deduced about Gissing’s familiarity with Schopenhauer’s philosophy, to which he was apparently led by his German friend, Eduard Bertz. Bertz sketched for Gissing the German chapter, entitled “Mind-Growth,” of his first published novel *Workers in the Dawn* (1880). At Bertz’s suggestion Gissing has the heroine study Schopenhauer’s essays *Parerga und Paralipomena*. Gissing himself probably came to own the collected works (6 vols., Leipzig, 1873-74), and by 1882 (a year before the first English translation of the complete works) had assimilated Schopenhauer’s philosophy into the essay “The Hope of Pessimism” (1882, not published in his lifetime), an early and lasting formulation for Gissing of his own philosophy of life and art.

Taking it as an “eternal truth that the world is synonymous with evil,” Gissing held that a “conscious and consistent pessimism” can be the only rational attitude to life, and pity the only rational attitude to oneself and one’s fellow-beings. The only activity which does not share the evil egotism of the “battle of life” is art:

The artistic mind, as Schopenhauer demonstrates, is *das reine Subjekt des*

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Erkennens, the subject contemplating the object without disturbing consciousness of self. In the mood of artistic contemplation the will is destroyed, self is eliminated, the world of phenomena resolves itself into pictures of absolute significance, and the heart rejoices itself before images of pure beauty. Here, indeed, good does prevail over evil, and there is excellence in the sum of things. (6)

Consequently, art is the only human pursuit which justifies a rational “worldly optimism.” In his *Commonplace Book* Gissing asked, “might one define *Art* as a satisfying and abiding expression of the zest for life?” (7) In the *Ryecroft Papers* his answer was affirmative. (8)

The novel which best rewards a close analysis of an affinity with Schopenhauer’s philosophy is *The Whirlpool* (1897). It is a late, well-fashioned work, which shows consistent, though not explicit, parallels between Schopenhauer’s arguments and the judgments Gissing makes in his presentation and discussion of the work’s main issues – marriage, family, and generally, modern relations between men and women. Diary entries suggest that Gissing began to think about the new novel in December 1895 and after several starts wrote it between August and December 1896. The fact that in May 1895 he “read – first time for long – some Schopenhauer” (*Diary*, p. 374) helps

account for the exceptionally pervasive presence of Schopenhauer's ideas in the novel. Two earlier titles, "The Common Lot" and "Benedict's Household" (*Diary*, pp. 398-99, 409), were abandoned in favour of "The Whirlpool," an image which Gissing had chosen in "The Hope of Pessimism" to replace "that terrible phrase: the battle of life."

We are shipmates, tossed on the ocean of eternity, and one fate awaits us all. Let this excite our tenderness. Let us move on to the real gulfs hand clasped in hand, not each one's raised in enmity against his fellow. So will the agony of the last

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drowning moment be lightened by the thought that we have not lived in vain. ("Pessimism," p. 95)

Here, Gissing extracts hope from Schopenhauer's simile which compares the egotistic confidence of unreflective man in the midst of an infinite world of suffering with a sailor's foolish trust in his weak vessel in the middle of a raging sea:

Denn, wie auf dem tobenden Meere, das, nach allen Seiten unbegrenzt, heulend Wasserberge erhebt und senkt, auf einem Kahn ein Schiffer sitzt, dem schwachen Fahrzeug vertrauend; so sitzt, mitten in einer Welt voll QuaaLEN, ruhig der einzelne Mensch, gestützt und vertrauend auf das *principium individuationis*.... (9)

A perception of the reality of the whirlpool distinguishes a few of Gissing's characters from the majority, whom Schopenhauer in another place calls "die Fabrikwaare des Natur" (Nature's mass product).

The image recurs several times, always connoting modern social life, especially in London, in contradiction to old-fashioned virtues, such as simplicity, stability, and rationality. (Such a dialectical use of pessimism is of course contrary to Schopenhauer's claim that his philosophy is true for all times.) For instance, Harvey Rolfe, the protagonist, on leaving the city with its scandals and gossip for a week's break in a provincial town, writes to his friend, "I feel as if we were all being swept into a ghastly whirlpool which roars over the bottomless pit." Finding himself condemned to London society to please his wife, he inwardly complains that:

he had always thought with uttermost contempt of the man who allows himself to be gripped, worried, dragged down, by artificial necessities.... Was he, resistless, to be drawn into the muddy whirlpool.... He remembered his tranquil

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life between the mountains and the sea; his earlier freedom, wandering in the sunlight of silent lands. (10)

Schopenhauer's view of the world as will and idea does justice to the novel's main conflict between the two modern trends expressed in first, imperialism, commercialism, barbarism, the whirlpool of city life, and second, pacifism, art, self-culture, and simple country life. The friends Hugh Carnaby and Harvey Rolfe embody the two trends, as to a lesser extent do the other characters: "The one's physical vigour and adroitness, the other's active mind, liberal thoughts, studious habits, proved reciprocally attractive" (p. 9). Gissing endorses the second trend: his

authorial comments are in sympathy with it, he makes Harvey Rolfe's point of view the prevalent one, and he stresses, as in the essay, that it is the result of mature reflected experience. (He wrote of Harvey to H. G. Wells in 1897, shortly after publication of the novel, "later he is ripe in that experience which kills the cruder egoism.") (11) Yet to the end of the novel Gissing and his protagonist concede the validity of the first trend, the assertion of the will in Schopenhauer's terms. The characters who represent this trend, such as Hugh Carnaby and the composer of popular music, Felix Dymes, may be criticized for their lack of reflection, but their success in life makes this lack no cause for regret; nor are they presented as contemptible.

The authorities cited in the novel in support of the first trend are Darwin and Kipling. Darwin appears by allusion to his theory of the survival of the fittest (pp. 12-13, 42), and Kipling in an explicit reference in the last chapter, where Harvey reads aloud to his friend Morton from *Barrack-Room Ballads*, "with no stinted expression of delight":

"Here's the strong man made articulate... It's the voice of reaction... The brute savagery of it! The very lingo – how appropriate it is! The tongue of Whitechapel blaring lust of life in the track of English guns!" (pp. 420-21)

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He admired his work and feared its influence. (While writing *The Whirlpool* he read Kipling's *The Seven Seas* on publication, *Diary*, p. 427). His letters to Bertz, at whose suggestion he first read Kipling, chronicle the change from growing admiration, mixed with envy for Kipling's popular success, to condemnation. In 1899 he glossed Harvey's speech quoted above.

This matter is of grave importance to me. No man living more abhors the influence of Kipling than I do; and I cannot endure to have it thought that I glorified him in "The Whirlpool." You, of course, knew that that passage was ironical?

Repeating the description he had put in Harvey's mouth, he deplored "the brute savagery of Kipling's latest work." (12) Yet, like Harvey, he acknowledged Kipling's timely appeal, his expression of the *Zeitgeist*, when he called him "only the mouthpiece of a tendency" and "only an instrument of fate, but, as such, he is doing incalculable harm to the human race" (*Bertz*, pp. 256, 277).

A propos of this tendency, one might remark that in *The Whirlpool* there is no allusion to Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's uneasy disciple – the "Man-worshipper," as Gissing called him in a rare reference when writing to Bertz (*Bertz*, p. 283). The only reference in his fiction seems to be in *Our Friend the Charlatan* (1901). During the short period when the two protagonists, Dyce Lashmar and Constance Bride, see profit in sharing their self-interests, Gissing has them both read "a book of Nietzsche." Both make Nietzsche their "intimate" philosopher, each secretly liking "this insistence on the right of the strong." But in words echoing Gissing's on Kipling in *The Whirlpool* and his letters, they pretend moral superiority to Nietzsche's philosophy: "He'll do a great deal of harm in the world... The jingo impulse, and all sorts of forces making for animalism, will get strength from him, directly or indirectly... And he delivers his message so brutally." (13)

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Schopenhauer's name appears only once in *The Whirlpool*, defining Harvey's pessimism.

Affected generally by the crisis in his life with Alma and particularly by his friend Hugh Carnaby's killing of Redgrave, that is, by what in "The Hope of Pessimism" Gissing calls "the convincing metaphysics of death" (p. 87), Harvey realizes:

the infinitude of human suffering... He told himself that this was merely a morbid condition of the brain, but could not bring himself to believe it. On the contrary, what he now saw and felt was the simple truth of things, obscured by everyday conditions of active life. (p. 305)

His friend Morton quips that like Schopenhauer they will go on living by virtue of a cheerfulness which defies all philosophy. Harvey's considered answer, that "we may call that intellectual maturity," is actually truer to Schopenhauer, for Morton's reading is not as thorough as his creator's. Schopenhauer argues that a philosophical perception of life and a consequent altruism would generate "eine gewisse Gleichmässigkeit und selbst Heiterkeit der Stimmung," a certain equanimity, even cheerfulness (*Welt als Wille*, Book IV, 66, p. 442). This is indeed the mood in which we see Harvey in the last chapter: reading Kipling "with no stinted expression of delight," laughing about himself, and listening to music "with keen pleasure."

Neither in the novel nor in his essay on pessimism does Gissing advocate the option of hastening death, a choice which Schopenhauer judges a merely apparent, physical deliverance, signifying not a denial of the will but its ultimate assertion (*Welt als Wille*, Book IV, 69, p. 473). Instead, Gissing adopts Schopenhauer's arguments for the acceptance of suffering, which alone can teach the futility of its cause, the will to live, and lead to the highest moral goal: the quietest denial of the will. Rather than drive him to suicide, Harvey's growing perception of human suffering diminishes his egotism and creates a new sympathy. The change begins with his realization that he

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is "merely a looker-on" when his friends suffer from a robbery and a bank crash.

It occurred to him that it might be a refreshing and salutary change if for once he found himself involved in the anxieties to which other men were subject: this long exemption and security fostered a too exclusive regard of self, an inaptitude for sympathetic emotion, which he recognised as the defect of his character. (p.41)

His marriage involves him in the anxieties which duly mend this defect. The creation of compassion is the hope Gissing saw in pessimism. In the essay he wrote:

Suppose all men so far intellectually trained as to be capable of fully and intensely realizing the pathos of the human lot, the deeper pathos which goes so much beyond our every-day griefs, and indeed gives to such their significance, – were it not inevitable that their souls should be forthwith possessed by an overpowering mutual pity? ("Pessimism," p. 94)

But how is an "intellectually trained" man of this conviction to deal with a wife and children who are not, in a world that does not generally share this conviction? Gissing ended his essay with the hope that mankind might reach the compassionate state when "to create a being predestined to misery will come to be deemed a crime" and "a childless race will dedicate its breath to the eternal

silence” (p. 97). From the same sentiment Harvey welcomes his second child’s death in early infancy, his only thought being of “thankfulness, that this poor feeble little being was saved from life” (p. 368). Although Schopenhauer holds procreation to be an assertion beyond one’s own life of the will to live and thus of suffering and death, contraception or infanticide, like suicide, are no real solution, since only through self-knowledge can the will to live cancel itself: “Er selbst kann durch

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nichts aufgehoben werden, als durch *Erkenntniss*” (*Welt als Wille*, Book IV, 60, pp. 378-88; 69, p. 474). Correspondingly, once his first son is born, Harvey trains him in the virtues compatible with pessimism. But given the rivalry of the two modern trends, he wonders whether he is right in training the boy’s imagination rather than his will. He discusses the “difficulty of education” with Morton:

“If I followed my instincts, I should make the boy unfit for anything but the quietest, obscurest life... I should teach him to despise every form of ambition; ... I should like him not to marry ... to have no children... The best kind of education would be that which hardened his skin and blunted his sympathies... Real kindness would try to make him a healthy ruffian, with just enough conscience to keep him from crime.” (pp. 320-21)

The friends cautiously agree that there may be a gradual progress, the world coming “round to a cultivation of the amiable virtues.” Yet Gissing questions this hope when nearer the end of the novel he has them identify Kipling as the voice of the times.

Close parallels can be drawn between Gissing’s analysis and judgment of his female characters and Schopenhauer’s theories on women in their relations to men, children, other women, society, and intellectual and artistic endeavour. The difference lies in Schopenhauer maintaining that women are naturally inferior to men and therefore ill equipped to use the equality granted them in European society to any but harmful ends. Gissing’s belief in their potential equality lends force to his criticism of their actual, socially conditioned, inferiority. For a consistent view of the resultant motivations in women he could follow Schopenhauer’s arguments, mainly in the essay “Ueber die Weiber” (On Women). (14) Woman considers love “ihren allein ernstlichen Beruf” (her only serious vocation, *Parerga*, p. 650), which means she must capture a member of the stronger sex so

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that he can take care of her. As a partner she compensates for her physical and mental inferiority by unscrupulously employing dissimulation: “daher ihre instinktartige Verschlagenheit und ihr unvertilgbarer Hang zum Lügen” (*Parerga*, p. 652). Her “geistiger Myops” (mental shortsightedness, *Parerga*, p. 651) knows only expediency, not honesty and justice. The same shortsightedness confines her vision to her material environment, which frequently results in “bisweilen an Verrücktheit grenzende Hang zur Verschwendung” (inclination for extravagance which occasionally borders on madness, *Parerga*, p. 651). Being dependent on her husband for her social standing, she is more conscious of rank than he: “die Weiber sind ... die gründlichsten und unheilbarsten Philister” (the most thorough and incurable philistines, *Parerga*, p. 656). The same dependence makes her view other women as rivals. She only cares for her children while they are helpless infants, instinctively. She is incapable of developing, as a father does, a continued love “auf Gewohnheit und Vernunft gegründet” (based on habit and reason, *Parerga*, p. 660). Finally,

any interest a woman may show in the arts is never objective, but an indirect way of conquering man: the fair sex he would have us call “the unaesthetic sex” (*Parerga*, p. 654). In all, woman’s weaker power of reasoning makes her more subject to nature and thus party to the will, which puts her in conflict with the man who seeks to deny the will and live by the idea. In his *Commonplace Book* Gissing remarked on “the profound cynicism (or naturalism) of the common woman” (p. 63).

In *The Whirlpool* he makes it clear that his two main female characters capture their husbands by feminine skills that the men hardly understand. Harvey’s reaction after Alma has seduced him into committing himself to a proposal of marriage is typical:

The inconceivable had come to pass. By a word and a look Harvey had made real what he was always telling himself could never be more than a dream, and a dream of unutterable folly... This was love; but of what quality?... A shake of

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the head might cure him; but from that way to sanity all his blood shrank.
(p.105)

In marriage, it is true, both Harvey and Hugh lie to their wives, but in each case it is to protect not themselves but the honour of another woman. Alma and Sibyl lie for self-protection. Only towards the end does Alma develop scruples, but she dismisses them by blaming her circumstances. After she has lied to Harvey about a compromising letter, “Alma’s heart sank at the deception, and her skill in practising it ... Alma rebelled against the fate which made her life dishonourable. Fate – she declared – not the depravity of her own heart” (p. 391). The irresistible attraction the whirlpool of society has for the women joins with what Schopenhauer says of woman’s inclination for extravagance and her greater concern with rank. The latter also creates the jealousy between Alma and Sibyl. Whereas their husbands remain firm friends, Harvey even naming his son after Hugh Carnaby, Alma begins to resent Sibyl’s show of superiority, for she regards herself because of her marriage to Harvey “to say the least, on equal terms with Mrs. Carnaby,” economically, socially, and intellectually. “The deference she still showed was no longer genuine, and this kind of affectation, hard to support and readily perceived, is very perilous to friendship” (pp. 162-63). Her jealousy of Sibyl because of Redgrave’s favours does not arise from love, but from her wish for social success, to which his influence can help her. In agreement with Schopenhauer’s analysis of this “odium figulinum” (trade-jealousy, *Parerga*, p. 654), Gissing remarks, “jealousy without love, a passion scarcely intelligible to the ordinary man, is in woman common enough, and more often productive of disaster than the jealousy which originates in nobler feeling” (pp. 251-52).

That Harvey would like his son not to marry is the result of the misery he experiences in his own marriage and observes in nearly every one else’s. The only happy household (by Harvey’s and Gissing’s terms) is the provincial, old-fashioned one of Harvey’s friend Morton. The cause of the

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difference is Morton’s wife, “who conceived her duty as wife and mother after the old fashion, and was so fortunate as to find no obstacle in circumstance” (pp. 303-304). Asked by Harvey about her opinion on a wife pursuing a career of her own, she thinks it “only a commonplace – that a married woman would, of course, be guided by her husband’s wish” (p. 316). In the other marriages it is nearly always the wife who causes the misery. She is usually attracted to the whirlpool of social life, which for the husband means scandal, overwork, and debts, and for the children neglect. At best,

she has, like Mrs. Handover, “never learnt the elements of domestic duty (p. 22), or, like Mrs. Leach, who lives up to her name, uses her husband as a “money-making machine” (p. 350) for her extravagant tastes. At worst (in the novel’s terms), she deserts her husband and children “to follow her own walk in life,” like Mrs. Buncombe, who sings in second-rate music-halls (p. 23). Some of the half-dozen modern marriages of this kind are merely sketched, having no function in the plot but adding to the typicality of the main characters’ domestic affairs. Thus the irresponsible social ambitions of the ladies Leach and Mrs. Abbott are background to Sibyl’s readiness to prostitute herself and compromise her husband for the sake of a place in Society. Mrs. Buncombe’s finding her popularity as a second-rate music-hall singer “ample justification of the independence she had claimed” foreshadows Alma’s sacrificing her reputation, her husband’s trust, and the care of her child to a career as a second-rate concert violinist.

Although Gissing shows women to be the immediate cause of domestic misery, he blames modern urban life for providing the circumstances. He stresses that the exceptional Mrs. Morton, as wife of a small-town corn merchant, “was so fortunate as to find no obstacle in circumstance” to being the ideal *Hausfrau*. For Alma and Sibyl, and the other London women in the novel, there is no contentment in a return to a simpler life: the whirlpool of London Society, to which they have been bred, pulls them back from the escape to which their husbands have persuaded them, Wales

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for Alma and Harvey, Australia for Sibyl and Hugh. Freedom from the anxieties of the whirlpool only brings them boredom, which Schopenhauer argues is the inevitable and equally painful alternative to suffering: “denn zwischen Schmerz und Langeweile wird jedes Menschenleben hin und her geworfen” (*Welt als Wille*, Book IV, 57, p. 371), that is, unless man abandons through renunciation this see-saw pursuit. When Harvey and Alma’s experiment at a free and equal marriage – sharing “liberty, not restraint” – has failed, and they have resigned themselves to an authoritarian marriage in London:

Harvey had a troublesome conscience. In acting with masculine decision, with the old-fashioned authority of husbands, he had made himself doubly responsible for any misery that might come to Alma through the conditions of her life ... there might have been found a middle way, which, whilst guarding Alma from obvious dangers, still left her free to enjoy and aspire. (p. 358)

The care of children is a major problem in the novel, and Gissing’s pessimistic treatment of it his most unequivocal denial of the idea of progress. Harvey discusses the problem with Mrs. Abbott, who takes care in her nursery school of his son and other middle-class children whose mothers won’t:

“Naturally, children are a nuisance; especially so if you live in a whirlpool... When there’s no leisure, no meditation, no peace and quietness – when, instead of conversing, people just nod or shout to each other as they spin round and round the gulf – men and women practically return to the state of savages in all that concerns their offspring.”

Mrs. Abbott counters his conclusion that “it’s a matter for the individual” with “it’s a matter for the world, too.” Harvey agrees by showing her a sprig of last year’s heather whose “dry, rustling,

colourless bells” told “of beauty that was past, and of beauty that was to come” (p. 146). If they have children – the successfully egotistical Sibyl hasn’t any and Alma welcomes a miscarriage – the women in the novel, except for Mrs. Morton, desert or neglect them and make it hard for the fathers to act responsibly.

Finally, Gissing exposes his female characters’ intellectual or artistic interests as the mere means to social ends which Schopenhauer says they inevitably are with women. Despite appearances, Sibyl “did not read much, and not at all in the solid books which were to be seen lying about her rooms; but Lady Isobel Barker, and a few other people, admired her devotion to study” (p. 402). At our first sight of Alma playing in her amateur quartet, the narrator cautions us that her shining countenance may possibly be due to “gratified vanity” rather than “the joy of the artist” (p. 29). Her plan to come out as a professional violinist is not for the sake of music, but social rank.

In one way, and one way only, could she hope to become triumphantly conspicuous, to raise herself quite above petty social prejudices, to defeat ill-wishers and to put to shame faint-hearted friends... And she must make use of all subsidiary means to her great conquest – save only the last dishonour. (p. 212)

When, as one subsidiary means, she sits at a concert with Redgrave, she does not listen to the music, but promotes her “great conquest” by either thinking about it or chatting with the man whom she is using for it. Schopenhauer writes: “Man darf nur die Richtung und Art ihrer Aufmerksamkeit im Konzert, Oper und Schauspiel beobachten” (one need only observe the direction and quality of a woman’s attention at a concert, opera or play, *Parerga*, II, p. 655).

In contrast, Morton likes books, and Harvey takes a disinterested pleasure in the arts and natural scenery. They thus avail themselves of the world’s one rational comfort (*Welt als Wille*,

Book III, 52, pp. 315-16). Among the objects of disinterested contemplation, which can aid man in negating his will, Schopenhauer ranks nature lowest, while the arts ascend from architecture to music. Music is an immediate representation of the will, not like the other arts a representation of ideas, which in turn objectify the will. Without following Schopenhauer’s hierarchy in detail, – Gissing in “The Hope of Pessimism” also singles out music as “the most perfect utterance of the deepest truth” (p. 95; cf. Schopenhauer, “der Komponist offenbart das innerste Wesen der Welt und spricht die tiefste Weisheit aus” – the composer reveals the inmost essence of the world and expresses the deepest wisdom, *Welt als Wille*, Book III, 52, p. 307). In the novel Harvey at first responds to Alma “with too exclusive an interest” because “music had power over him” (p. 28; cf. “die Musik ... wirkt so mächtig auf das Innerste des Menschen” – music has such a powerful effect on the inmost being of man, *Welt als Wille*, Book III, 52, p. 302). Alma’s perversion of music to a social ruse is the strongest condemnation of the whirlpool. The fact that Dymes, a vulgar, vain, ambitious person, can compose “tender” melodies of “sweetness and pathos” which pass the judgment of critical listeners (pp. 179, 181), need not amaze the reader of Schopenhauer, as it does Alma: the composer expresses the world’s essence “in einer Sprache, die seine Vernunft nicht versteht... Daher ist in einem Komponisten, mehr als in irgend einem andern Künstler, der Mensch vom Künstler ganz getrennt und unterschieden” (in a language which his reason does not understand... Therefore in a composer, more than in any other artist, the man is completely separate

and distinct from the artist, *Welt als Wille*, Book III, 52, p. 307).

The optimism about art which Gissing shares with his main character is also evident in his care for the form of his pessimistic novel. To repeat his summary of Schopenhauer's aesthetics: in the work of art the artist shares with his audience a view of the world of phenomena which is a significant and purely beautiful view by force of its objectivity. This justifies the artist's optimism:

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he improves the human lot by increasing the beautiful and by exercising his audience's denial of egotism in the disinterested, objective contemplation of it. This Schopenhauerian aesthetic, first formulated in "The Hope of Pessimism," was well suited to last Gissing through his writing career, since it combined his own inclination for disinterested observation and artistic workmanship with his period's tendencies to realism and art-for-art's sake. Notable results of this aesthetic in *The Whirlpool* are, in terms of objectivity, the choice of subject matter and its sincere and dramatic presentment; in terms of beauty, the imaginative thematic grouping of characters; in terms of both, the careful style, with its characteristic distanced, highly latinized, diction. (15) (Examples of these aspects can be found in the discussion of the novel's contents, above). *The Whirlpool* fulfils the ambition which Waymark, a student of Schopenhauer in Gissing's *The Unclassed* (1884), expresses about the novel he is writing:

Not *virginibus puerisque* will be my book, I assure you, but for men and women who like to look beneath the surface, and who understand that only as artistic material has human life any significance... Life for its own sake? – no ... but life as the source of splendid pictures, inexhaustible material for effects – that can reconcile me to existence, and that only. (16)

Waymark here paraphrases Schopenhauer's conclusion to his chapter on art: the comfort of art lies in the fact that:

das An-sich des Lebens, der Wille, das Daseyn selbst, ein stetes Leiden und theils jämmerlich, theils schrecklich ist; dasselbe hingegen als Vorstellung allein, rein angeschaut, oder durch die Kunst wiederholt, frei von Quaäl, ein bedeutsames Schauspiel gewährt.

(Life as such, the will, existence itself, is a continued suffering, partly miserable, partly terrible; yet

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the same as idea alone, purely contemplated or repeated through art, free from pain, provides a significant spectacle, *Welt als Wille*, Book III, 52, p. 315).

1 - Edmund Gosse, "The Limits of Realism in Fiction," *Questions at Issue* (London, 1893), p. 149; quoted in C. J. Francis, "Gissing and Schopenhauer," reprinted in *Collected Articles on Gissing*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968), p. 112. For Thomas Hardy Schopenhauer's role has been established as limited to a late confirmation of a pessimism which was his response to experience and English reading (see Harvey Curtis Webster, *On a Darkling Plain*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1947, reprinted by Archon Books, 1964; and G. W. Sherman, *The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy*, Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University

Press, 1964). Also, since Hardy, unlike Gissing, did not know German, he would quote secondary English sources.

- 2 - *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1978), p. 334; hereafter noted as *Diary* in the text. For personal reasons Gissing destroyed the early part of his diary up to 1887, that is, including the time of his first reading of Schopenhauer.
- 3 - Michael Collie, "How George Gissing Disappeared," *English Studies in Canada*, I (Winter 1975), pp. 434-49.
- 4 - Francis, *op .cit.* The article corrected the view of a mere obligatory name-dropping held by Ralph Goodale in "Schopenhauer and Pessimism in Nineteenth-Century English Literature", *PMLA*, XLVII (March, 1932), pp. 244, 260. There exists a dissertation by Janet Voth Foote on

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"Gissing and Schopenhauer, A Study of Literary Influence" (Indiana, 1968). Ulrich Annen, in *George Gissing und die Kurzgeschichte* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1973), describes the short stories as "resembling works of propaganda for Schopenhauer's doctrine of renunciation" (p. 90), but he does not draw the connection between Schopenhauer's philosophy and realism and art for art's sake. My study *German Elements in the Fiction of George Eliot, Gissing and Meredith* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1979) treats the topic of this article more generally.

- 5 - "Introduction", *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).
- 6 - "The Hope of Pessimism," *ibid.*, pp. 88, 95; hereafter noted as "Pessimism" in the text.
- 7 - *George Gissing's Commonplace Book*, ed. Jacob Korg (New York: The New York Public Library, 1962), p. 69.
- 8 - George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (London: Constable, 1903), p. 59.
- 9 - Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, ed. J. Frauenstädt, I (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1873), Book IV, 63, pp. 416-17; hereafter noted as *Welt als Wille* in the text.
- 10 - George Gissing, *The Whirlpool* (New York: AMS Press, 1969), pp. 44, 201; for further examples see pp. 145, 175, 233, 299. Hereafter noted in the text.
- 11 - *George Gissing and H. G. Wells, Their Friendship and Correspondence*, ed. Royal A. Gettmann (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), p. 48.
- 12 - *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, 1887-1903*, ed. A . C. Young (London:

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Constable, 1961), pp. 268-69; hereafter noted as *Bertz* in the text.

- 13 - George Gissing, *Our Friend the Charlatan*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), pp. 235-36.
- 14 - Arthur Schopenhauer, "Ueber die Weiber," in *Parerga und Paralipomena*, ed. Julius Frauenstädt (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1874), II, pp. 649-62, *passim*; hereafter noted as *Parerga* in the text.
- 15 - Anne Pilgrim treats Gissing's scholarly diction as symptomatic of the severe stratification among readers of the modern novel, in "Gissing's Imagined Audience", *Gissing Newsletter*, X, no. 2 (1974), pp. 14-19.
- 16 - George Gissing, *The Unclassed* (2nd ed., London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1895), pp. 116-117.

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Some Early Letters Re-dated

Pierre Coustillas

Readers of Gissing's *Letters to Members of his Family* who have consulted the unpublished correspondence are aware of some difficulties in dating and establishing the chronology of George's correspondence with his father and younger brother during the period 1868-1870. Algernon and Ellen Gissing themselves, although they printed only three of the seven letters which have been preserved for those years, duly noted their tentative dating. They say of the second letter in the book, written at Seascale, that it is "plainly written Jan., but surely a mistake for June," and they add before passing on to the third letter (to Algernon, dated Dec. 28th): "If Jan. of the preceding letter is correct it must belong to 1870. The advancement in style may support this, so possibly George and his mother had joined the invalid" – that is Algernon, who was staying alone at

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Seascale in December 1869 for his health – for a couple of weeks in the new year. The editors left the problem unsolved, being in two minds about it because the letter dated "Jan. 17th" though essentially descriptive, offers no clear evidence as to the time of the year – winter or summer – when George actually wrote it. Besides, the supplied dates on the originals of several other letters indicate further difficulties.

The first two letters, written at Monkshouse, are only dated "25th" and "27th" on the originals, both of which are in the Beinecke Library at Yale University, "July 1868" being added in an unknown hand. "June" (p. 1 in the *Letters*) may have been an afterthought of the editors, but it is not as plausible as July because in June young George would normally still have been at school in Wakefield. The style and spelling certainly support the theory that these two letters were written some eighteen months before the next batch of five. These consist in:

(1) an undated letter to Algernon (*Letters*, pp. 3-4) which is held by the Pforzheimer Library; on the manuscript, the date supplied in brackets in an unknown hand reads 'Dec. 28/68?' Internal evidence shows that Algernon was at Seascale.

(2) a letter to T. W. Gissing dated "Seascale Jan. 5th." which was acquired by the Pforzheimer

Library in 1971. It contains a detail which disposes of the theory according to which this second series of letters was written in the summer of 1869. George observes that “the place is not altered a bit” and that indeed, for his part, he likes it just as well “now as I do in summer.”

(3) three letters to T. W. Gissing, all at Yale, dated from Seascale, respectively “8th Jan.,” “15th” and “Jan. 17th.” The last of these is printed in full in the *Letters to the Family*, pp. 2-3. They make a quite satisfactory sequence.

It ensues that the date of the first letter of this second batch is certainly 28th December 1869.

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Algernon had been sent to Seascale ahead of George and his mother, probably a little before Christmas 1869 and he was staying as the Gissing usually did with a certain Mrs. Tyson. Mrs. Gissing and her elder son joined him, very likely in early January 1870. William remained at Wakefield with his father. The fact that, in his letter of 5th January 1870, George wrote “we all send our best love to everybody” does not enable us to be sure of the whereabouts of Margaret and Ellen, respectively about six and two years old, at the time. But in the same letter George gave his love to “Aunty.” So it is possible that some aunt, perhaps Mrs. Gissing’s sister, aunt Lizzie, alias Elizabeth Edmonds, had come to keep house at 55 Westgate in her absence. By “all,” George would thus have meant his mother, Algernon and himself. But this is mere conjecture.

One thing now appears to be solidly established: after the letter of 21 July 1863 (now in the Pforzheimer Library, and the first of Gissing’s letters on record) written in Swansea, and the two letters of July 1868 sent from Monkshouse, we have a Wakefield letter to Algernon at Seascale, followed by four from Seascale addressed to Thomas Gissing, and this batch of five definitely belongs to December 1869 and January 1870.

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Notes on *The House of Cobwebs*

P. F. Kropholler

[The edition referred to is the first English edition, 1906.]

- p. 4, l. 4.

“Home, Sweet Home.”

A popular song which first appeared in the opera *Clari, the Maid of Milan* (1823). Text by John Howard Payne, music by Sir Henry Bishop.

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- p. 12, l. 11.

“*nulla dies sine linea.*”

A motto attributed to the painter Apelles (Pliny the Elder: *Naturalis Historia*, 35, 10).

- p. 15, l. 23.

“A knavish trick”.

Perhaps a reference to the line in the national anthem: "Frustrate their knavish tricks."

- p. 126, l. 25.
"evil tongues."
Might be a reference to Milton: *Paradise Lost*, VII, 26 ("On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues").
- p. 147, l. 7.
"And at noon the house knew him no more."
Perhaps inspired by Job: VII.10 ("neither shall his place know him any more").
- p. 169, l. 24.
"suffering from hope deferred".
Cf. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." (Proverbs, XIII.12).
- p. 220, l. 18.
"hope springing eternal."
"Hope springs eternal in the human breast" (Pope: *An Essay on Man*, I, 95).
- p. 247, l. 13.
"to herd with narrow foreheads."
From Tennyson: *Locksley Hall*, 175: "I, to herd with narrow foreheads."
- p. 260, l. 23.
"a moment's weakness of the flesh."
A reference to St. Matthew, XXVI.41 ("the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak").
- p. 263, l. 13.
"There's the devil to pay".
A common expression, cf. "Godlike in giving, but --"the devil to pay!" (Thomas Moore: "On a Cast of Sheridan's Hand").

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- p. 263, l. 20.
"what is it in Dante? - *il fumo in aere ed in aqua la schiuma!*"
From *Divina Commedia*, Inferno XXIV, 51 (*aqua* in the story is a misprint for *acqua*).
- p. 265, l. 12.
"their task was the same to-day as yesterday."
Perhaps a reference to the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews, XIII.8 ("the same yesterday, and to-day and for ever").
- p. 267, l. 15.
"bravery by flood or field."
Cf. Shakespeare: *Othello*, I.iii.135 ("moving accidents by flood and field").

- p. 272, l. 26.

“But thought is free, and so is love”.

Shakespeare: *The Tempest*, III.ii.134 (“Thought is free”).

- p. 272, l. 27.

“the light of his life”.

Cf. St. John, VIII.12 (“he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”).

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Notes and News

The H. G. Wells Society arranged a residential weekend-conference on “H. G. Wells and his literary friendships” at the Polytechnic of North London on September 19th and 20th. Three papers were read: “George Gissing and H. G. Wells” by Gillian Tindall and Patrick Parrinder, “Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells” by John Hammond, and “Henry James and H. G. Wells” by Margaret Baldwin.

Gillian Tindall reports that she discussed the history of the Gissing-Wells friendship, Wells’s presence at Gissing’s deathbed (see *Tono-Bungay*) and the reasons she thought these two so apparently dissimilar persons were attracted to one another. Her talk was mainly in terms of what Wells did for Gissing. Patrick Parrinder concentrated on what Gissing did for Wells, that is, mainly introducing him to Italy, at a period when Wells was still young and totally untraveller. The next day John Hammond spoke on Wells and Bennett – there was considerable plain-speaking between the two men at various moments – mentioning how, near the end of Bennett’s life Wells wrote to him “what a good friendship ours has been.” Then Margaret Baldwin read a long paper in which she demonstrated the way in which, in spite of friendship, neighbourliness and a good deal of mutual admiration, the fundamental difference of literary approach in James and Wells eventually drove them apart. James accused Wells of being a vulgar reformer rather than an artist. Wells accused James of skimming over the surface of his material “like a water boatman as big as an elephant” and satirised him in *Boon*.

Earlier in the year, in Limoges, on January 18th, at the annual colloquium of the French Society of Victorian and Edwardian Studies, a paper was read by Claude Jolicoeur, of the University of Nantes, on “Gissing: l’écrivain grand prêtre de la littérature.”

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In the January 1980 number of the *Newsletter*, Jacob Korg invited readers who have spotted quotations from Gissing’s works in the *Oxford English Dictionary* to notify the editor. No communication on the subject has so far reached the latter, but he himself has come across two Gissing quotations by chance:

- (i) *mundungus*: bad, smelling tobacco. 1901. *Our Friend the Charlatan*, 137, “Here’s a new mixture, my own blending ... I see your pipe is empty”... “I stick to my own

mundungus; any novelty disturbs my thoughts.”

- (ii) *to dusk*: to become dusk or dim. 1888. *A Life's Morning* XI (1890) 169, “when it began to dusk, Hood descended and supper was prepared”.

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Recent Publications

Volume

The Greenwood Press, of Westport, Connecticut, has reprinted the *Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz*, originally published in 1961 by Constable in England and Rutgers University Press in America. This new edition, dated 1980, is tastefully published in blue green cloth with white titling at \$32.60.

Articles, reviews, etc.

- Wendell V. Harris, *British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: A Literary and Bibliographic Guide*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979. See in particular pp. 111, 121-23, 127, 179-80.

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- Margaret Harris, *A Checklist of the 'Three-Decker' Collection in the University of Sydney Library*, 1980. Lists *Demos*, *Thyrza* and *A Life's Morning*, which are followed by a substantial bibliography.

- Patrick Waddington, *Turgenev and England*, London: The Macmillan Press, 1980. Brief references to Gissing.

- Ted Morgan, *Somerset Maugham*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1980. Passing references, the most significant of which concerns Maugham's review of *By the Ionian Sea* in the *Sunday Sun* in 1901. See *Gissing Newsletter*, October 1975, p. 23.

- Francesco Badolato, “Gissing e Verga: aspetti uniformi e difforni,” *Otto/Novecento*, March-April 1981, pp. 231-48.

- Michael Collie, “The Question of Motivation: George Gissing and Henry Maudsley,” *Ariel*, April 1981, pp. 3-28. Collie declares in a footnote that Gissing referred to Maudsley in both his diary and correspondence, but fails to give references.

- Francesco Badolato, “L'inglese a caccia del mondo antico,” *Italia Intellettuale*, January-June 1981, pp. 5-8. Review of Gissing's diary.

- Michel Ballard, “Dualité et duplicité dans *The Wheels of Chance*,” *Etudes Anglaises*, April-June 1981, pp. 152-64. Contains various references to Gissing's work.

- Mario Praz, "Un profeta del femminismo," *Il Tempo* (Roma), 3 July 1981, p. 3.
- Anon., *Wakefield Express*, 21 August 1981, p. 10. A paragraph on the grant from the Yorkshire Arts Association for the Gissing Symposium in Wakefield.
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- Antoine Compagnon, "Really Imaginary," *Times Literary Supplement*, 28th August 1981, p. 984. Review of Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* with passages on Gissing. – An announcement of the Gissing Symposium appears on p. 982 of the *T.L.S.*
- Anon., "Sites Tour for Gissing Fund," *Wakefield Express*, 28 August 1981, p. 5.
- [Martha Vogeler], "Language and Literature," *Choice*, July-August 1981, p. 151. Review of *George Gissing: Critical Essays*.
- Anon., "Wakefield's Crusading Novelist," *Wakefield Express*, 11 September 1981, p. 10. With a photograph of the participants in the symposium. Also "Author Read in Japan" in Second Section, p. 2.
- Gillian Tindall, "A Gissing Conference," *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 September 1981, p. 1100.
- Kate Taylor, "A Wakefield Awakening," *Pennine Magazine*, August-September 1981, pp. 28-29.
- Dennis R. Dean, "'Through Science to Despair': Geology and the Victorians," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol. 360, 1981, pp. 111-36. Contains references to *Born in Exile*.
- Verlyn Klinkenborg *et al.*, *British Literary Manuscripts*, Series II. From 1800 to 1914. New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library in association with Dover Publications Inc. Item 107 is a postcard from Gissing to A. H. Bullen in facsimile, dated 27 November 1897. An ALS to Kitton of 10 December 1902 is also in the Pierpont Morgan Library.

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