

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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“Objectified Autobiography” in the Plots  
of George Gissing’s Novels

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If fiction is, to a large extent, objectified autobiography – a feasible theory – then the interestingness of an author of fiction depends proportionately on the interestingness of the author’s own character. Despite Gissing’s habit of seclusion and rather limited social contacts, he was essentially a man of interesting and dramatic character.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1880 and 1903, George Gissing published twenty-three novels and began work on countless others, most of which he destroyed.<sup>2</sup> Even without the supporting evidence of his letters

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and diary entries, we can see that there was scarcely a time, from the age of twenty-one until his death, when Gissing was not writing fiction. His books brought him small profit; they had to be turned out swiftly, if their author were to live by his art. A novelist is, to employ a simple definition, one who sees stories in the things he contemplates. For many hours each day, Gissing saw no one

but himself and contemplated nothing but blank paper.<sup>3</sup> He had not the facility for plot-construction of a Trollope or the imagination of a Dickens; he admitted that “invention” was the “weakest of my various weak points.”<sup>4</sup> Poverty, an early criminal conviction, and successive marriages to two less-than-respectable women limited his social mobility and experiences. Thus, he was forced to use himself – his own opinions, actions, and nature – as the material for his fiction.

Gissing’s method of “objectified autobiography” succeeded, because it was rigidly selective. Unlike much confessional fiction, his was never shapeless or plotless. Gissing was obsessed with a single, albeit highly dramatic, episode in his own life; from the outlines of it, he created a basic plot with both emotional and intellectual interest and used it to illustrate his own philosophy. The main action of almost every Gissing novel involves loss – often of the protagonist’s pride, sense of self-mastery, and faith in his own abilities. However, the defeat itself eventually becomes a victory, a necessary stage in the emergence of a character’s best self.

The sources of this plot can be found in the most important incident of Gissing’s early life. At the age of nineteen, he had been an exceptionally promising student at Owens College, Manchester, preparing to enter the University of London; and at the moment when he had every reason to anticipate a secure future, he himself undermined it. Although he showed self-discipline in his studies, he had none in his love-life. He fell in love with a prostitute whom he attempted to support

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by stealing money from his school-mates. Caught, tried, convicted, and briefly imprisoned, he tumbled from a position of superiority to one of permanent dishonor.<sup>5</sup> According to Pierre Coustillas, “It is no exaggeration to say that he never recovered totally from that blow.”<sup>6</sup>

For a youth who had never experienced failure before, the hardest “blow” must have been to his own self-image. Suddenly Gissing was compelled to recognize in himself such disturbing traits as dishonesty, sexual obsession, and gullibility. We know that he refused to see only shame in this situation – that he persisted in regarding the woman, as Jacob Korg puts it, as a “victim of society” and himself as her Good Samaritan.<sup>7</sup> Soon after their marriage in 1879, however, she returned to alcohol and to the streets, robbing Gissing even of the illusion of having been her rescuer.

Nevertheless, the ordeal was not without its benefits for him. Gissing, cut off from the academic world, earning a meager salary as a tutor, and living with his diseased and drunken wife in rundown areas of London, was forced into intimate acquaintance with the wretched poor, whose plight became his new concern. For a time, he threw himself into the reform movement; he wrote articles, lectured in a workingmen’s club, and turned briefly to Positivism. His urge to improve the squalid environment into which he had been cast gave him the impetus to begin writing *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), his first published novel. Thus, out of the humiliation that his love had brought upon him came a discovery of the darker side of life, pity for those – himself included – who had to experience it, and positive efforts in the form of novel-writing. All things considered, his was almost a “fortunate” fall. As might be expected, Gissing himself wished to cling to this interpretation of the events.

Near the end of his life, Gissing, in the person of “Henry Ryecroft,” wrote:

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Foolishly arrogant as I was, I used to judge the worth of a person by his intellectual power and attainment. ... Now I think that one has to distinguish between two forms of intelligence, that of the brain, and that of the heart, and I have come to regard the second as by far the more important ... the best people I

have known were saved from folly not by the intellect but by the heart ... their faces shine with the supreme virtues, kindness, sweetness, modesty, generosity. Possessing these qualities, they at the same time understand how to use them.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Gissing's protagonists undergo a kind of sentimental education, as did the author himself. They possess "intelligence of the brain" at the outset, but quickly acquire "intelligence of the heart" – especially kindness and generosity – through the most intense suffering. Though the wisest character in *Thyrza* (1887) may say that "in spite of idealisms, suffering often does more harm than good,"<sup>9</sup> the plots of the novels point to the opposite conclusion. Pain is the key that opens the human personality, which is by nature selfish and narrow.

Throughout the novels, as in Gissing's own life, the chief source of suffering is love, which reveals to the protagonists their own weakness and dependence upon others. The heroes and heroines not only accept this unhappy knowledge gracefully, but fashion from it a new bond with the world. Having had to face and to pardon their own imperfections, they are better able to forgive the failings of those around them. They then can offer much-needed comfort, where once they felt contempt, and show "kindness" and "generosity" even to their intellectual inferiors.

We can see this pattern in action in *The Odd Women* (1893), one of Gissing's finest novels. Its protagonist, Rhoda Nunn, is employed in a feminist enterprise to train women for the business world. At the start, she proudly displays a tough exterior and a belief in Social Darwinism. She is disdainful of women less self-disciplined or intelligent than herself – "They cumber us; we have to

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fight," she explains.<sup>10</sup> Believing herself invulnerable to passion, she makes "fallen women" her special target and indirectly drives one of these, a former pupil named Bella Royston, to despair and to suicide. Although her more humane partner, Mary Barfoot, warns Rhoda about substituting fanaticism for charity, the latter retorts that "'Charity for human weakness is all very well in its place, but it is precisely one of the virtues that you must *not* teach.'"<sup>11</sup> The "virtues" that Rhoda teaches by her own example are intolerance and a combative spirit. These qualities repel a passive character such as Monica Madden and turn her away from the school, at a crucial moment; ironically, they make marriage to a man she hardly knows seem more appealing than the feminist cause which could have been her salvation.

For Rhoda to overcome her self-destructive pride, she must fall. Hers is a "fall" into love with Mary Barfoot's cousin, Everard. He and Rhoda engage in a struggle for dominance, which neither wins and which only cuts short their affair. In the aftermath, Rhoda discovers that she is as susceptible to sexual passions and jealousies, as easily distracted from her cause, and as quick to be devastated by the failure of her romance as any of the "weak" women whom she has scorned. But the experience, however humiliating, proves a blessing; released and increased by love and suffering, her emotions become a new resource in her work.

During the final crisis, Rhoda offers Monica her sympathy and support, instead of contemptuously disregarding her "weak" plea for forgiveness, as she might have done earlier. When she buoys up Monica, her argument has the sincere ring of one that she has used successfully upon herself, before putting aside her own misery and returning to her feminist mission:

'Life seems so bitter to you that you are in despair. Yet isn't it your duty to live as though some hope were before you? ... Isn't it your duty to remember at

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every moment that your thoughts, your actions, may affect another life – that by heedlessness, by abandoning yourself to despair, you may be the cause of suffering it was in your power to avert? Your life isn't wrecked at all – nonsense! You have gone through a storm, that's true, but more likely than not you will be all the better for it.<sup>12</sup>

In the novel's last scene, Rhoda displays that compassion which Gissing saw as an inseparable blend of self-pity and pity for others. Her sigh over Monica's "Poor little child!" strikes a wistful note of truth, immediately after her brisk assurances that she has never felt better and that "The world is moving!"<sup>13</sup>

The plot of *The Odd Women* is a deft interlocking of individual concerns (the moral growth of the central character) with social and philosophical issues (the theme of the "battle of life"). The relation here between fiction and autobiography is very close. As Rhoda abandons her combative attitude, so Gissing himself was cured of a youthful attraction to the ideas of Herbert Spencer, whom he once called "perhaps our greatest living philosopher."<sup>14</sup> It was an opinion he soon discarded: in later years, when not openly denouncing Social Darwinism, he would make it the butt of a joke, as in *Our Friend the Charlatan* (1901). In his novels, any character applying the principle of "the survival of the fittest" to social behaviour is sure to undergo either conversion or chastisement. Abraham Woodstock, for instance, who declares, "It's nature that the strong should rule over the weak, and show them what's for their own good,"<sup>15</sup> dies of smallpox contracted on a visit to the slum which he, as the landlord, has allowed to become a horror (*The Unclassed*, 1884).

The design of Gissing's plots leads the heroes and heroines to the author's own philosophy. Gissing had formulated this philosophy early, just as he was beginning to write fiction. The clearest expression of his peculiar attitude toward life may be found in "The Hope of Pessimism" (1882), an article which he never tried to publish. "The Hope of Pessimism" was more than an essay to him; it

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was a literary resource. It justified the kind of story with the kind of plot that his personal needs led him to write, and it provided him with a stock of phrases on which he could repeatedly draw in his novels.

Much has been said about Schopenhauer's influence upon Gissing<sup>16</sup> – a debt which the latter proudly acknowledged, both in public and in private. Affinities with Schopenhauer are evident in the essay's closing paragraphs, which urge the suppression of the "will-to-live" and look forward to the extinction of the human race. But before this grim conclusion, there is a great deal in "The Hope of Pessimism" about how life could be made more tolerable in the meantime. Although Gissing admired Schopenhauer's creed, he deliberately emphasized only those parts of it with which he agreed, even at the risk of distorting the whole. In *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), he had made Helen Norman, another character with resemblances to himself, write in her diary:

Am I then a convert to the doctrine of pessimism? Not by any means, for, after all it appears to me that his pessimism is the least valuable part of Schopenhauer's teaching. The really excellent part of him is his wonderfully strong sympathy with the suffering of mankind. Again and again he tells us that we should lose the consciousness of self in care for others, in fact identify ourselves with all our fellows ... For this doctrine alone I thank him heartily; it chimes exactly with the principle which has long been yearning for expression in my own mind.<sup>17</sup>

Here the important (if unduly sibilant) phrase is “strong sympathy with the suffering.” As Gissing explains in “The Hope of Pessimism,” there will be no improvement in the world until the combative spirit is replaced by pity. Pity results from realizing that one is but a helpless mortal, struggling with other doomed beings. Gissing’s premise is that all men, being mortal, are weak. He

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abhors the robber-baron philosophy which makes a virtue of insensitivity and permits the abuse of the powerless:

The motto of our time is: Every man for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost. ... let every man fight his way through life as best he can, one up, another down ... we expect no mercy in the battle, and accordingly give no quarter: the strong man will make his way; for the weak, are there not workhouses and prisons? ... Does not science – the very newest – assure us that only the fittest shall survive?<sup>18</sup>

But the tone of the essay is not despairing. If a “strong” man can be made to recognize the weakness in himself, then perhaps he will be able to accept and to forgive weakness in others, instead of exploiting it. Thus, Gissing exhorts us:

Let us see into the dark places of our brother’s soul, and strive to solace him with sweetest sympathy. Not as a hardy, self-sufficient being, ripe to cope with circumstances, as a strong warrior competent against the odds which face him, as a conqueror ... not thus let us regard man, for thence comes the hardening of the heart against him, the insistence on one’s own miserable claims, the prevalence of the spirit of combat; so have we come to use that phrase, “the battle of life.” No; rather cultivate our perception of man’s weakness, learn thoroughly the pathos inherent in a struggle between the finite and the infinite.<sup>19</sup>

Echoes of the ideas and the language of “The Hope of Pessimism” can be heard throughout Gissing’s novels. In almost every plot, the real evil is the “spirit of combat,” which infects even basically good characters. So, in *A Life’s Morning* (1888), the heroine’s parents tell her, “You have the battle of life before you; it is a terrible one, and the world is relentless”;<sup>20</sup> Amy Reardon of *New Grub Street* (1891) is influenced in her destructive actions by a mother who believes that “life was a

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battle. She must either crush or be crushed”;<sup>21</sup> the hero of *Will Warburton* (published posthumously, 1905), Gissing’s last completed novel, sees London as a “vast slaughter-strewn field of battle.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the most direct use of “The Hope of Pessimism” occurs in *The Nether World* (1889), in which long sections of the argument are reiterated, almost verbatim, by Michael Snowdon:

‘If only we had pity on one another, all the worst things we suffer from in this world would be at an end. It’s because men’s hearts are hard that life is so full of misery. If we could only learn to be kind and gentle and forgiving – never mind anything else. We act as if we were all each other’s enemies; we can’t be

merciful, because we expect no mercy.<sup>23</sup>

The typical plot of Gissing's fiction and the "plot" of his philosophy are one and the same; in each, the movement is from an erroneous sense of strength or self-confidence to an awareness both of personal limitation and of the tragic limits of human life. From this awareness comes a growth in the capacity for sympathy. In the novels, this change is effected by some experience that reveals a character's inherent weakness to himself. For Gissing's protagonists, as for the author himself, unhappy love is the usual cause of this humiliation. The list of characters educated to compassion by such a "fall" is long. It would include Helen Norman of *Workers in the Dawn* (1880); Osmond Waymark and Ida Starr of *The Unclassed* (1884); Adela Waltham Mutimer of *Demos* (1886); the eponymous hero of *Denzil Quarrier* (1892); Nancy Lord of *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894); Harvey Rolfe of *The Whirlpool* (1897); and Will Warburton of the book of the same name.

The autobiographical impulse was strong in George Gissing, and it was encouraged by his circumstances – both by his social isolation and by the practical demands of his profession. Early in his career, he was fortunate to discover a "plot" in his own traumatic experiences. But he seemed

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never to be released from his obsessions by depicting them. He continued to adapt the same plot to novel after novel until the time of his death.

#### NOTES

1 Oswald H. Davis, *George Gissing: A Study in Literary Leanings* (London: Johnson, 1966), p. 99.

2 Included in this count are novels released posthumously, but none of Gissing's volumes of short stories. The manuscripts of at least four more completed novels, which were never published, are believed lost.

3 In a letter of 1889, Gissing described his daily routine of sitting down to write at three in the afternoon and working until ten or eleven o'clock "with a break at 8 o'clock for a little bread and butter and a cold cup of tea..." *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, 1887-1903*, ed. Arthur C. Young (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1961), p. 54.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

5 Gillian Tindall, in *The Born Exile: George Gissing* (New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), pp. 129-30, emphasizes the "horror" that such a crime, which one might now dismiss as a minor youthful offense, continued to arouse in the minds of Gissing's contemporaries.

6 Pierre Coustillas, ed., "Introduction," *George Gissing: Essays & Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), p.5.

7 Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 12.

8 George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (London: Constable, 1903) pp. 48-49.

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- 9 George Gissing, *Thyrza: A Tale*, new ed. (London: Smith, Elder, 1907), p. 331.
- 10 George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, 3 vols. (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893), I, p. 145.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- 12 *Ibid.*, III, pp. 267-72.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 325.
- 14 *Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family*, eds. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (1927: rpt. New York: Haskell House, 1970), p. 40.
- 15 George Gissing, *The Unclassed*, new ed. (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1895), p. 125.
- 16 See for instance C. J. Francis, "Gissing and Schopenhauer," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, XV (June 1960), pp. 53-63.
- 17 George Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn*, ed. Robert Shafer, 2.vols. (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1935), I, p. 215.
- 18 George Gissing, "The Hope of Pessimism," *George Gissing: Essays & Fiction*, p. 90.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 20 George Gissing, *A Life's Morning* (1888: rept. London: Home and Van Thal, 1947), p. 87.
- 21 George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, 3 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, 1891), II, p. 131.
- 22 George Gissing, *Will Warburton: A Romance of Real Life* (London: Archibald Constable, 1905), p. 159.
- 23 George Gissing, *The Nether World: A Novel*, ed. John Goode (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1974), pp. 99-100.

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Gissing's Narrative of Change:  
*The Odd Women*

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Fortunately for the study of nineteenth-century literature, George Gissing's novels have recently gained increased critical attention, and *The Odd Women* in particular has won interest and

praise even over the long-time favorite of the canon, *New Grub Street*. Observers like Adrian Poole (*Gissing in Context*, Rowan and Littlefield, 1976), Michael Squires ("Structure and Theme in Gissing's *The Odd Women*," *Modern British Literature*, 3, No. 10, 1978) and Katharine Bailey Linehan ("*The Odd Women*: Gissing's Imaginative Approach to Feminism," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 40, 1979) have recognized through close, insightful readings of Gissing and the novel the boldness and intelligence of Gissing's narrative. They all see the fundamental underpinning of a world being tested, of tradition being tried and found wanting, and they recognize that Gissing meets headlong the problem of changing relations between men and women to produce ultimately a highly significant definition of the cultural fabric of late Victorian England.

Poole points out in a more general discussion of marriage in the Victorian novel that for Gissing,

the discrepancy between women's inner feelings, needs and desires, and their available or prescribed social roles, offers a focus for the dramatization of [his] own deepest preoccupation, the interpretation of this discrepancy into the terms of an active desire for the "inner" to become incarnate in the "outer," or of a regressive desire for the maintained purity of the inner life in the face of an irretrievably hostile world.<sup>1</sup>

This suggests the kernel of Gissing's understanding of a world that operates on principles of social

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Darwinism, and of a culture that establishes rigid niches into which its members are expected to fit and from which they must operate, regardless of how stifling they may be. One of the more telling ironies of a culture perceived in this way, and suggested by Gissing in other novels like *Thyrza*, *New Grub Street*, and *Born in Exile*, is that these prescribed niches, evolved to protect their denizens from the brutality of a world modeled upon biological or natural conditions, ultimately brutalize their occupants by squelching individual potential, by smothering ideas and possibilities for individual fulfillment.

Gaining similar insights, Squires characterizes the men and women of the novel as "suppressed, alienated, and often frustrated ... [depending] upon a stubborn vow to allow a predetermined pattern to structure their actions,"<sup>2</sup> and Linehan points to unfortunate characters like Widdowson (and Dr. Madden in a more symbolic way) as "prisoners of time; their nostalgia for the old-fashioned ideals of marriage and family represents a form of psychological escapism." Gissing uses time thematically, according to Linehan, "to insinuate modern society's need for a drastic severance from the traditional path of female socialization and marriage."<sup>3</sup> These remarks on Gissing's thematic concerns in *The Odd Women* are intelligently considered and helpful, but they do not center on what I have come to believe is Gissing's greatest achievement in the novel, the structuring of a narrative of change. Gissing sets up *The Odd Women* on a binary basis and presents an intricate series of oppositions on all levels of human activity. His manipulation of an almost impeccably objective narrator, intervening interior monologues, and abundant dialogue suggests that the most effective way to express the narrative tensions that accompany the theme of change is to establish relentless oppositions of point of view. In every major character (and in most minor ones as well) opposing forces struggle for dominance; in every significant interaction between

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characters, abutting inclinations and sympathies are forced to the surface; and finally the entire social fabric is revealed as a clashing of the old and the new. Even in his embryonic thoughts about the novel, expressed to Eduard Bertz, Gissing saw the “all but triumphant force of [vulgarism]”<sup>5</sup> opposing what had been to that time the controlling establishment – the privileged upper classes. The very profusion of opposition becomes the structural metaphor for expressing the animus of the social milieu Gissing confronts.

The oppositions that occur on internal, spiritual grounds and that expand to take over interpersonal relations center ultimately on the Monica/Widdowson, Rhoda/Barfoot arrangements, two ostensibly different relationships that when closely considered are in fact very similar. We see in them that the individual sensibilities of men and women are out of sync, to a great extent because the established social order, in an effort to legitimize and perpetuate the prevailing patterns of dominance, subservience, and quiescence, has extrapolated certain societal laws from a Spencerian view of natural law, involving predatory struggles in a harsh environment. The most obvious example of this kind of extrapolation and resulting unmeshed condition occurs in the marriage of Monica and Widdowson. Though Rhoda’s and Barfoot’s involvement ultimately proves also to be out of sync, they show initially greater potential for resolving the oppositions they experience and manifest. The same is never true of Monica and Widdowson, who realize almost from the start that their sensibilities will be far from synchronous. Though magnified and refined in many, often more subtle, convolutions in the Rhoda/Barfoot arrangement, the basic notes of Gissing’s piece sound firmly in the marriage of Monica and Widdowson.

Not long after Monica’s life with Widdowson has settled into a smothering stasis, her demands for more freedom begin to make themselves heard, but only as the most dissonant notes of opposition on Widdowson’s ears:

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‘But here’s the old confusion. I am a man; you are a woman.’

‘I can’t see that that makes any difference. A woman ought to go about just as freely as a man. I don’t think it’s just. When I have done my work at home I think I ought to be every bit as free as you are – every bit as free. And I’m sure, Edmund, that love needs freedom if it is to remain love in truth.’ He looked at her keenly.

‘That’s a dreadful thing for you to say. So, if I disapprove of your becoming the kind of woman that acknowledges no law, you will cease to love me?’

‘What law do you mean?’

‘Why, the natural law that points out a woman’s place and’ – he added, with shaken voice – ‘commands her to follow her husband’s guidance.’<sup>6</sup>

To Widdowson, the “confusion” between natural law and societal law is complete. That which promotes survival in a natural world has wrongfully been superimposed upon a sophisticated social order where it no longer can serve its original function. Widdowson’s endorsement of and insistence upon what he calls “natural law” makes him at once the spokesman and victim of an outmoded, inappropriate social order, and ironically only he is able to characterize the pathetic truth of his unenviable position:

‘It’s because I have lived so much alone. I have never had more than one or two friends, and I am absurdly jealous when you want to get away from me and amuse yourself with strangers. I can’t talk to such people. I am not suited for

society. If I hadn't met you in that strange way, by miracle, I should never have been able to marry.' (XVI)

Unmarried until late in life, solitary in one of the many clerk's jobs in commerce or government, unacquainted with, even embarrassed by, the social activities of members of his class, Widdowson,

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as others like him, is bound to support, if by nothing but his very anonymity, the established societal order. The irony of his own words, "I am not suited for society. ... I should never have been able to marry," becomes even more telling as he presents himself as Monica's protector, as the upholder of society's institutions. He indeed is unsuited for society, at least for one that must confront fundamental changes. And he likewise is unsuited for marriage, at least to a woman who questions his right to protective lordship over her. Through classical, almost Ovidian, interior monologues, Gissing presents Widdowson's moral life in the balance, shifting one way and then another, as the oppositions to his understanding of the established order present themselves:

'My ideal of the wife perfectly suited to me is far liker that girl at the public-house bar than Monica. Monica's independence of thought is a perpetual irritation to me. I don't know what her thoughts really are, what her intellectual life signifies. And yet I hold her to me with the sternest grasp. If she endeavoured to release herself I should feel capable of killing her. Is not this a strange, a brutal thing?'

Widdowson had never before reached this height of speculation. In the moment, by the very fact, of admitting that Monica and he ought not to be living together, he became more worthy of his wife's companionship than ever hitherto.

Well, he would exercise greater forbearance. He would endeavour to win her respect by respecting the freedom she claimed. His recent suspicions of her were monstrous. If she knew them, how her soul would revolt from him! (XXIII)

When he toys with this idea that his marriage – maybe any marriage – might be made fundamentally better with "greater forbearance," Widdowson finds himself in dangerous territory, not only in conflict with, not only in opposition to, but virtually "in ambush" by the forces of social

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revolution. Lacking the necessary imagination and courage to resolve the oppositions, he acts, as so many others must in similar threatening situations, by retrenching:

What a simple thing marriage had always seemed to him, and how far from simple he had found it! Why, it led him to musings which upset the order of the world, and flung all ideas of religion and morality into wildest confusion. It would not do to think like this. He was a man wedded to a woman very difficult to manage – there was the practical upshot of the matter. His duty was to manage her. He was responsible for her right conduct. With intentions perfectly harmless, she might run into unknown jeopardy – above all, just at this time when she was taking reluctant leave of her friends. The danger justified him in

exceptional vigilance.

So, from his excursion into the realms of reason did he return to the safe sphere of the commonplace (XXIII).

Though we see Widdowson vacillate (with occasional judgmental punctuation from the narrator) between opposing extremes of dominance over and freedom for Monica, he ends up miserably mired in his original self, still demanding recognition of what he believes is his justified position of power. Though his sympathy for Monica in her unhappiness increases through the course of the novel, Widdowson never essentially advances from this position. As the narrator cues us to realize, his "height of speculation" was never to be founded in fact.

In Monica, however, Gissing creates a slightly more complex character. Unwilling shop worker, reluctant student of Mary Barfoot's academy, Monica seems initially, by her agreement to marry a man she does not love, to be bereft of any will at all. But in her refusal to acquiesce to predetermined niches for the subservient wife, she shows herself willing to question and oppose the

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antiquated prescriptions of marriage and to step beyond, however tentatively and incompletely, the confines of the world that has choked her sisters and ossified her husband. As she takes root in this reality, Monica strikes through Widdowson's traditional ideas and rhetoric to help begin a definition of a new self. She blurts out in response to Widdowson's speculation on allowing her greater freedom:

'I don't like to hear that word. Why should you say *allow*? Do you think of me as your servant, Edmund?'

'You know how I think of you. It is I who am your servant, your slave.'

'Oh, I can't believe that!' She pressed her handkerchief to her cheeks, and laughed unnaturally. 'Such words don't mean anything. It is you who forbid and allow and command...' (XVI)

Monica's perception of the bare truth surrounding her marriage is at once salutary and destructive, for it forces upon her, with the brief help of Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn, an inchoate metamorphosis into a self that demands equal status and latitude for the development of its integrity, while it concurrently drives her to seek a man like Bevis, a mere romantic dabbler and feckless coward. Gissing probes incisively into this paradox in Chapter XX, "The First Lie," as Monica claims she has visited Milly Vesper, when in fact she has just been wooed by Bevis:

The first falsehood she had ever told him, and yet uttered with such perfect assumption of sincerity as would have deceived the acutest observer. He nodded, discontented as usual, but entertaining no doubt.

And from that moment she hated him. If he had plied her with interrogations, if he had seemed to suspect anything, the burden of untruth would have been unendurable. His simple acceptance of her word was the sternest rebuke she

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could have received. She despised herself, and hated him for the degradation which resulted from his lordship over her. (XX)

If Widdowson had understood Monica's demands for equality, the lie about her meeting with Bevis would never have been necessary. Even given the lack of understanding, had Widdowson at least probed and acted the tyrannical master, Monica could have felt the rightness of her deception. His apparent complacency in his position of power simply compounds the magnitude of the lie and of the hate she has for Widdowson for making her tell it. Though it is this stark reality of Monica's marriage that encourages the nascence of her will and acts as the primary catalyst of her change, it also effects her ultimate destruction. At one time, she had at least ostensibly subscribed to the outdated confines of marriage to a man like Widdowson, but at the time when it all has to be thrown over, Monica can look only to the vacuous Bevis to fill the void.

The change in Monica, however significant, is incomplete, and when compared to Rhoda's, only embryonic. She does not, in effect, reject the idea of wifely thralldom, but she realizes that her lack of freedom with Widdowson has also meant a crippling restraint on her "freedom to love." Bevis, she believes, "she could love with heart and soul, could make his will her absolute law, could live on his smiles, could devote herself to his interests" (XXII). She is not unlike Emma Frances Brooke's Jessamine (*A Superfluous Woman*) who confronts in herself both the "natural" and "social" woman, but who eventually is "destroyed by capitulation to social convention."<sup>7</sup>

In the relationship between Monica and Widdowson, Gissing presents a bald statement of the dangers and wrenching effects of perpetuating a system no longer truly functional in a modern age. The striking relief of the cameo comes through strongly in Widdowson's character, as it demands

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the submission of Monica, as it reinforces the image of the "guardian male, the wife-proprietor, who from the dawn of civilization has taken abundant care that woman shall not outgrow her nonage" (XIX). But the baldness of the Monica/Widdowson relationship is itself part of a less obvious structural and thematic movement, as it is intended to seem like a foil to the relationship between Rhoda Nunn and Everard Barfoot. Maintaining the structural oppositions, Gissing intends his readers to be struck by the apparent contrast between the rigidity and fluidity of the two relationships. He wants us to believe that Rhoda and Barfoot can indeed emerge from the darkness of the primitive social ordering, which so effectively stultifies Widdowson and Monica, so as eventually to suggest more poignantly the ultimate failure that they too experience.

I do not want to imply that Barfoot, and especially Rhoda, are mere hollow mouthpieces of advanced, liberal thinking, but the fact remains that the fundamental underpinning of their relationship is a mirror image (albeit magnified and more complex) of Widdowson's and Monica's: a concentrated battle of wills where there is no real winner. And the defeat comes about for the same basic reason. Just as Widdowson vacillates between opposing inclinations to grant and withhold freedom for Monica, Barfoot tests his position with Rhoda by proposing marriage, then free union, and then marriage again (but in a "mood of chagrin"). The entire balancing act is motivated by precisely the same fears that plague Widdowson: possible loss of dominance. Again through interior monologue, we see Barfoot dealing with the oppositions:

The woman he loved would be his, and there was matter enough for ardent imagination in the indulgence of that thought; but his temper disturbed him. After all, he had not triumphed. As usual the woman had her way. She played upon his senses, and made him her obedient slave. ... So it was a mere repetition of the old story – a marriage like any other. And how would it result?

She had great qualities; but was there not much in her that he must subdue, reform, if they were really to spend their lives together? Her energy of domination perhaps excelled his. ... Perhaps she would torment him with restless jealousies, suspecting on every trivial occasion an infringement of her right. From that point of view it would have been far wiser to persist in rejecting legal marriage, that her dependence on him might be more complete. But then returned the exasperating thought that Rhoda had overcome his will. Was not that a beginning of evil augury? (XXVI)

Barfoot resides finally in an unchanged self, one that despite a fascination with the possibilities of new relations among men and women actually values more its own claim to dominance. That rigid willfulness and simple arrogance inspire Barfoot to refuse explanation to Rhoda about Monica's presence outside his rooms, "for she must manifest absolute confidence in him," and this, of course, precipitates the disintegration of their proposed union.

In Rhoda, the process mirrors, but also magnifies, that which surrounds Monica. She feels a similar clash between competing principles but with a greater complexity. Passionately devoted to the advancement of women (originally seen as harsh and unbending in her reaction to Bella Royston's death), Rhoda also feels what she perceives as the opposing pull of love: "She had no beauty; she was loved for her mind, her very self." With the influence of love comes another set of principles, part of which requires a diminution of arrogance, a need for compromise and greater delicacy. When Rhoda realizes that she has temporarily won the day (Barfoot's agreement to legal marriage), she reflects on her need to be "more politic": "It is the woman's part to exercise tact; she had proved herself lamentably deficient in that quality" (XXVI). In realizing this, however, Rhoda

does not simply subside into a position categorically opposed to that which she assumes at the beginning of the novel; she instead takes part in a modified Hegelian dialectic<sup>8</sup> and emerges into a different self, one that promises to draw upon, and even transcend, the opposing extremes:

She herself was no longer one of the 'odd women'; fortune had – or seemed to have – been kind to her; none the less her sense of a mission remained. No longer an example of perfect female independence, and unable therefore to use the same language as before, she might illustrate woman's claim of equality in marriage – if her experience proved no obstacle (XXVI).

Rhoda is clearly better prepared than Monica, through her maturer concept of self, to test the conditions of change. Contrary to Jacob Korg's earlier assessment that Rhoda's pride "prevents her from making the compromises necessary ... to practical affairs,"<sup>9</sup> she is willing to go a long way to accommodate the position that has emerged from contrasting ideological postures. In the end – and this seems to be the crucial point of the debate – she is willing to go farther than Barfoot, who eventually is seen as not much better able to partake in the dynamics of change than his counterpart, Widdowson.

Though Michael Squires points out that in both Rhoda and Barfoot "each self tries to control the behaviour of others" and that the language of the narrative reinforces the struggle with a

preponderance of “words such as ‘power,’ ‘domination,’ ‘conquest’ ... and ‘triumph,’” there is a clear difference in the contours and impact of their respective struggles. For Barfoot, the parting at Seascale marks the final push for dominance of his will, for asserting once and for all the romantic pride he retains in his original self. He revels in the idea that Rhoda must submit to him (“Oh! but the submission should be perfect!”), and he arrogantly persists in his idea of lordship over her. That

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Gissing removes Barfoot from the action of the narrative at this point (the end of Chapter XXVI) until the final confrontation with Rhoda only helps to confirm that which he has always implied about Barfoot’s character: no sustained amount of introspection can occur in him to effect the same kind of dialectic that Rhoda undergoes. To be sure, we are told that his intercourse with the Brissendens had “subdued his masculine self-assertiveness” and “the result was a genuine humility such as he had never known,” but that does not constitute real change, either on Barfoot’s personal level or on the larger societal level. Invigorated and challenged by Rhoda’s intelligence and her ideas about women’s place in society, even to passionate love for her, Barfoot always lingers only on the outskirts of that world, plays only the enthusiastic dilettante to Rhoda’s profoundly serious role. Though Barfoot cannot be made out as the conscious cynic, his relatively easy move into the world of the Brissendens, “the world with which he had a natural affinity; that of wealthy and cultured people who seek no prominence, who shrink from contact with circles known as ‘smart,’ who possess their souls in quiet freedom” (XXX), constitutes in fact no real move at all, and is no surprise to anyone. The impetus for that movement is always there. Once the Amy Drake episode had subsided and he had inherited more money, all Barfoot needed was someone, who if not exactly subservient, would be at least secure enough in her own privileges to allow him to “possess (his own) soul in quiet freedom.” It is this that explains his final proposal to Rhoda – a legal marriage – where all the respectability of the old forms could survive, preventing, in their reinstatement, the abrasiveness and vulgarity of the “circle known as ‘smart.’”

And this is, of course, what brings the power and impetus for change on the societal level to the reaches of those not so privileged. The persistent economic problems of those not genteelly endowed promote the kind of ultimate resolve that Rhoda assumes as her duty in life. Love Barfoot

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as she may, intrigued and flattered by his attentions as she may be, she cannot see the possibility of success for herself or for the myriad like her unless she and they achieve the equality that seems so right and necessary. To gain their point, many are mandated to partake in the “anarchy” Mrs. Cosgrove espouses, which ultimately explains Rhoda’s final reversal and rejection of Barfoot’s proposal of marriage.

For Rhoda, then, the dénouement of her relationship with Barfoot, beginning at the parting at Seascale, follows the pattern established by her new idea of self. She may fluctuate wildly at points between heady, prideful anger and despair, but she never completely loses sight of the responsibility to see and establish her own equality and integrity, and the demand that Barfoot explain the Monica Madden connection remains the practical means of achieving that goal:

But the soul in her had not finally succumbed. Passion had a new significance; her conception of life was larger, more liberal; she made no vows to crush the natural instincts. But her conscience, her sincerity should not suffer. Wherever

destiny might lead, she would still be the same proud and independent woman, responsible only to herself, fulfilling the nobler laws of her existence (XXVII).

The gnawing point about Gissing's relentless revelation of male/female relationships is, that they are combative to no truly victorious end. No one can doubt this in Widdowson and Monica, confined as they are by the shackles of a grinding, oppressive tradition; and no one can fundamentally doubt this in Rhoda and Barfoot, as they continue to struggle with implications of profound change in a new social order. That Rhoda can go on with her work counseling women in alternatives to marriage without having to explain away her own seems but a pyrrhic victory. We can join Linehan in appreciating Gissing's presentation of opposing points of view of Rhoda – Barfoot's, which sees her social disadvantages as keeping "her rebellious zealotry on edge, forcing

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her to sacrifice her best chances for happiness," or perhaps Rhoda's own in which she has been "perfected in her dedication to the feminist cause, returning to it through the crucible of love with a new humility and an unselfish commitment to a social good transcending her potential personal happiness."<sup>10</sup> But either way, the ideal of combining the strong, independent woman with love in marriage has not been won. And for Barfoot, who essentially settles for Agnes Brissenden, despite his fascination and love for Rhoda, there can be no real victory, but rather a retreat to the prescribed forms society continues to impose.

Seeing the reality of these difficulties in *The Odd Women* continues to make the novel particularly timely. With a popular mandate to make tradition work, the current American government has been ordered to renew the American dream. Hard work, private enterprise, personal and public self-determination, the strength of the family, the bonds of men and women in marriage – all must be reconfirmed. But the sense of desperation that this mandate engenders is a recognizable echo of what rang through Gissing's England of the 1890's. For by the time a society has perceived that the old order has changed, it is already too late to recall it, and the reliance on tradition to reinstate a mythologized past will be, at the very least, disappointing. Society, then, has only two real choices: to deal effectively with conditions as they exist, thus cementing for the time being the changes that have taken place, or to institute new changes consciously and purposefully in order to accommodate the various elements of society and to allow them to coexist. Either way, the process is replete with difficulties and painful choices.

For students of culture and literature, interest lies in how these possibilities for action are reflected in narrative forms. I have tried to suggest here that Gissing in *The Odd Women* has responded to the latter possibility through a narrative of change: a novelistic world structured throughout on oppositions. For the 1980's, when tradition will be tested again, and when we will

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see, I believe, conscious institution of change emerge, Gissing's *The Odd Women*, which slices definitely between the old and the new, will continue to have emotional, intellectual, and cultural appeal.

#### Notes

1 Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowan and Littlefield, 1976), p. 176.

- 2 Michael Squires, "Structure and Theme in Gissing's *The Odd Women*," *Modern British Literature*, 3. No. 1, 1978, pp. 3-18.
- 3 Katharine Bailey Linehan, "*The Odd Women*: Gissing's Imaginative Approach to Feminism," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 40, 1979.
- 4 Linehan discusses well the objectivity of the narrator's voice, but from a slightly different perspective. Though she appreciates the lack of judgmental intrusion, she is more interested in it, when it occurs, as it tends to reflect Gissing's ambivalence toward women and their social status. I am impressed, however, with the easy integration of narrative judgment with interior monologue. When the point of view changes, it does so with little warning and then is sustained only briefly, supporting the idea that conditions of change are more organically expressed through the internalized, opposing thoughts of the characters themselves.
- 5 Arthur C. Young, ed., *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, 1887-1903* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961), p. 144.
- 6 George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977), p. 164. Henceforth all citations will be made by chapter number in the text.
- 7 A. R. Cunningham, "The 'New Woman Fiction' of the 1890s," *Victorian Studies*, 17, 1973, pp. 177-86.
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- 8 Gerhard Joseph, "The Antigone as Cultural Touchstone: Matthew Arnold, Hegel, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and Margaret Drabble," *PMLA*, 96, No.1, Jan. 1981, pp. 22-35. In an interesting discussion, Joseph defines a "qualified" Hegelian interpretation of tragedy, especially with regard to George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and helps to illuminate the Hegelian dialectic as I have alluded to it here.
- 9 Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 189.
- 10 Linehan, p. 367.

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Veranilda: A Revaluation

David Dowling  
Glasgow

Gissing was engaged on *Veranilda* at the time of his death and, like *Weir of Hermiston*, the book breaks off at a tantalising point, leaving the reader mystified as to the author's intentions. There is very little written on this novel, most of it hostile or, if well-intentioned, inclined to superficial praise. The preface to the first edition by Frederic Harrison, for example, could have been written without reading the book. The best criticism is H. G. Wells's preface<sup>1</sup> which was



rejected by the relatives. He knows the book thoroughly and hints at knowledge of the projected ending. Presumably Gissing had given him an outline in conversation. Wells tells us that the last scene was to be morning at Basil's villa on the Palatine Hill with the enormous city deserted, the people having fled before the advance of the Gothic king Totila. The conception is unusually dramatic for Gissing but no doubt the disastrous quality of the situation appealed to him.

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Infuriatingly Wells tells us nothing more. If Basil and Veranilda are merely to wait in Basil's palace, the ending remains a puzzle. If they are merely rescued by the Goths, Basil appears a rather inglorious Roman. If they are to be executed a reason would have to be provided as to why Totila should kill the long lost Gothic princess. Perhaps only Basil is to be threatened with execution and Veranilda is to make a dramatic plea for his life. The lady Aurelia, absent since near the beginning of the book, must reappear and be involved while the mysterious treasure that Stephanus and Sagaris are about to find will be appropriated by Heliodora and no doubt used to pay off the barbarian king. The chronicler of the "ignobly decent" is suddenly rioting in drama, action and wealth but the short-lived nature of Totila's triumph (he soon lost the city to Belisarius) is the usual turn Gissing gave to events.

The historical context is presented with consummate skill. A mass of sixth-century detail lightly and naturally accompanies the narrative with no gratuitous display of historical learning, while the terrain within which the action takes place is authentically described from the author's own Italian journeys. The defect of the book is the wooden figure of Basil and the altogether shadowy quality of Veranilda. The latter indeed could be transferred unaltered from the penetralium of her sixth-century villa to the drawing-room of a nineteenth-century terrace-house. Almost every minor character is given more individuality than the heroine.

More interesting too than Basil is his elder friend Marcian, a man with a guilty secret. In the view of the other characters he is a man of steadfast purpose but he is beset by secret interior conflict. In the historical context he sees himself as a high-standing Roman helpless between Greek and Goth. Like other Roman aristocrats he pays lip-service to the idea that the Roman Empire lives on in the person of Justinian in Byzantium. He knows, however, that the Byzantine interest is to

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keep Italy in ruin and subjection. The interest of the Goths on the other hand is to revive the economy as they wish to make Italy their base, and their way to civilization is through Roman culture. Marcian therefore knows that the really wise and public-spirited thing to do is to become a traitor to this Roman Empire, in fact an oppressive organization of corrupt Greek officials, and ally himself with the Goths, ostensibly barbarian conquerors but in fact the natural partners of the Romans.

His political perplexities extend to his religion. He regards his Catholic faith as his one certainty in a world in turmoil, but his potential allies the Goths are Arians. Though Marcian is an educated man, he does not understand the point at issue among the theologians, merely views with sadness the split in the formerly unified faith. Gissing makes use of this sixth-century doctrinal problem as skilfully as he does the entirely different religious problems of modern characters such as Godwin Peak. Marcian's dilemma is also Gissing's sceptical sidelight on the fashionable and facile Victorian nostalgia for the "simple faith" of early Christian times. Gissing does not believe that things were ever easy.

The damage done by this dispute itself, considering its sheer irrelevance to ordinary affairs,

must also have appealed to Gissing's sense of tragic irony. The Homoousians (the Catholics) believed that the Son was consubstantial with the Father, while the Homoiusians (the Arians) would affirm only that the Son was like the Father in every respect. Evelyn Waugh has a hilarious chapter on this subject in his novel *Helena* when a learned bishop in the pulpit, exhorting his followers to Holy War, forgets which set of sacred principles he is urging them to defend. Though I am sure that Gissing would have been highly amused by this treatment by the son of his friend Arthur Waugh, could he have read it, overt farce was contrary to his own literary practice. The cautious Gissing, following Gibbon<sup>2</sup> must have seen that the Catholics were concerned with substance and the Arians

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with qualities, perplexities argued calmly by philosophers but unfortunately, when used by theologians to "circumscribe the nature of the Trinity, those persons least exercised in the habits of abstract thought, aspired to contemplate the economy of the Divine Nature."<sup>3</sup>

Marcian, only partly comprehending, is caught in the violent results of these disagreements and swings between a desire for decisive action in the world to the opposite extreme of wishing to retire to a monastery to escape the turmoil. This violent swinging between extremes is shown to be outwith Marcian's control and, though fitted perfectly to the ancient context, resembles a problem which also belongs to Gissing. That is, whether to be a scholarly recluse or a worldly sensualist. Whenever Gissing himself was the one he wanted to be the other. In Marcian's case this unfortunate state of mind leads to his betrayal of Basil. His rejection of the world first expresses itself as a desire for monastic celibacy but this in turn produces a state of violent sensuality. He genuinely intends to rescue Veranilda and restore her to Basil but, the rescue once effected, the thought of her in the enclosed litter, guarded by his men and entirely in his power, inflames his dormant desire and he carries her off to his fortified villa. Note the typical Gissing touch that at the beginning of this incident Marcian had not intended to do anything wrong. The result is that Basil stabs him to death and though the violent incident is not out of place in this context, Gissing thereby allows the most interesting character to vanish halfway through the book.

Flaubert, as is evident from "The Place of Realism in Fiction," was much in Gissing's thoughts as a fictional exemplar. *The Whirlpool* has justly been compared with *Madame Bovary*.<sup>4</sup> *Veranilda* can similarly be compared with *Salammbô* and was, I think, written from the same motive. Both writers had laboriously examined the petty circumstances of commonplace lives and the reaction seemed to be a desire for violent action, drama and splendour in an exotic locale.

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1 George Gissing and H. G. Wells, ed. Gettmann, Appendix D, 1961.

2 Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. II, Chap. 21, 1776.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Workers in the Dawn*, ed. R. Shafer, Introduction, p. xxxix, 1935.

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## Review

George Gissing, *Will Warburton*, ed. Colin Partridge, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981.

The last novel Gissing completed as well as his last story of modern life, *Will Warburton* is inevitably affected by the pathos with which its original publication was fraught. When it appeared in book form in the late Spring of 1905 this romance was greeted with sympathy though, understandably, no reviewer was prompted to rank it among Gissing's most remarkable achievements. *Veranilda* had roused either enthusiasm or disapproval: the literary world had been puzzled and disturbed. With *Will Warburton* Gissing became recognizable again. The genial grocer who chose to climb down the social ladder was readily connected with Mr. Bailey, of *New Grub Street* fame, and the disenchanting view of worldly influences on art did not fail to remind readers of many passages in the whole *oeuvre*.

After it was serialized in the *New Age* (before A. R. Orage's time), and in the *Yorkshire Weekly Post*, the story enjoyed honourable sales in the original six-shilling edition, the 1908 sixpenny reprint and the 1915 shilling edition, but those of Gissing's admirers who pinned their faith on the stronger stories – *Demos*, *The Nether World*, *Born in Exile* in particular – found *Will Warburton*

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just a little too mild and mellow to satisfy their taste entirely. Yet, if the novel is to be appreciated at all, its mellow atmosphere had better be regarded as a virtue than a shortcoming, for indeed choosing the latter course would amount to ignoring the author's purpose. The original publishers, Constable & Co., tried to make the book attractive to those readers who were repelled by Gissing's earnest, tragic novels of the 1880s and early 1890s. Hardly was the manuscript completed when the news was released that this novel was by no means a pessimistic one. W. Robertson Nicoll, that inveterate gossip who talked at large about Gissing's private life, wrote in the *Sketch* for 1 April 1903: "I hear that Mr. George Gissing's new novel is completed, and that it will be what is called a cheerful book. Whether this is good news or not, I am unable to say. Has Mr. Gissing, after all, ever given us anything finer or truer than *New Grub Street*?"

In his substantial introduction Colin Partridge offers a solid assessment of the story as a work of art and his comments benefit greatly from his careful examination of the manuscript in the Berg Collection. Some thirty pages of the introduction are devoted to a study of it; so that we can see Gissing at work in the autumn and winter of 1902-1903. Clearly, the manuscript of the novel is one of the most interesting left by the author. But Colin Partridge goes far beyond the genesis and composition of the story; he analyses Gissing's intents and purposes with common sense and shrewdness: "Comedy of absurdity dramatizes deliberate exaggerations of character, attitude and situation. The humour lies in presenting the psychological unbalance of individuals and the social unbalance that results from the interactions of such characters. Part of Gissing's 'amiability' in *Will Warburton* derives from his technique of deliberately inflating his characters' egocentric attitudes; rather than microscopically analyze foibles and obsessions – a process that draws the analyst to a deeper personal pessimism – Gissing's method exaggerates them beyond psychological realism to

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a point of genial comedy, while his art gives the illusion of realism to these absurd exaggerations."

Much work remains to be done on this novel which has been the subject of very few articles. For instance it would be worth studying the sources of Gissing's inspiration for the character of

Norbert Franks, or the treatment of some characteristic situations which occur in previous novels (*New Grub Street*, *Eve's Ransom* and *The Town Traveller* especially), while the type of woman embodied by Rosamund Elvan might be worth putting in perspective not only within the framework of Gissing's fiction, but within a certain Victorian and Edwardian tradition. Just as Rosamund Elvan reminds one of Rosamund Vincy in *Middlemarch*, she foreshadows Agnes in E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*, a novel which Forster must have been writing about the time *Will Warburton* was published. – Pierre Coustillas.

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#### Notes and News

The programme of readings from *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* mentioned in our last issue was broadcast again on 17, 19, 24 and 26 January.

Mrs. Spencer Mills draws the editor's attention to Walter Allen's autobiography, *As I Walked Down New Grub Street* (1981), which derives its title from Gissing's novel. Various reviewers (in the *Listener* for 10 December, the *Observer* for 13 December and the *T. L. S.* for 18 December, for instance) have emphasized Allen's interest in Gissing which is testified by a number of articles and reviews as well as introductions to *Born in Exile* and *The Nether World* in the early 1970s. Allen first became acquainted with Gissing's work as a boy at school, where, he recalls "we read with [the English master] ... an anthology called, I think, *Selected Modern Short Stories*, and published in the World's Classics series," which contained "A Poor Gentleman." Frank, the English master,

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"characterised the story as 'morbid'. I cannot pretend I liked it but I found it oddly disturbing, and it was the beginning of a life-long fascination, in which there is a streak of aversion, with Gissing."

Clifford Brook gave a lecture on T. W. Gissing and his family in the Drury Lane Public Library in Wakefield on 23 March.

Obituaries of Professor Geoffrey Bullough, the author of *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, mention that in his student days at the University of Manchester he won the Gissing Prize.

Oxford University Press announce John Halperin's new volume, *Gissing: A Life in Books* for April in their catalogue of *New Academic Books* (21,5 x 14 cm, 410 pages, 12 half-tones, £17.50).

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#### Recent Publications

##### Volumes

George Gissing, *Will Warburton*, edited and with an introduction and notes by Colin Partridge. Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981, pp. ii + 337. Orange cloth, gilt titling. £9. 95. 30pp. of the 42-page introduction are devoted to a study of the manuscript.

George Gissing, *Nouvelles choisies*, présentées par Pierre Coustillas, Lille : Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1981, pp. 203. Pictorial wrappers. Francs 45. Contents : Introduction, translation of the following stories: "Lou and Liz," "The Day of Silence," "An Inspiration," "The Schoolmaster's Vision," "One Way of Happiness," "A Poor Gentleman," "Humplebee," "The Scrupulous Father," "A Charming Family," "A Daughter of the Lodge," "Christopherson" and

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"Miss Rodney's Leisure"; a short biography of Gissing and a bibliographical note on the short stories. The stories have been translated by various members of the University of Lille.

Patrick Bridgwater, *Gissing and Germany*, London: Enitharmon Press, 1981, pp. 95. Yellowish green cloth, green jacket. £6. 00. Contents: Introduction; Goethe and Heine; Schopenhauer; Nietzsche; Conclusion.

George Gissing, *Six Sonnets on Shakespearean Heroines*, with an introductory note by Pierre Coustillas, London: Eric and Joan Stevens (74 Fortune Green Road, London, NW6), 1982, pp.16. c. £3. 50. Blue wrappers with a portrait of Gissing by Mrs. Clarence Rook. Handprinted. Six unpublished sonnets which Gissing wrote in the summer and autumn of 1876. The Shakespearean heroines are Miranda, Portia, Cordelia, Imogen, Perdita and Desdemona.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Marilyn B. Saveson, "George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction," *The Cresset*, May 1980. Review of John Goode's book.

Pierre Coustillas "Letter to the Editor," *The Dickensian*, Autumn 1981, pp. 168-69. About the introductions to the Rochester edition.

Gianni Resnati, "George Gissing, un inglese esiliato in Inghilterra," *L'Ordine della Brianza*, 5 December 1981, p. 15.

Adeline R. Tintner, "Gissing's 'Fleet-footed Hester'. The Atalanta of Hackney Downs," *Etudes Anglaises*, October-December 1981, pp. 443-47.

John Gabree, "New and Notable," *Newsday* (a Long Island newspaper), 14 February 1982. Review

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of *Eve's Ransom* (Dover).

Pierre Coustillas, "Comptes Rendus," *Etudes Anglaises*, January-March 1982, pp. 92-93. Review of *Denzil Quarrier* (Harvester).

Anon., "Residential Conference," *The H.G. Wells Newsletter*, Spring 1982, p. 2.

