

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 Exhibition

The Gissing Exhibition was held as scheduled at the National Book League headquarters, the fine eighteenth-century building at 7 Albemarle Street, London, W1. It was formally opened on 23rd June by the distinguished poet and critic, William Plomer, whose contributions to Gissing scholarship in the late forties are well-known. A number of visitors came from all parts of England and some from abroad – members of the family, Gissing enthusiasts, academics, librarians, publishers, booksellers, journalists, etc. Mr. Plomer’s short address is being printed as a keepsake by the Enitharmon Press. All copies of this limited edition will be signed by the

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author. A professional photographer photographed the glass-cases in the exhibition room as well as the organisers of the exhibition. In its number for July 3rd, the *Bookseller* had a photograph showing from left to right Pierre Coustillas, John Spiers, William Plomer, Martyn Goff (director of the NBL) and Christopher Kohler. After Mr. Plomer's address, Mr. Kohler proposed a vote of thanks to Miss Cynthia Sanford of the NBL, whose invaluable help greatly contributed to make the exhibition a success.

Records of the Exhibition are of different kinds. A set of the 13 photographs taken on June 23rd can be obtained from the NBL for £2.80. They are large enough for the reading of a certain autograph letter to Clara Collet to be possible with a magnifying-glass. A visitors' book contains the names of such visitors as did not forget to enter their names in it. The press made some useful and friendly comments on the event. The *Daily Telegraph* (24 June) quoted from William Plomer's address: "In each generation since his death, there have been discoveries or rediscoveries of Gissing but there has never been such a splendid rediscovery as this." It concluded with an extract from an interview of John Spiers who stated that Gissing's subject-matter – "the horror and fascination of the new cities, of urban working-class life and social phenomena like the depersonalisation of human activity" – has a special relevance to-day. In this he was echoing and amplifying Asa Briggs' belief that *New Grub Street* is "the first important novel to describe the beginnings of mass communication." The *Evening Standard* (24 June) prefaced a short account of Gissing's life and ideas with this statement: "George Gissing, that rather sombre Socialist novelist of the turn of the century, may now be in a process of revival. There is now a *Gissing Newsletter*, and there are academic admirers in France and America, and the National Book League has organised an exhibition of rare Gissing editions, photographs, manuscripts and perhaps most important to any writer, contracts." The *Investors' Chronicle* (July 2) wrote: "At the National Book League *The Rediscovery of George Gissing* will give you an object lesson in book-collecting. Gissing is now in fashion again, a good deal owing to the efforts of the Dorking rare book dealer, C. C. Kohler [...] The catalogue, really a full book by John Spiers and Pierre Coustillas, is a magnificent distillation of current knowledge

on the chequered publishing history of the author."

The two most significant accounts came from the *Times Literary Supplement* (July 2) and the *Financial Times* (June 28), both by Anthony Curtis, author of an unpublished biography of

Gissing and of a number of articles on his work. He commented in the *TLS* that the exhibition was “the most complete that has yet been devoted to the novelist” and he described the catalogue (163 pages, NBL Members £1.50, Non-Members £2) as “a rich source of accurate information about all aspects of the novelist’s life and work. It also keeps abreast of the rapidly expanding – dare one say, booming? – academic reassessment of him. It is as important a landmark in our understanding of the materials on which a definitive life might be based as the catalogue prepared by the late John D. Gordan for the exhibition held in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library in 1954, which it surpasses showing the considerable advances that have been made in Gissing scholarship since the pioneer days of Dr. Gordan. An example of the range of the exhibition is that not only does it contain a complete run of the novelist’s books in their earliest and later editions, including Lord Esher’s copy of *Workers in the Dawn*, but also several volumes from Gissing’s own library – *Jane Eyre*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, inscribed by Hardy, J. A. Owen and G. S. Boulger’s *The Country Month by Month*. There are in addition books by his brother Algernon who pursued a career as a writer in the shadow of George and who (so the catalogue tells us) used to time the appearance of his books so that they coincided with the publication of those of his renowned brother in the hope that some reflected glory might fall upon his inferior productions. Of all the trials and tribulations which the long-suffering George had to bear this, the least-well-known, must also have been to an author the most irksome.”

In his three-column article in the *Financial Times* with a portrait of Gissing in 1895, Mr. Curtis gave a sketch of the writer’s career and presented the exhibition, concluding: “Apart from the wealth of scholarly documentation the exhibition also contains many photographs. Particularly interesting are those of the many different houses in London where Gissing lived (recalled in the semi-autobiographical *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*) and of places he

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visited in Greece and Italy. But there is no picture of Nell, his first wife, and one cannot but wonder idly what she was like.”

The only gloomy note was sounded by Eric Homberger in a short letter to the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* (July 9). He rightly deplored that only *New Grub Street* is available in an inexpensive edition and asked for paperback editions of *Workers in the Dawn*, *Demos*, *The Nether World*, etc. Mr. Homberger has not been the only academic to make such a request of late. Both scholarly, carefully edited reprints, and low priced editions of Gissing’s works are needed. The writer’s public can only extend substantially if his books are available in an inexpensive form.

Here are the contents of the Exhibition Catalogue entitled *The Rediscovery of George Gissing: A Reader's Guide*: preface, list of lenders, introduction, early life and family, first work, the novels of social protest, the novels of middle-class life, a return to social novels, last years, short stories, selections, letters, miscellaneous writings, biographies and sketches, criticism, books in print.

To celebrate the closing of the Exhibition on July 7th a dinner was held at the Burford Bridge Hotel, Mickleham, where the Omar Khayyám Club met on several occasions, particularly on July 13, 1895. On that day, Meredith, Hardy and Gissing all spoke in public, and the event was widely reported in the press. In a more modest way, the 1971 dinner gathered the organisers of the Exhibition and some of their friends.

Finally, it should be recorded that P. Coustillas was interviewed by the French Service of the BBC and that, at the suggestion of Dott. Francesco Badolato, a talk was given by L. Grosso on the Italian Service.

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### *Veranilda*

C. J. Francis  
University of Newfoundland

It is generally agreed that *Veranilda* is a failure, a dull book; that Gissing has no doubt enjoyed dwelling on and in his favourite classical scenes, but has not made that enjoyment accessible to the reader. It is odd, though, that scene and subject so close to *By the Ionian Sea* should be so much less attractive. Well, a travel book demands a different kind of achievement; we should ask, what are the demands on *Veranilda*, and how did Gissing fail?

Most obviously, in plot. Matured as a novelist, far removed in his other late works from tales of sensation, when he comes at last to make use of his classical learning he expounds it through a purely conventional, and idle, story of romantic love, in which a group of stock characters move in formations motivated mainly by circumstances, suffering the exaggerated pangs of passion, grief, anger and remorse habitual in this genre. The infinitely trite story of boy-gets-girl is prolonged by unnecessary intrigues and pointless misunderstandings.

Yet perhaps this criticism alone is not sufficient to condemn a historical novel. Undertaking this form, new to him, in it seems a lighthearted way, Gissing has simply followed in the traditions of Scott and many another nineteenth-century historical novelist. A number of books whose scenes are supported by just such narratives of cardboard figures in romantic

postures have established themselves as historical novels of the first rank. Which surely suggests that plot is not of great importance.

To analyse at length the varying kinds of this distinct subspecies of the novel would be attractive but irrelevant. I postulate that the average historical novel's first function is to re-create as an experience an age that is past – to give the reader, as it were, to live in it. Its second, less essential, is to re-interpret the age, its events, and the historical figures that lived in it. But for story-telling, and for investigation of fictional characters such as is expected of the ordinary novel, there is comparatively little demand. It could be argued indeed that too high a

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proportion of these normal novelist's skills would actually distract from the primary purposes of historical recreation. So it is that a novel which excels in those primary purposes may well be held together by the most casual framework of plot, of which the very familiarity is here a virtue.

Gissing's failure, then, must be in re-creation and reinterpretation.

Obviously, the historical novelist's task is the easier when his chosen period is familiar to the reader, whose imagination then is well prepared for the experience and who will contribute to the picture of his own knowledge. Fresh interpretations of history have more impact when the reader has already views and conceptions to unsettle. Unfortunately, there can be few settings less familiar to the average English-speaking reader than the age of Cassiodorus. Had it been the age of the Caesars, now, the time of Christ; or a period of British, American or modern European history; both education and literature have contributed to make us at home in them. Other novelists, too. But the only others I can readily call to mind who have written of the reign of Justinian are Masefield and Graves, more recent than Gissing. One may fairly paraphrase a question in a well-known work devoted to the average man's knowledge of history (I mean *1066 and All That*) and ask the potential reader of *Veranilda*, how *can* you be so numb and vague about the Gothic kings of Italy?

Still, history can very well be learnt from novels. Has Gissing succeeded, as others have, in meeting the challenge of the unfamiliar period, all the necessary information being supplied within the text? I think not; not because the information is not there to be gathered, but because he does not succeed in interesting us in it. In the first place, like Browning in *Sordello*, he tends to assume more knowledge in the reader than he can reasonably be expected to have. The memory of Theodoric and Cassiodorus, the threat of Belisarius, hang over the book – are important to its mood and motivations; but, I repeat, these persons are, if not unknown to the general, at least not well enough known to carry emotional connotations. In the second place, he

has provided few historical events, no complete historical process to contemplate. The story

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covers a period during which King Totila was reconquering Italy in the absence of Belisarius; and, had the book been completed, might have included the fall of Rome. But Belisarius never appears. Had the book (for instance) begun with his departure, and ended with his return, a much more cogent and complete action would have been achieved.

The use of a romantic tale as a vehicle for the historical novel depends on that tale being not only contingent on but also subordinate to great events. Gissing has let it bulk too large. It is perhaps consistent in him, that, loathing warfare as he did, he should avoid battles and sieges; but the events of the period are primarily military-political. Refraining from following the fortunes of Totila, he follows those of his fictional characters instead; the historical figures make the briefest of appearances, and Belisarius none. For the most part we have to read the twinings of an intrigue in which we have little interest, and the thoughts of characters who had no depth in their first conception and gain little by investigation.

There remains only, to save the book – and this is indeed Gissing's main purpose – the re-creation of the life and atmosphere of the times. Here Gissing comes closest to success, creating a strong impression, elegiac and mournful, of the decadence of Roman life in the aftermath of the Empire. For this the limited range of historical events – actions without conclusion, political manipulations without resolution – may be conceived to be well chosen. The absence from this scene of that man of decisive purpose, Belisarius, is then proper. Many of the events can be seen, not as a part of a meaningful action, but as a process of deterioration that cannot be averted. Several times over we are introduced to great houses which retain some of the dignity of Roman life; most are deserted by some turn of events, some robbed and despoiled, in the course of the book, though always in the background, and their owners seem scarcely to care as their possessions and wealth are reduced, so that this seems an inevitability of the times. The incidental background reflects the same process, as temples are despoiled, statues go to the lime-kiln, brigands wander in the civilised Roman countryside, and an endless panorama of deserted buildings, decaying carvings and cracked mosaics passes before us. Most effective is

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the Roman water shortage, the empty baths and the personal uncleanliness, especially since the destruction of the aqueducts was so very recent and the effects only beginning to be felt – it is a symbol of which more could have been made.

This is good, and if it is gloomy it is also Gissing. But, besides mood, there needs a further element in re-creation: evocation of the sensation, the concrete experience of living in the time. Gissing is lacking here, and it is difficult to explain exactly why; for he works hard to this end with considerable antiquarian erudition, assembling endless detail especially of décor and manners. He has particular skill in making use of what has survived till today and suggesting the rest.

It is a good test of an author's descriptive powers, that he should be able to convey a scene so vividly that a visit to the actual source should merely confirm his version; further, that the memory of his vision of it should enliven the reality. *By the Ionian Sea* achieves this, even after seventy years. Of *Veranilda* the reverse is true. From the novel one receives no very distinct impressions – a good deal of information, but little material with which to form mental pictures. Only with the aid of a fairly extensive knowledge of Gissing's scene can I admire his antiquarian ability and develop the imaginative pictures in my mind which he is trying to create.

Obviously, something is lacking. There is, at times, that tendency to vagueness or imprecision which marks so much of his descriptive work. There is a failure to form parts into a scenic whole which is only exacerbated by prolific detail. There is a deficiency of detail of a more ordinary kind which could make a considerable addition to a sense of current reality. When Basil, in an inn, "made shift to dine on such food as could be offered him," we would be glad to know what that food was – particularly in view of Gissing's special talent in description of food and his significant use of it on other occasions. One may compare Basil's journey with the brief account of Mallard's in Chapter V of *The Emancipated* (only a mile or two away, though separated by many centuries) to see how dead the one, how alive the other. The colour of a horse – horses are merely vehicles to Gissing – the size at least, even if not the design, of a

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ship, the nature of Basil's task in the monastery garden, the very tool with which he performed it; can any novelist afford to omit so much that is a part of real experience? Not I think in the historical novel.

Even in his own particular field of antiquarian detail he has the tendency to assume in the reader his own familiarity with the material. Too often he relies on merely naming a building, a bridge, a statue; no aid for the eye to one who has not seen it.

"In the midst of a little garden, planted with flowering shrubs, rose the statue which its late owner had most prized, an admirable copy of the Aphrodite of Cnidos; it stood upon a pedestal of black basalt and was

protected by a light canopy with slender columns in all but transparent alabaster.”

This, part of one of his better scenes, nevertheless is only partly description; the rest partakes of the nature of statement. The uninformed reader is left with unsatisfied questions: what shrubs? what style of canopy? in particular, what does the Aphrodite of Cnidos look like?

In the end, one can appreciate Gissing’s enthusiasm for his material without sharing it, recognise that one has been well informed about the period but not moved by it.

Perhaps after all Gissing’s antiquarian enthusiasm was not such an important part of his mind as he and others have suggested. *The Times Literary Supplement* (see *Collected Articles*) perceptively notes that Basil’s penance under St. Benedict – a stereotype, but the most effective of the historical figures – is memorable, in that the discussions of conduct, of the life of spiritual withdrawal versus the love of woman, are problems of timeless concern in which Gissing can take a contemporary and perhaps personal interest. It is here that the novel comes closest to having a theme. In the midst of a decadence, not only of traditional Roman life but of a politically divided, self-seeking Church whose activities destroy the heritage of the past to no good purpose, Basil finds a promise for the continuity of civilisation in the rule of Benedict, in its virtue and discipline and in its concern for the preservation of learning and beauty.

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For a while, in reading this, one can believe that the whole book has tended to this point, and maybe it was Gissing’s intention that it should. On looking back, however, one has again to admit that any sense of purpose has been lost among the varying elements of romance, intrigue and historical detail. Despite this, the refreshing quality of this part reveals again that Gissing’s true métier is the discussion of themes of contemporary human concern. Classical studies may have been Gissing’s hobby, but they do not provide sufficient force of feeling for a novel. His dream has no reality.

One final point: I particularly miss in this novel the sardonic Gissing of astringent mind, alert to social and human significance. Once only do I detect the authentic note. Apropos of the seizure of the potters’ common chest, “Basil’s feeling, as he listened, was one of renewed bitterness against the Greeks; but to the potters themselves he gave little thought, such folk and their wrongs appearing of small moment to one of his birth.” How his romantic hero leaps suddenly into life!

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### Veranilda: Some Other Opinions

P. Coustillas

Among the reviews occasioned by the original publication of *Veranilda* in September 1904, the following are of special interest. The extracts reprinted here reflect the wide range of conflicting opinions about the various aspects of the book. Not a few of these reviews will be found in *George Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, edited by P. Coustillas and C. Partridge (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Barnes & Noble), which is due for publication in 1972.

*Daily Telegraph* (September 28, 1904): "It requires an effort certainly to breathe the sixth-century air, but it is worth while trying, for *Veranilda* is an historical romance such as we rarely see in our modern time. The author is no pedant dragging in his learning with him like a cumbrous cloak wherever he moves; he is a scholar who has a dramatic joy in life, a man who can describe character, who can make us feel the influence of the characters about whom he

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he talks, live their life with them, understand their impulses and their ways."

*Daily Chronicle* (September 28, 1904): "It is a finely constrained and elaborately poised piece of work; the details of description and of historic perspective are most carefully worked out, the whole tale is full of dignity, and rich workmanship. But it lacks the one thing needful: it lacks the breath of life. There are force and opulence of treatment such as one might hardly have expected to find, but there is scarcely any charm."

*Morning Post* (September 28, 1904): "It has occurred to us in reading it that the very fulness of the author's knowledge, his tenderness for localities hallowed to him by personal association no less than by reading and research, have sometimes caused him to forget his story, with its narrower human interest, and to throw on himself for awhile at least the mantle of a Gibbon. Not that the romance is by any means wanting in its dramatic moments or that the plot is devoid of a certain ingenuity, while much of the characterisation shows both strength and subtlety."

*Daily News* (October 3, 1904): "There is local colour, a real and even passionate love for the very landscapes and sunshine of the south. One can almost feel the relief with which Gissing turned from the lifelong, self-imposed task of the chronicle of the 'ignobly decent' ... There is accurate observation and a profound knowledge of the classes and of the history of the time ... Yet somehow the thing fails in that one essential quality of interest – the quality that grips the reader and holds him spellbound and compels him whether he would or not to listen."

*Manchester Guardian* (October 5, 1904): "The characters are generally conventional, and perhaps, by Gissing's standards in his novels of contemporary life, rather elementary, but character seems in this case to have been a secondary interest ... The style is graceful and lucid, admirably fitted for its purpose, and radically different from his earlier style and temper ... [The narrative] strikes us as a respectable and even a remarkable accomplishment, but it is the cold performance of a writer who was capable of passion and penetration."

*Scotsman* (October 6, 1904): "The characters ... who crowd the stage of this brilliant sixth

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century drama stand out as vividly as if they peopled a drama of yesterday or today. A roll of Virgil's manuscript becomes as tangible a thing as a volume of Tennyson; and Totila himself as strong a personality as Bismarck or the Duke of Wellington."

*Globe* (October 7, 1904): "Many persons, Roman, Goth and Greek, are welded into the story, and in the development of the plot. Their characters are indicated with masterly skill; but it is not to these alone that the book owes its distinguishing excellence. It is rather to the author's capability of realising and re-creating for his readers the epoch in which his story is placed. The atmosphere of decaying Rome seems to hang about the pages in which George Gissing's genius reveals itself at its best ... Gissing has chosen his time boldly and justified his choice. It is not often, in the history of present-day literature, that the posthumous work of a writer can be claimed by his admirers as the most satisfactory of his achievements."

*Times Literary Supplement* (October 7, 1904): "Gissing seems to know [the period] as well as if he had lived in it in a previous incarnation. At any rate he must have lived long in it in happy imagination before he sat down to write. His actual story, it is true, is of no very absorbing interest to the modern reader; but it could hardly be otherwise with a story of ancient Rome ... The love of Basil for Veranilda leaves us cold, and the perplexities of Marcian when the flesh lusts contrary to the spirit leaves us indifferent. But the period lives if the characters do not."

*Academy* (October 8, 1904): "Scholarly, earnest work, seldom attaining to beauty and never to spiritual unity, 'Veranilda' confesses to the fact that in Italy of the Greek and Goth, as in modern London, George Gissing found the discords of life when most he desired its harmony."

*Illustrated London News* (October 15, 1904): "Is it possible to be stirred in the slightest degree by any of the men and women in 'Veranilda'? Was the author stirred? We cannot find a single passage which suggests that his heart was really in the matter. The narrative drags its slow length along until we are weary of the interminable explanations which the characters are

constantly interchanging, explanations of incidents we have already forgotten. In a romance of Rome in the sixth century you do expect a good deal to happen. In 'Veranilda' very little happens."

*Glasgow Herald* (October 15, 1904): "All the characters are clearly and vigorously delineated, the plot is dexterously handled; the desolation of the country and town and the corruption of society in Italy are vividly but not naturalistically described, and the diction shows a precision and simplicity rare in present fiction. Altogether this last work of George Gissing must be acknowledged as one of the best historical novels lately produced."

*World* (October 18, 1904): "His grand, beautiful story, so scholarly, without one disconcerting suggestion of pedantry . . . makes us feel the author's gift really was genius. We are glad to have this noble work, sad legacy though it be. We know where to place George Gissing now."

*London Outlook* (October 22, 1904): "'Veranilda' may well be a monument of archaeological research, but as a story is decidedly feeble and uninteresting."

*Athenaeum* (October 22, 1904): "He was simply not fitted for this particular work. It is written carefully, it is put together with patience and skill, it has bright and effective periods and incidents, it has all the trappings of romance – but it is Gissing in disguise."

*London Literary World* (October 28, 1904): "The strongest part of the book is that in which there is described the state of Rome when Totila, King of the Goths, had encamped around the city. While writing these passages, George Gissing is as near as he possibly could to touching the page with the magic touch."

Few articles on *Veranilda* appeared after the immediate reception of the book came to an end. The most valuable contribution on the subject doubtless came from the author's son ("Gissing's Unfinished Romance," *National Review*, January 1937, pp. 82-91). A. C. Gissing eagerly responded to the literary and historical appeal of the story: "In the past Gissing had frequently proved himself unable to rise to scenes of a highly dramatic nature, but in reading those stirring middle chapters of his romance one instinctively feels that here he has gained a

new power. The tragic days at Marcian's villa on the Liris, with the vivid narrative that precedes the description of them, and the moving sequel, show that the author had at last gained the mastery of a branch of art which hitherto had always presented difficulties. The murder of

Marcian certainly ranks as his most successful piece of 'tragedy.' With regard to the ending, Gissing's son had this to say: "For one thing we believe that, contrary to the habit of the earlier Gissing, he intended, as far at any rate as the affairs of Basil and Veranilda are concerned, to make the story end happily. His own experience of life had taught him much as to the perversity of human affairs; but now he was not dealing with the life around him; he was depicting an age widely remote from his own ... an age in which it was possible for ideal things to take place. And we know that the last chapter of all was to contain a picture of Rome in all the fearful desolation of her forty days of utter abandonment – streets of great buildings empty and forsaken, and a ghostly stillness reigning within the mighty heart which had then ceased to throb."

The literary quarrel which attended the appearance of the volume in 1904 has been related at some length by the present writer in "The Stormy Publication of Gissing's *Veranilda*," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, November 1968, pp. 588-610.

#### An Unpublished Letter to James Payn

P. Coustillas

Gissing finished "Godwin Peak," later retitled *Born in Exile*, on July 17, 1891 at Clevedon. Elated by the success of *New Grub Street*, his only three-volume novel to have run into a second edition in that form, he sent off his manuscript to his publishers, Smith, Elder & Co., three days later. He asked £250 for the English and American copyright, that is £100 more than he had obtained for *New Grub Street*. The publishers acknowledged receipt of the manuscript on July 22 but he did not hear from Payn until August 7. The relations between the two men had always been difficult, and Payn's letter, very hard to decipher, contributed to make them worse. The "reader" said that the reading of "Godwin Peak" would be interrupted for a month because of

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his forthcoming holiday, adding that anyway Smith, Elder could not contemplate paying £250 as *New Grub Street* had been a financial failure. The latter statement was as much of a surprise to the author as it is to us. Gissing was all the more inclined to disbelieve it as he heard from Bertz on the very same day that the unprofitable novel had just appeared on the Continent in Tauchnitz's series. Depressed by Payn's letter, he replied immediately that, if Smith, Elder would pay £150 at once, he would take it, but that if the payment of the £150 depended on Payn's opinion when he had read the whole manuscript, he would withdraw it. On August 9, Gissing had his novel back and a letter from Payn saying that he was prepared to finish reading

it on his return from holiday, if the author chose to send it back. He warned him that he could not advise his firm to offer more than £150, attributing Gissing's lack of success to the pessimism of his books.

The following letter, the last Gissing wrote to Payn to all appearances, shows his firm, dignified reaction. It is also a fine illustration of the view expressed by *The Times* in its obituary notice that he was "one who valued his artistic conscience above popularity, and his purpose above his immediate reward." The original is undated but the Diary establishes that it was written on August 10, 1891. It is now part of C. C. Kohler's collection and is printed here with his permission.

24 Prospect Park,  
Exeter.

Dear Mr. Payn,

Thank you; in writing thus privately to me about the prospects of the MS you have done me a kindness.

I cannot expect my publishers to have as much faith in the future of my books as I have myself. From my point of view, it is by no means the immediate *library* sale that has mainly to be taken into account. The purchase of a copyright means property during a long series of years, & a few years hence my novels will sell much better than they do today. But this is speculation, & everyone is justified in declining to speculate.

To alter with deliberation the whole spirit of my work would be to court & merit failure.

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I take no credit to myself for preferring present poverty to the certainty of a hopeless future if I tried to write otherwise. The continental novelists have gained their public by persistence in self-development; I must try to win the same end by the same course. *But* "those who live to please must please to live," & I am sure you will think me justified in going about to find what this MS will fetch in the open market.

Yours very truly,  
George Gissing.

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Letter to the Editor

(re “Henry Ryecroft’s ‘trick’ again,” vol. VII, No. 2, April 1971, pp. 15-17).

Dear Sir,

While all the sources hitherto suggested in the *Newsletter* for Henry Ryecroft’s “trick” are interesting and not improbable, one other author has not yet been mentioned though he made use of a similar “trick” several times quite explicitly. This other author is of earlier date than Bergson, or Proust, or Pater, or the English edition of Schopenhauer’s *Studies in Pessimism*, or even than *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. He is, besides, an author with whose writings Gissing unquestionably had intimate familiarity before he wrote his own *Ryecroft*. I am referring, of course, to Charles Dickens. It is worth noticing, in connexion with the final remark in your own valuable contribution to this debate, that Orwell, who was, like Gissing, one of the most perceptive critics of Dickens, must have been also one of the most attentive readers of his works.

Some relevant passages are:

“It [Mr. Spenlow’s greenhouse] contained quite a show of beautiful geraniums. We loitered in front of them, and Dora often stopped to admire this one or that one, and I stopped to admire the same one; and Dora, laughing, held the dog up childishly, to smell the flowers; and if

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we were not all three in Fairyland, certainly *I* was. The scent of a geranium leaf, at this day, strikes me with a half comical, half serious wonder as to what change has come over me in a moment; and then I see a straw hat and blue ribbons, and a quantity of curls, and a little black dog being held up, in two slender arms, against a bank of blossoms and bright leaves.”

*David Copperfield*, Chapter XXVI.

“I had no thought, that night – none, I am quite sure – of what was soon to happen to me. But I have always remembered since, that when we stopped at the garden-gate to look up at the sky, and when we went upon our way, I had for a moment an indefinable impression of myself as being something different from what I then was. I know it was then, and there, that I had it. I have ever since connected the feeling with that spot and time, and with everything associated with that spot and time, to the distant voices in the town, the barking of a dog, and the sound of wheels coming down the miry hill.”

*Bleak House*, Chapter XXXI.

“Oh, his manners! won’t his manners do, then?” asked Bidy, plucking a black-currant leaf. . . . Bidy having rubbed the leaf to pieces between her hands – and the smell of a black-currant bush has ever since recalled to me that evening in the little garden by the side of the lane – said, ‘Have you never considered that he may be proud?’”

*Great Expectations*, Chapter XIX.

It is interesting to note that the above examples are to be found in Dickens’s only three large-scale autobiographical narratives, and that the autobiographical form lends itself better than any other to the use of Ryecroft’s “trick.”

Faced with such a plethora of possible sources or influences, one is tempted to conclude that perhaps we need not look for sources or influences at all. Where the phenomenon in question has been observed and described by so many writers, and when each of us could probably record similar cases from his own experience, why not simply credit Gissing with having hit upon the same discovery in an independent manner?

Sylvère Monod, Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris.

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Editor’s note: Some time after sending me the above letter Sylvère Monod wrote again mentioning that while re-reading Proust he came across a passage in which Proust quoted Chateaubriand about the “trick.” Shortly afterwards going through an old bookseller’s catalogue offering an autograph letter of Gissing to Meredith dated August 2, 1903, I myself read this: “The proximity of Spain has its imaginative value now and then. A year ago, as I stood by the road-side looking at the mountains two Spanish priests passed me, conversing. I said to myself ‘Don Quixote,’ and straightway set to work upon the text, which I had never before had time to grapple with...”

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### Recent Publications

### Volumes

- *The Rediscovery of George Gissing: A Reader’s Guide*, by John Spiers and Pierre Coustillas, London, National Book League, 1971. £2.

- *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, by P. J. Keating, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971, £3.50. Gissing is the subject of ch. 3 but he is constantly referred to throughout the work. Naturally the working class novels examined are *Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, *Thyrza* and *The Nether World*. Although it is partly a working class novel, *A Life's Morning* receives no mention. The other late Victorian authors studied at some length are Walter Besant, Henry James (*The Princess Casamassima*), Kipling, Somerset Maugham (*Liza of Lambeth*), Arthur Morrison, Henry Nevinson, Edwin Pugh, Pett Ridge and Richard Whiteing.

- *Working-Class Stories of the 1890's*, edited by P. J. Keating. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971, £1.60. Gissing's story "Lou and Liz" is reprinted on pp. 80-92. The other authors present in this anthology are Morrison, Kipling, Nevinson, Edwin Pugh, A. St. John Adcock and Clarence Rook.

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#### Articles, Reviews, etc.

- Rogers, James, "George Gissing," *English Literature in Transition*, vol. XIV, no. 1, 1971, pp. 62-71. A detailed analysis of recent publications on Gissing, with pertinent comments.
- Anon., "Our Contributions to Gissing Studies," *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo daily, evening edition), June 4, 1971. A review of *Gissing East and West: Four Aspects*, with a photograph of Mr. Kamo, book in hand, saying: "Nineteenth-century England is so like present-day Japan."
- Peterborough, "More Relevant Now," *Daily Telegraph*, June 24, 1971.
- Anon., "Gissing Revived," *Evening Standard*, June 24, 1971.
- [Curtis, Anthony], "Gissing Rescued," *Times Literary Supplement*, June 25, 1971, p. 727. A review of *George Gissing, Essays and Fiction*, *Gissing East and West* and *My First Rehearsal and My Clerical Rival*.
- Tindall, Gillian, "Women's Lib 1892," *New Statesman*, June 25, 1971, pp. 886-87. A full-page article on *The Odd Women*.
- Curtis, Anthony, "Gissing Exhibition," *Financial Times*, June 28, 1971.
- Isella, Bruna, "Le Novelle di Gissing," *Italia Intellettuale*, January-June 1971, p. 14. A review of Francesco Badolato's volume of Gissing stories in Italian.
- Hutchison, B., "The Rediscovery of George Gissing," *Book Collecting and Library Monthly*, June 1971, p. 64. An announcement of the exhibition.
- [Curtis, Anthony], "Commentary," *Times Literary Supplement*, July 2, 1971, p. 762. Deals in part with the exhibition.



- Anon., "Aids for the Traveller," *Investors Chronicle and S. E. G.*, July 2, 1971, p. 27. Deals in part with the exhibition.

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- Anon., *Bookseller*, July 3, 1971, p. 12. Photograph taken at the Exhibition with some comments.

- Homberger, Eric, "Gissing," *Times Literary Supplement*, July 9, 1971, p. 808. Letter to the editor.

- Anon., *Reading and Berkshire Chronicle*, July 23, 1971. A review of *Gissing East and West* and *My First Rehearsal and My Clerical Rival*.