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“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 Biological Drama: Darwinian Ethics
in George Gissing’s Fiction

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Darwinian ethics, particularly in the form of Social Darwinism popularised by Herbert Spencer, found a ready response among the middle classes of the later Victorian period.¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that we can find illustrations of these attitudes in the novels of George Gissing, careful social analyst that he was and man of his time. Three novels in particular illustrate and are influenced by the ethics of Darwinism: *New Grub Street* (1891), *Born in Exile* (1892) and *The Whirlpool* (1897).

The impact of *The Origin of Species* on literary form is an area of critical dispute: Hyman sees it as a consequential movement towards tragedy, while Dwight Culler, in contrast, views it as a movement towards comedy.² Neither approach is, strictly speaking, supported by the case of Gissing’s fiction: in his narratives we find a combination of both comic structure (with its usual ending in marriage) and tragic structure (with its emphasis on destiny and individual death). The success of some characters in the struggle to leave progeny (the Darwinian “battle for life”) exists alongside the failure to do so of the protagonist, with whom the reader usually identifies.

Gissing’s work is often seen as embodying a widespread late-nineteenth-century fear of evolution-in-reverse, of racial degeneration.³ In this reading, his novels illustrate a progressive degeneration of behaviour and values in his characters, due to the survival of the compromisers and the morally corrupt and to the corresponding elimination of the honest and upright.

“Positive” characters acknowledge the importance of moral values and are defeated; “negative” characters accept corrupt mediocrity and survive.⁴

The main weakness of this reading is the presence of a series of characters that do not fit in with such a moral dichotomy. Indeed, we may say that Gissing draws back from any such moral judgment. The characters who prove to be “fit” and “unfit” are by no means seen as, respectively, “bad” and “good”; Gissing takes the position of orthodox Darwinism, picturing the dynamics of social selection in an *amoral* perspective.

The simplistic interpretation of which I complain is an example of a more general tendency to maximize the symbolic significance of his characters, taken as representing types or ideas rather than persons. Lewis D. Moore, for instance, identifies Edwin Reardon and Jasper Milvain in *New Grub Street* with “the independent, creative artist” and “the facile adapter,” while Oswald H. Davis looks on the same characters as representing “ideals” and “commerce.”⁵ Though a common mode of critical interpretation, such identifications need to be carefully viewed in the light of Gissing’s words on the *roman à thèse*:

Its common characteristic is a lack of the novelist’s prime virtue, the ability to create and present convincing personalities. In the argumentative and exhortative novel we are not concerned with persons, but with types. [...] It serves a purpose in preparing the way for another kind of writing, which will at once have literary value and be a response to urgent spiritual need.⁶

Here appears Gissing’s belief in the importance of psychologically credible characters and his opposition to puppets artificially manipulated to illustrate a problematic theme. This leads him to attempt a depiction of the man of his age as a collection of contradictory instincts:

Human nature is compact of strangely conflicting elements, and I have met men extremely brutal in one way who yet were capable of a good deal of genial feeling in other directions.⁷

Although it might successfully be argued that the autobiographical characters are often depicted with a lack of objectivity, I would agree with C. J. Francis’s view that Gissing “went by observation of life except when he was indulging his romantic idealism.”⁸ Francis shows that Gissing

was perfectly aware that character was not so simple a matter as the traditional classical or romantic novelists, and their Victorian descendants, might believe. In such novels, characters were neatly defined, and easily recognised as symbols. Their motives were directly related to their actions and consequently to schemes of virtue and vice, or social morality. (p. 2)

At this stage I think we may return to Gissing’s Darwinism to support our interpretation, for it is Darwinism, with its emphasis on traits either inherited or the result of environmental conditioning, that undermines the myth of the romantic hero, whose actions had been seen as an expression of his “self” independent of circumstances.

Gissing’s apparently “positive” characters are never heroic. Gillian Tindall has shown that they all share in Gissing’s common “guilty secret” theme; they display “a sense of unease” and

take part in “slightly furtive role-playing,” thereby betraying “a devious ambition, a lack of integrity, an ulterior motive, even just the basic fact of egotism.”⁹

I cannot therefore agree with Korg’s view that in the binary opposition of the protagonists the reader should distinguish between “one who willingly accepts reality with its own disorder, corruption and inconsistency” and “one who withdraws into a world of his own” (p. 2). I would like to show that, on the contrary, such an important act of choice cannot be justifiably assumed in relation to Gissing’s protagonists, who, though described sympathetically, seldom escape the disordered motivations of mediocrity.

These characters are clearly unfit for their environment, doomed to extinction, but can never become heroic accusers of the society that eliminates them – for the simple reason that *they are part of that very same society*. Indeed, they never allow themselves a superior or detached life-choice; all are involved in “the survival of the fittest.” Gissing’s defeated protagonists, far from such a choice in favour of a more heroic or tragic stance, take refuge in a kind of “narcissistic” self-pity:

Refuge from despair is often found in the passion of self-pity and that spirit of obstinate resistance which it engenders. In certain natures the extreme of self-pity is intolerable, and leads to self-destruction; but there are less fortunate beings whom the vehemence of their revolt against fate strengthens to endure in suffering. These latter are rather imaginative than passionate; the stages of their woe impress them as *the acts of a drama*, which they cannot bring themselves to cut short, so various are the possibilities of its dark motive. The intellectual man who kills himself is most often brought to

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that decision by conviction of his insignificance; self-pity merges into self-scorn, and the humiliated soul is intolerant of existence. *He who survives under like conditions does so because misery magnifies him in his own estimate.*¹⁰

The alternative to suicide is the magnification of one’s own self as a victim of external forces: through a viewing of his life as a desperate drama, Gissing’s defeated character glorifies himself as a martyr of society.

I will argue that Gissing’s social resentment arises from the *structure* of his novels, which points to the ambiguity of the Darwinian theory when applied to a social context. Gissing’s novels will be shown to reveal the existence of pain and defeat as a private event concealed behind the public celebrations of successful characters. They thus imply a guilty forgetting of the pain within society and defamiliarize it.

This “defamiliarization” strategy has more to do with an artistic aim than with social criticism. Gissing’s social attitudes are more sarcastic, i.e., faithless, than critical. For all the renewed perception of pain and sorrow, the exhortation to mutual aid – which the youthful Gissing had expressed in “The Hope of Pessimism”¹¹ – finds no space in the social fabric of his mature novels. Despair dominates, and no ethical system apart from Darwinism has any lasting validity.

II

1. From the very beginning *New Grub Street* portrays the opposition between the two protagonists, Jasper Milvain and Edwin Reardon. In Jasper’s words, Edwin

is the old type of unpractical artist; I am the literary man of 1882. He won't make concessions, or rather, he can't make them; he can't supply the market [...]. He sells a manuscript as if he lived in Sam Johnson's Grub Street. But our Grub Street of to-day is quite a different place (pp. 38-39).

The novel thereafter describes his effort to adapt to a changed environment. Reardon recognizes as such the necessity to conform to the new literary standard:

Milvain's temperament is very different from mine. He is naturally light-hearted and hopeful; I am naturally the opposite. What you and he say is true enough; the misfortune is that I *can't* act upon it. I am no

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uncompromising artistic pedant; I am quite willing to try and do the kind of work that will sell; under the circumstances, it would be a kind of insanity if I refused (p. 81).

Edwin's activity as a writer is itself a result of his attempt to adapt to the market, since his temperament as a classical scholar has no chance of editorial outlet (p. 90). His first effort is rewarded by short-lived success, which comes along with a female companion, "the world's greatest prize" (p. 256). Literature is thus made equal to any other battlefield of sexual selection by Reardon, who "had always regarded the winning of a beautiful and intellectual wife as the crown of a successful literary career" (p. 95).

Edwin's desires and efforts are not different in kind from those of his age. He cannot therefore complain about the fact that Amy – the woman who has selected him for his potential success over his rivals – entirely accepts contemporary values (p. 81). When she points out her husband's inability to react to difficulties, he does not claim to refuse the battle: he declares himself *unable* to fight (p. 80). In contrast, difficulties never overwhelm Jasper Milvain, a man who codifies his adaptive attitude by arguing that "to please the vulgar you must, one way or another, incarnate the genius of vulgarity" (p. 43). Feeling "justified in supplying the mob with the food it likes" (p. 43), he finds his way into popular magazines.

The Milvain-Reardon opposition is paralleled in the persons of Whelpdale and Harold Biffen. The former, recognizing his own literary mediocrity, accepts the rules of market demand: in fact, he turns out to be a very competent analyst of consumer behaviour when he succeeds in transforming the unprosperous *Chat* magazine into the successful *Chit-Chat* (pp. 496-497). He thus shows that he deserves to perpetuate his own kind through his marriage to Dora Milvain. Harold Biffen, however, is the only writer who really plans an artistically valuable piece of work, since Reardon humbles himself in the use of second-rate narrative techniques (p. 354). His having no economic success means that his genetic patrimony is doomed to extinction, since he is prevented from marrying. When, companionless, he realizes that "life was barren to him and would soon grow hateful" (p. 256), he kills himself. Biffen thus belongs to the category of those who, bowing to the judgment of uselessness society passes on them, transform self-pity into self-scorn and reject life.

Some critics have been tempted by these binary oppositions to offer a morally dichotomic reading of the novel as a whole, seeing the upholders of Dr. Johnson's literary standards

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opposed to those advocating for literature the commercial values of bourgeois ideology: consequently, the triumph of the second group of people implies Gissing's negative judgment

on society. This reading might seem justified by the plot development: Biffen commits suicide; Reardon dies a few hours after his only son, and the genetic patrimony of both characters is thereby dispersed; Milvain, in contrast, marries successfully (replacing Reardon as Amy's husband), as do Whelpdale and Milvain's sisters.

Such a critical reading, however, fails to take into account the narcissistic self-appraisal of Gissing's "positive" characters, while construing their "state of martyrdom" as externally caused. Further, it does not fit the case of Alfred Yule, "a struggling and embittered man" (p. 51). He employs paternal pressure to try and appropriate his daughter's money for a new journalistic venture, being unconcerned that, should he achieve his aim, he would spoil her chances of a good marriage. In Yule we can see literary aims at odds with moral integrity: his meanness as a father conflicts with the seriousness of the man of letters who "took his efforts *au grand sérieux*" and who "thought he was producing works of art" (p. 127). He is of course destined to fail in the struggle, but his relevance in the novel is not circumscribed to this, for his similarities with Reardon shed light on the latter's lack of social ambition rather than on any deficiency in artistic integrity.

The case of Dora Milvain cannot either be reduced to the moral typology we are challenging here. Although she is destined for marriage and consequently for survival by sexual transmission of her characteristics, she is not so cynical as her brother concerning the importance of success at any cost. She condemns Amy's behaviour towards her husband (p. 500) and Jasper's towards Marian Yule; she accepts contemporary values, but does not divest herself of all moral dignity: even if she never disputes "the value of money," she claims that "there are things one mustn't sacrifice to gain it" (p. 545).

It is true that the title *New Grub Street* establishes an explicit link with the productive model of Dr. Johnson. Yet this link should not be seen only in relation to Reardon, as argued by some critics. We should not forget that Johnson's approach to literature did not exclude journalism,¹² nor should we forget how commercial the eighteenth-century novel was.¹³ The Reardon-Milvain opposition should rather be considered in the light of the Darwinian notion of "common descent": both characters are related to a common ancestor, i.e. Dr. Johnson and the literary culture he represents. The difference between the two is that Jasper has retained some

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Johnsonian characteristics (his tireless ability to apply himself to his work, his wide-ranging literary "appeal") which suit him to the new *habitat*, whereas Reardon has been endowed with others that are no longer needed. No morality is involved in Darwin's evolution, which only works to maintain adaptation when the environment changes. Insofar as he fits in, Jasper resembles Dr. Johnson more closely than Edwin does.

Edwin's resentment should therefore be viewed as narcissistic despoliation of a society that has not granted him success. In this perspective, something is missing when David Grylls says that the Ithaca Reardon and Biffen talk insistently about is "a yearningly dreamed alternative"¹⁴ to the new Grub Street they live in, Ithaca is in fact not so much an undetermined alternative, as a spatial-cultural alternative programmed to receive as fittest writers like Reardon and Biffen rather than people like Milvain and Whelpdale.

As for Milvain, he is not so directly responsible for Reardon's solitude as Edwin accuses him of being (p. 299): actually, his responsibility is confined to his acceptance of the values of society. His lack of moral constraint in relation to Marian Yule is clearly a narrative transcription of the marriage market which Darwin had justified in *The Descent of Man*. Marian, who is a victim of this ethic, shares it herself; indeed, she consents to being valued for her money, being "very willing to accept money as her ally in the winning of his love" (p. 360). When she is deserted by him, she is consistently faithful to the same principles; she does not call Jasper a "brute" or a "lucky fellow" for surviving his two companions, but merely sees him

as “better fitted to fight [his] way” (p. 535). She thus justifies Jasper’s triumph and his operative strategies by conferring on them a scientific value. Jasper, on his part, accepts himself as a vehicle for society’s values: “this isn’t a heroic type, of course not. I am a civilized man, that’s all” (p. 149). Yet his recurring efforts to egg Reardon to success, and the critical support he gives Biffen and Reardon from the vantage point of the periodicals he writes for, divest him of any connotation of “evil variety.” He simply belongs to a “fitter variety.”

On the other hand, the “two by two” structure is not devoid of significance, even though it does not justify the hypothesis of degeneration of the species. Indeed Jasper’s story frames Edwin’s, as Whelpdale’s frames Biffen’s: Reardon appears in chapter III and dies five chapters from the end, whereas Milvain dominates both the opening and conclusion. The narrative structure thus “conceals” Edwin’s tragedy within Jasper’s comedy and its public celebrations.

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What is implied through this narrative strategy is the fact that the public comedy of evolution includes and conceals – in the formula of “survival of the fittest” – the private tragedy, the wasting of environmentally less retributive qualities caused by the perishing of the least fit.

Once Biffen and Reardon have met their tragic fate, the plot develops towards the traditional comic ending; Jasper Milvain marries Amy, Whelpdale marries Dora Milvain, and Maud Milvain is married to Dolomore. Gissing’s novel thus combines the tragic and comic aspects of evolution, showing how the stress publicly laid on the comedy of the Milvain variety relegates the elimination of less fit varieties to the back of society’s conscience. The narrative structure is therefore sarcastic towards those optimistic interpretations of the evolutive process which did not fight shy of using formulas such as “natural selection” and “survival of the fittest” so as to equate evolution with progress, and consequently justify a satisfied, cheerful view of social life.

Gissing’s structural argument should be construed as a reflection on the tendentiousness of the social response to the Darwinian theory. Gillian Beer has seen in Darwin’s “multivocality,”¹⁵ i.e. his ambiguous language, the means through which the Victorian audience would read his work in an ideologically marked way. As George Levine says, the theory offered itself to a “domesticated and ‘bourgeoisified’ reading, since it represented an “explanatory desideratum” for bourgeois ideology.¹⁶ Morse Peckham, too, had shown how Darwin’s theory was eventually accepted by society because it lent itself to an ideological reorientation.¹⁷ This sort of “hijacking” of the theory for ideological purposes is exemplified in Amy’s interest for “specialism popularized” (p. 397), which arises when she abandons Edwin. Indeed, her reading of *such forms* of Darwin and Spencer involves an instrumentalization of their theories aimed at presenting her behaviour as “natural.”

Darwinian evolution justified capitalistic ideology as the right way to improve the human species. Darwin argued that natural selection tends towards “improvement” of the species,¹⁸ and Spencer’s evolutionary metaphysics saw in it a movement towards perfection. Such optimism was responsible for the laical teleology of late Victorian society, which refused to acknowledge the tragic darker side of the theories.

Gissing’s narratives refuse such a blindness: they show both sides of the coin, thus unmasking the cruelty of bourgeois ideology. In fact, the final comedy never allows one to

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forget that “extinction and natural selection go hand in hand” (*Origin*, p. 80). Gissing’s fiction should therefore be viewed as establishing the dramatic tension of opposites that Hardy considered the writer’s business; “to show the sorriness underlying the grandest things, and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things.”¹⁹

2. The portrayal of Godwin Peak explicitly reveals how Gissing's protagonists share in the ethics of hegemonic bourgeois society. *Born in Exile* unmasks the real dynamics of Reardon's pretended martyrdom by depicting a world utterly dominated by Darwinism.

The novel's title indicates Godwin's condition of genetically determined exile (*born*). He is an exile in Darwinian terms; that is to say, a biological anomaly devoid of any evolutive potentiality for his unfitness in relation to his environment (Latin *exul-is*, from *ex-solum*). Godwin assimilates the Darwinian ethics both at home (p. 39) and at the radical college he attends (p. 11). He therefore realizes his anomaly in relation to the working class to which he belongs, recognizing he is an alien in his own native *habitat*: "he was no longer fit for Twybridge, no longer a companion for his kindred" (p. 53). Yet, the success he scores at college flatters him into thinking he is a *lucky* anomaly – "an aristocrat of nature's own making" (p. 41) –, i.e. an anomaly which he deems better fitted to a "higher" class. Still, Godwin's ambitions cannot find fulfilment at school, since he is forced to leave by the shameful presence of his uncle (p. 28): he is dogged by his "lowly origins."²⁰

The novel thereafter represents Godwin's efforts to remove his ancestral past in order to fit into a different social environment. His exogamic strategy should therefore be looked upon as a desire to transfer to a branch of descent which is not his own, but to which he feels that he belongs. In fact, Godwin plans "a voyage of discovery, to end perchance in some unknown land among his spiritual kith and kin" (p. 103); the novel thus narrates his unsuccessful environmental research, contrasting with the harmonious fitting into society of other characters.

The analogies with the adaptive tendency depicted in *New Grub Street* are evident. In *New Grub Street* the setting was shaped by the modifications imposed on literary production by commercial practices; in *Born in Exile*, it is shaped by the phase of compromise through which the conflict between religious orthodoxy and post-Origin scientific proposals was going at the close of the century.

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Actually, the religious resistance to Darwinian theory had been followed by an astute transformation of dogma, which now accepted evolutionary metaphysics for its teleological implications: for instance, Charles Kingsley's Broad Churchism justified the struggle for existence as the instrument of election for the morally best, and of refinement for man as the undeveloped angel.

Gissing's rejection of this scientifically-justified finalistic optimism is made clear by the creation of Bruno Chilvers. Chilvers is Peak's antagonist just as Milvain was Reardon's; he climbs to success by putting into practice a cooperation between scientific discoveries and religious spirituality which Peak scorns:

What we have to do is to construct a spiritual edifice on the basis of scientific revelation. [...] The results of science are the divine message to our age [...]. Less of St. Paul, and more of Darwin! Less of Luther, and more of Herbert Spencer! (p. 349)

Chilvers is depicted as an unpleasant hypocrite, his preaching being at variance with his real thought. On the other hand, Peak is supposed to distinguish himself from Chilvers because he does not prostitute his belief in positivism for popular praise. Yet it should be noted that they both share a tendency to compromise, that is a proneness to adapt themselves which is typical of Darwinism. Godwin's inability to qualify himself as a scientist or as a man of letters prompts him to foster Radical propaganda, because "he burned with the desire of fame, and saw no hope of achieving it save as an author" (p. 130).

Moreover, Godwin's ambitions point him towards a marriage devoid of ideals and passion. He finds in Sidwell Warricombe the instrument for his exogamic enterprise by evaluating her on a philogenetic scale; "Sidwell might be held a perfect creature, perfect in relation to a certain stage of human development" (p. 170). Peak therefore chooses her according to the Darwinian strategy of sexual selection in human society, which views marriage as a means for social and genetic advancement:

Godwin Peak had for years contemplated the possibility of baseness at the impulse of a craving for love capable only of a social (one might say, of a political) definition. The woman throned in his imagination was no individual, but the type of an order. (p. 217)

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Such words clearly echo Milvain's reflections on marriage. Just like him, Godwin does not hide his real motivations behind romantic catchwords: "he neither was, nor dreamt himself, in love with her" (p. 218).

In Godwin's view, Sidwell is valuable as a means of entering the Warricombes' house – "house" both in a genealogical and a social sense. For him this house represents what Darwin had meant through the notion of "niche," i.e., the place where a variety, living isolated from competitors, can harmoniously relate itself to the environment, and survive as a species without fighting (p. 170). Entering this house is for Godwin equal to entering the niche constituted by Exeter, the quiet town far from London, "a spot of exquisite retirement [...] in security from the struggle of life" (146).

Peak's access to Exeter is obtained through his deception of Martin Warricombe, who is a geologist tied to the idea of a Creator; Godwin conquers him by a demonstration of his faith which fuses the orthodox God and the natural selection principles (pp. 251-252). Peak is therefore not so different from Chilvers, since his conduct is not devoid of hypocrisy and ambiguity. Actually, his attitude to life is highly contradictory: though his aim is social climbing, he detests Spencer's *laissez-faire* and democracy seen as "the opening of social privileges to free competition" (p. 265); though he opposes endogamic confinement to his own class, he has no objection to such a confinement where others are concerned, refusing the universal mixing of classes invoked by the Radicals.

What distinguishes him from Reardon is his capacity for acute self-analysis. When his deception is unmasked by the Warricombes, Peak does not present himself as the victim but rather as the author of his destiny: "An opportunity offered of achieving the supreme end to which my life is directed, and what scruple could stand in my way?" (p. 439). Therefore, once his enterprise has failed, he will not delude himself that he is a martyr; he will simply acknowledge his inability to establish a harmonious relationship with any environment. In this perspective, Godwin's refusal of Marcella Moxey's marriage proposal is not unreasonable: the marriage would bring him back to the social class he was unsuited to, and tried to escape from. Such a decision implies his "death" as genetical patrimony, since he will not be able to leave progeny. Therefore Godwin belongs metaphorically to the category of people who, accepting their unfitness as a decree of destiny, commit suicide.

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In contrast, three other characters do manage to reach success and marriage. Moxey, Chilvers and Malkin reveal their capacity for adapting to environment in their choice of wives and in social relationships. Following the pattern already met with in *New Grub Street*, Peak's defeat is juxtaposed to their integration. Once more, I would like to stress the fact that this

double ending does not justify a moral reading of the plot: Peak's only friend Earwaker, for instance, refuses to prostitute himself for money, as in the *Weekly Post* episode. Despite this, he survives, for he is "naturally marked for survival among the fittest" (p. 109).

(To be concluded)

¹As regards the literary reception of the Darwinian theory, see Leo Henkin, *Darwinism in the English Novel 1860-1910*, New York: Russell & Russell, 1940, pp. 197-259. Once a text has been quoted, page numbers referring to it will be given after the quotation in brackets.

I would like to thank here Professors Francesco Badolato and Clotilde de Stasio for their invaluable suggestions and patience. I am also very grateful to Richard Dury and Judith Evans (University of Bergamo) for their careful revision of a first draft of the English text. Errors and mistakes still present in it are of course mine.

²Stanley Edgar Hyman, *The Tangled Bank: Darwin, Marx, Fraser and Freud as Imaginative Writers*, New York: Atheneum, 1974 (1962); A. Dwight Culler, "The Darwinian Revolution and Literary Form," in George Levine and William Madden (eds.), *The Art of Victorian Prose*, New York: Oxford U. P., 1968, pp. 224-46.

³Leo Henkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-32. Henkin argues that in Gissing's narratives "evolution, blindly sifting, too frequently chooses the chaff and discards the wheat" (p. 232). The same argument emerges in the critical work of Adrian Poole, who thinks that "there is a strong evolutionary thesis underlying the narrative, according to which physical victory and moral degeneration are interconnected." Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context*, London: Macmillan, 1975, p. 146. This view has been recently reproposeed by Lewis D. Moore, "The Triumph of Mediocrity: George Gissing's *New Grub Street*," *Gissing Newsletter*, XXIII, 1 (January 1987), pp. 1-15.

⁴In this perspective, Jacob Korg thinks that Gissing's novels "suggest that failures in life may well be people of superior worth who are the victims of a society that grants success only to the meretricious and insensitive [...]. In the social context depicted in his novels, success, even spiritual success, is a sure sign of moral degeneracy, while failure and helplessness are nearly as certain to be signs of genuine virtue." Jacob Korg, "The Paradox of Success and Failure in the Novels of George Gissing," *Gissing Newsletter*, XIX, 3 (July 1983), pp. 16-17.

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⁵Lewis D. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 2; Oswald H. Davis, *George Gissing: A Study in Literary Leanings*, London: Johnson, 1966, p. 87.

⁶George Gissing, "Gissing on Matters of War and Ethics," *Gissing Newsletter*, X, 3 (July 1974), p. 5.

⁷Letter to Algernon, 23 June 1884. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (eds.), *Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family*, London: Constable, 1927, p. 141.

⁸C. J. Francis, "Gissing's Characterization: I Heredity," *Gissing Newsletter*, III, 1 (April 1967), p. 1; "II Environment," III, 2 (June 1967), pp. 3-7; "III Temperament," III, 3 (September 1967), pp. 1-6.

⁹Gillian Tindall, "The Guilty Secret," *Gissing Newsletter*, IX, 4 (October 1973), p. 5.

¹⁰George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987, p. 373 (my emphases). For *Born in Exile* and *The Whirlpool*, the editions referred to are those published by the Hogarth Press in 1985 and 1984 respectively.

¹¹Gissing wrote in 1882: "We are shipmates, tossed on the ocean of eternity, and one fate awaits us all. Let this excite our tenderness. Let us move on to the real gulfs hand clasped in hand, not each one's raised in enmity against his fellow." In Pierre Coustillas (ed.), *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970, pp. 94-95.

¹²See R. C. Churchill, "Three Autobiographical Novelists," in Boris Ford, *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, vol. 6, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982, p. 345.

¹³See Bernard Bergonzi, "Introduction" to *New Grab Street*, pp. 21-22. This point is made clear in Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985 (1957), pp. 58-61.

¹⁴David Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1986, p. 92.

¹⁵Gillian Beer, "Darwin's Reading and the Fictions of Development," in David Kohn (ed.), *The Darwinian Heritage*, Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1985, pp. 561-569.

¹⁶George Levine, *Darwin Among the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction*, London: Harvard U. P., 1988, pp. 11-12. In Beer's words, "as ideological conditions change, so readers appropriate diverse elements of Darwin's writing and turn to their own advantage one element in his complicated discourse" (p. 568).

¹⁷"Darwinism and Darwinisticism," *Victorian Studies*, September 1959, pp. 19-40.

¹⁸Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, p. 96.

¹⁹Michael Millgate (ed.), *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, London: Macmillan, 1984, p. 178.

²⁰Gillian Beer has acutely identified in the "lowly origins" the *topos* marking a watershed between wishful Victorian literature and the Darwinian myth. Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 63.

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Letters from the Channel Islands
Margaret Gissing on Holiday

Pierre Coustillas
and Xavier Pétremand

Among the frustrations felt by Gissing's biographers and by the editors of his correspondence are those which result from the unavailability of his relatives' letters to him. How often would obscure references to strangers and contemporary events become clear if one had the two sides of the correspondence! With the notable exception of William, his brothers and sisters are seen essentially through his own letters and private papers. What Algernon and Margaret thought of George's attitudes and activities must largely be inferred from his replies to their letters – they never wrote publicly about him. Only Ellen did so on three occasions and only in the late 1920s, when she was ageing and her memory no longer fully reliable.¹ Margaret, a more introvert character, chose to keep silent, and she is not known to have played any conspicuous part in the management of George's posthumous affairs. Doubtless she was led to discuss them more than once with Ellen, but no trace of her approval or disapproval of this or that has come down to us. Even samples of her handwriting were until recently difficult to trace.

The discovery of several groups of letters exchanged by members of the Gissing family, letters from Margaret's pen in particular, now somewhat alters this picture. They quite naturally passed into Alfred's hands after the death of his uncle and aunts, but he never turned them to any literary account. No quotation from them is offered in his biography of his father or in the articles and prefaces he wrote in the interwar period. The most significant series is printed below. The eight letters were written to her mother and sister in August and September 1889 from Guernsey, Sark and London, and they offer a detailed picture of Margaret on holiday. Besides their intrinsic interest and the light they shed on their writer's personality, they are, together with George's own letters and diary jottings, a major source of information for future

biographers of the novelist.

To the best of our knowledge, no biographical sketch of Margaret Emily Gissing has ever been published and, as factual information about her is so widely scattered, it may not be irrelevant to sketch the broad lines of her life and to fill a few gaps in passing with mentions of hitherto unknown documents in private hands. Only two portraits of her, it would seem, have

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appeared in books or periodicals – they were taken in 1880 and 1903 respectively² – but several other photographs, one of which we reproduce here, help us to imagine her physical appearance between babyhood and old age. The Wakefield photographers, G. & J. Hall, first photographed her on 27 October 1865, that is two days after her second birthday, sitting in a large armchair, then at age five and eight, and again twice at an unspecified date when she was definitely in her teens and more attractive than Ellen was to be at about the same age. Other portraits of her, unfortunately undated, enable us to see her as a young woman of possibly twenty-five. Next chronologically she appears on two occasions with her sister among their pupils, the first time doubtless in George's lifetime when only nine boys were studying with them in their Wentworth Terrace days. The last picture that has been preserved was most likely taken at Aysgarth, near Leyburn, in North Yorkshire, where she was to die on 18 March 1930.

Like her brother Algernon, Margaret did not see much of the world, and her mental attitudes, as analyzed by George, whom we are certainly not inclined to contradict, were always affected by her provincial mode of life. Of her early schooling there is no record, but Clifford Brook's researches have established that she entered the Wakefield Girls' High School in September 1878 and left in April 1880, ill health being the reason, according to the relevant register. Two letters to her mother written on 29 June and 6 July 1878 show her in a holiday mood when she was staying with Ellen at Emma Shailer's home, Russell House, Broadway. This was obviously her first visit to her Worcestershire relatives and she expressed her delight at everything around her. She must have left Wakefield rarely, if at all, since the days, prior to her father's death, when she had spent holidays at Seascale. Her cousin Mary Bedford she found much nicer than she had imagined, and she was to visit her, together with Ellen, a good many times during the next five decades. "We '*arrived*' at Evesham," she reported in the first of these letters, "& Aunt Emma and Mary found us without the least (what I call) fuss. Then we drove to the *Crown*, got out, went a little *shopping* & then started on our way to *Broadway*. I enjoyed the drive very much. We got here & it did look delightfull outside. We went in & it was lovely *inside too* & I think we *shall enjoy* ourselves VERY MUCH." Something of her basic, all too often stifled, capacity for enjoyment which appears in her letters of 1889 is manifested in those early messages to her mother which are studded with such enthusiastic girlish phrases as "it is *very jolly*,"



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Margaret Gissing, c. 1888

"you don't know half how lovely it is" and "Nelly is quite in raptures she likes the place so much." The other, far better known aspect of her personality, also occasionally finds utterance, and the two are somewhat oddly combined when she notes on 6 July 1878: "We go to Church every morning & I like the clergyman very much, but I do wish I could come home for Sundays, but then of course I never could expect to

enjoy Sunday anywhere as much as in Wakefield,” – a sentiment contradicted by one of the letters written from Guernsey.³

Of Margaret’s activities in the 1880s and early 1890s we catch glimpses in George’s letters and in the diaries of Lucy Bruce, a friend of the Gissing family who was to become a relative of theirs when her niece Catherine Baseley married Algernon Gissing in 1887. She tried hard, with George’s assistance, to improve her cultural status; she gave lessons to local children and for various periods taught away from home. A short-lived and disastrous attempt at governessing at Highbridge, Somerset, is echoed by George in June 1883. She then had more positive experiences at Mold, near Hawarden, and in Scotland, a country she visited again more than once when staying at Dunblane with the Langs, who had been neighbours of the family in Stoneleigh Terrace. Holidays in Bridlington, where another friend of the Gissings, Dora Carter (of whom portraits have been preserved), went to live after she left Wakefield for good in 1891, are also on record. Lucy Bruce’s mentions of Margaret’s visits are not invariably cheerful ones;

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they convey the impression that all these people suffered from the boredom of provincial life and that they occasionally bored one another unmistakably. Again this is confirmed by the characteristic jab at the Halls in one of the letters from the Channel Islands. Margaret’s candour is refreshing and one feels that if she had always expressed her feelings more openly she might have been much happier. Unadventurous she was by temperament and education and so she remained. For years she did not know of George’s first marriage – Mrs. Gissing shielded her as much as possible from the radicalism and unconventional doings of her eldest son, the black sheep of the family – and his letters to her, mildly affectionate, yet streaked with ironical remarks, let alone sarcasms, clearly indicate that anything he did or thought was most likely to displease her. Conversely he was rarely satisfied with her; even more than to her ailing and grumbling nature he objected to her piety. To Bertz he wrote from Sark on 5 September 1889: “I am very anxious to get to work again, very anxious. These holidays must not be made too long; for my part, I soon begin to rust. And then I suffer so much from the absolute lack of conversation. My poor sister is a Puritan, and we can talk of nothing but matter of fact.” The way in which he referred to her in the early days of his correspondence with Gabrielle Fleury fits in with this view. Still, as the years went by, he was more anxious to spare her and refrained from assaulting her prejudices. (By the turn of the century, of course, he had to be grateful to her for sharing with Ellen the schooling and care of Walter.) It is characteristic that he did not tell her of his common-law marriage until late 1901, when he thought he might after all, despite previous assertions to the contrary, pay a visit to his relatives on his way from the Nayland sanatorium to Central France. Eventually they agreed to disagree, but George remained convinced to the end that he was viewed by Margaret, as well as by his younger sister and mother, with feelings that showed all too plainly that in the Wakefield home “the milk of human kindness” was apt to turn sour. Marriage might up to a point have transformed Margaret, but no shadow of a romance attaches to her name.

A turning-point in her life was the opening of a Boys’ Preparatory School with her sister’s collaboration. George was requested to give advice, his competence in all matters of the intellect being acknowledged despite the exception taken to many of his doings and to the pessimistic and spiritually heretic nature of his literary work. The school opened in the spring of 1896 and it was certainly as successful as such a modest establishment could be. Interesting recollections of

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a few of their former pupils have been published. In 1953 John E. Kilburn wrote an appreciative account of his reminiscences of the Gissing sisters and of their educational achievements. In

Wentworth Terrace, where he says it started (actually it started at Westfield Grove and was moved to Wentworth Terrace in September) “this school rapidly grew in esteem and when I had the privilege of attending, it had been removed to a larger residence in Sandy Walk, adjoining Sunny Lawns. There are many old pupils, including a small handful still in Wakefield, who look back with gratitude and affection to the years they spent under the kindly instruction of the two Gissing sisters. There was a great dignity and almost a Victorian discipline about schooldays in that quiet old house.”⁴ The reminiscences of John Horsfall, H. B. Webster and Robert Levens added much to what Kilburn wrote. They can be read in the *Gissing Newsletter*.⁵ It appears that, in schoolboys’ slang, Margaret was nicknamed Little Gis as opposed to Big Gis, Ellen, who took the higher forms while her sister took the lower ones. Although the two sisters were members of the Church of England, they apparently held very different views on religion. The more liberal Nellie was Low Church and attended the cathedral, while Margaret – this tallies with the impressions one might tentatively infer from Gissing’s own allusions to his sisters’ spiritual attitudes – was High Church and went to St. Michael’s.

The school held its own for some fifteen years. According to John Kilburn, “with the opening of the Junior Department at the Grammar School in 1914, the numbers at the Boys’ Preparatory School declined” (actually the Gissing family removed to Fernleigh, St. Mark’s Avenue, Leeds, before the Junior Department opened; we have seen letters of Ellen written in June 1912 from the Leeds address). On leaving Wakefield Margaret ceased teaching; only Ellen is said to have coached university students in Leeds. In 1923 or 1924, Margaret and Ellen left Leeds for Aysgarth, near Leyburn, where they settled in a cottage called Yore View. This was to be Margaret’s last home, and there is evidence, supplied by letters that Ellen and Alfred wrote during the next few years, that Alfred would occasionally stay for long periods with his aunts. The letters from him dated 1928 and 1929 that we have seen were sent from Yore View. So, as his diary testifies, he was a witness of Margaret’s long agony during the autumn and winter of 1929-1930.

He first mentions his aunt’s decline on 1 January 1930: “Aunt Margaret, I am sorry to say, has been ill in bed for a good many days. I am feeding her on milk. Nervous system exceedingly

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weak, but heart strong.” He was at the time, when household duties allowed, correcting his play, “The Unclassed,”⁶ for a West-end manager to see. Four days later he noted that her illness now wore rather a grave aspect. She had practically lost the use of her left hand and leg. “There is evidently some serious disorder of the gall-bladder,” he added. “I am doing my utmost to get good medical advice. On Monday [...] I sent to Bradford for a certain J. W. Armstrong to examine her. He turned out to be a mere quack – £4.4.0 were quite wasted.” Another doctor was sent for shortly afterwards, but no progress was made, and Alfred gloomily recorded on 11 January that his aunt appeared to have a tumour (malignant or otherwise) near or on the ascending colon. She was by then paralysed in one arm. On 17 January a trained nurse came to look after the patient, who could no longer take milk and lived entirely on grapes and grape-fruit. The end of Margaret’s sufferings seemed near at hand; yet she struggled on for another two months, and Alfred noted realistically the last stages of her illness – convulsions, agitation of the brain, incapacity to speak, epileptic attacks, difficulty in breathing – calling the nurse “a clumsy, ignorant old creature” in his entry for 13 March. The entry for 18 March, on which day she died at 2 a.m., covers nearly a page and makes pathetic reading. Alfred and Ellen were called down by the nurse just in time to find the patient taking her last faint breaths. “Nurse said she had almost smiled an hour or so before. Now she lies on her bed with a most peaceful expression on her poor thin face, & we are thankful that the battle is at last over, & that she is at rest. For just two months she has taken scarcely any nourishment. It has been a great & long struggle.”

The next day a site was chosen for the grave near the north-east angle of the church, and the funeral took place at 11 a.m. on 20 March, “a day of incessant blizzard – one of the wildest and coldest days this winter.” No carriage being available, the mourners, among whom was Algernon, walked all the way from Yore View to the church, and on their return home Alfred carefully recorded all the musical items of the service chosen by Ellen. “May she rest in peace and joy after her trials & afflictions, which she has borne so patiently,” he concluded. Sixty-two years later, the grave can still be found but, as a recent visit has revealed, it has fallen into disrepair.⁷ Margaret’s will, made on 11 October 1928, was uncomplicated: she bequeathed all her belongings to her sister. It was proved at £1152.⁸ Had Ellen predeceased her, all her “personal property and all moneys whatsoever, invested or otherwise,” would have gone to

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Alfred or, should that prove impossible, to Enid, Katharine and Margaret, the three daughters of Algernon and Catherine Gissing.

The main interest of the following letters, with their erratic punctuation and occasional misspellings which we have allowed to stand uncorrected, is that they reveal an aspect of Margaret’s personality which rarely if ever appears in George’s correspondence and private papers. The frustrated, bitter, conventional side of her temperament often shades into an affirmation of more engaging qualities. A shrewd observer, her brother was aware of the kind of woman Margaret could have developed into had she been, like Miriam Baske in *The Emancipated*, in contact with forward-thinking people. Before they left Wakefield together for Guernsey he noted that the mere prospect of a change in her humdrum, mind-quelling existence made her sweeter than usual. From her new environment with its leisurely atmosphere she saw Wakefield as it looked to outsiders; she almost came to view her native town through her brother’s eyes. Her unexpected dig at her neighbours the Halls is characteristic. She responds to the beauty of the landscape, she enjoys “a tremendous dinner of four courses,” she finds the air soft and balmy, yet not exhausting. The climate seems to suit her perfectly and she retrospectively becomes conscious of her own weakness. To her Guernsey looks like a rural paradise, sparsely populated with kind-hearted people whom she contrasts with the anonymous London crowds she saw on her way from George’s flat to Waterloo railway-station. The cleanness of everything around her, including that of the Guernsey calves that she strokes lovingly, is soothing to the eyes and to the mind. She only complains about the service performed by the young rector, an Oxford man. “Oh dear!” she exclaims, “why must one’s life be passed with fearful burdens in a depressing place like Wakefield when one might choose such places!” Altogether one feels inclined to pity Margaret and to see in her what George liked to call a victim of circumstances.

I

Hotel du Gouffre
Forest, Guernsey
Wednesday evening [21 Aug., 1889]

My dearest Nellie

I shall begin this letter this evening & not post it for a day or two. We got all done in London & set off for Waterloo Station in a hansom, the first adventure took place before we

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reached the station, the horse fell onto its hind legs, the luggage was violently pitched forward into the streets, fortunately we saved ourselves from going forward. We had to get out, while the

horse was raised, & George thought the luggage would be stolen as it was a thievish street. My leg was a little bruised no other damage. We arrived safely at Southampton, it was just drizzling with rain. We went on board & it began to pour. We managed to eat our supper & then it was so wretched we parted for the night & went to our respective berths. I went 1st class, & the saloon was very comfortable kind of velvet sofas with pillows, I laid down & looked about & dozed till I felt it starting, it sailed through the Solent very smoothly & I was very comfortable, but as soon as we passed the Needles & got out into the Channel the rocking began; but kept sleeping in fits till about three; then a girl by me began to be violently ill, it made me feel very squeamish & although I took a lozenge I was soon sick, & felt very ill the rest of the time, the sea got rougher & rougher as we went on. I could hear the waves break over the deck. The only thing was to lie with eyes shut as still as possible. I managed to doze in between the attacks even George was a little sick I don't think you would have escaped this time. I have felt very dizzy all day, but hope after a night's rest to be quite right. It is a terrible night the wind blowing a gale the sea very rough. I pity the people crossing to-night It has been too rough for the Sark boat to go to-day. We find we can't possibly afford to go to France, the small things add up so, we shall be here about a fortnight & then at Sark for a week probably. I hope you are enjoying Scarboro'.⁹ I will resume this letter to-morrow.

Thursday evening

We have had a magnificent day. We are very comfortable here, we have breakfast at 8, lunch at 1. or any time we want it & dinner at 6.30 At present we are alone here & I expect we shall generally take our lunch out with us. Tell Dora, thanks to her we are in the most beautiful part of Guernsey, the situation of this hotel is marvellous, from our windows we look down a deep ravine or gorge which is the Gouffre, into the sea beyond, rocks of massive granite on each side.

We set off out after breakfast this morning & went along the cliff walk – there is no shore at low tide the sea is up to the cliffs, except in the bays, but you can walk all along the cliffs, so that it is finer than a shore because the sea is always dashing on the rocks. Well we walked on past Petit Bot Bay round Icart Point to Moulin Huet Bay, within this there is a small bay called Saints Bay which is very beautiful, & the background most lovely, here we went inland because we wanted to go to St Peter Port; we had a beautiful walk arriving there about 1, we had some lunch & wandered about the town, we went into “the Town Church” which is very nice, they have daily service I only wish I was a little nearer for Sunday. I am afraid Forest will be very primitive. We were rather tired when we got in but had a tremendous dinner of four courses.

To-night it is very calm, not a ripple, so I should think the boat will have a good passage. I think it will do us much more good to stay here a fortnight than to go about so much; & it will

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cost us very little to go to Sark. The air here is marvellous so soft & balmy still not exhausting; I only wish you & Dora were here.

I will write a letter to Mother, but perhaps you will send this for her to read.

I seem to feel very far away from you, that dreadful Channel between, but oh it is lovely when you get here. The people seem all so kind & good tempered it is quite a pleasure to talk to them. Well I think I shall close this time or else you will never get it.

Very much love to Dora & yourself. I am

Your loving sister

Madge

II

Hotel du Gouffre

Forest
Guernsey
Thursday evening [22 Aug., 1889]

My dearest Mother

I have just written Nellie a very long letter & asked her to send it to you, but as you can't get it till Tuesday, I am just sending a note which you will get on Monday.

We are very comfortable here & have everything very nice. It is situated in the most beautiful part of Guernsey & looks down a deep ravine to the sea. We had a rough passage & I was very sick, nearly everybody was, & I felt very dizzy all yesterday I am so tired I can hardly write, we have been out from 9 till 6 to-day. It is very beautiful & the air so soft & balmy. The sea dashes on the rocks all day, it has been deep blue all day edged with white foam; we could see [sic] the waves dashing on the cliffs at Sark, the foam going many feet high. The lanes here are full of the finest harts tongues I have ever seen how you would enjoy it if only you could get here.

I am not really writing an account because you will get Nellie's letter & I can hardly keep my eyes open.

Good-bye dearest, I hope Theresa is good & you are not lonely. Give my love to dear Mrs. Whiteley & the Halls very much to yourself.¹⁰

Your loving
Madge

III

Hotel du Gouffre
Forest
Guernsey
Aug. 24th 1889

My dearest Nellie

I think I must begin a letter to you because it seems so long before you get letters. You see it is rather difficult to tell you the places we have been to, when you have never heard of

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them & I am such a bad describer. Well yesterday we set off as usual directly after breakfast with our lunch or mid-day meal to go to Pleinmont Point the South west extremity of the island; the best of it is you can walk on the highest part of the cliff right along the coast, there are no rivers to hinder us, the only thing is there are long ravines which go so far inland, it doubles the distance walking round them, so that sometimes it is really nearer to take an inland road & go straight. Well we arrived at Pleinmont about 11.30, it is a rocky wild part but easier to climb about than near us here, but of course remember in no case can you get down to the sea, there are only three little bays on this side where there is a shore you can walk about on, sometimes we see a lovely piece of sand & sheer precipice on all sides no possibility of getting down to it. Now I am wandering away, dear me, I am afraid these letters are very confusing.

We sat down & eat [sic] our lunch watching the waves break on the great rocks, unfortunately it was very calm, what a sight it must be when even a little rough, I can't describe the awful rushing into caverns far under the earth, & the spray dashing over rocks out at sea. We can see Jersey most days, but not France To-day we have been to the opposite extremity Jerburgh Point, there is a little Bay called Saints Bay, it is part of Moulin Huet, which is perfect the scenery in the background is most lovely, the purple heather covers the green hills & cliffs at present, & where nothing else grows the rocks are covered with lichen. Brambles grow in abundance but the blackberries are not yet ripe. The cliffs are like extensive moors, bramble,

gorse, heather & bracken grow all down, & the greenest ivy clinging to the rocks. We have now seen all the South coast of the island yes & the east. We sat & eat our lunch to-day on a bank looking over the deepest blue sea, on the right was Sark, & not far from there was Herm, both most distinct in the sun-light, we could see trees; then as we looked across Fermain Bay there was the Harbour of St. Peter Port, & dozens of little rocky islands, you cannot imagine the clearness, George said it reminded him of Italy the colours were so beautiful Three Alderney or I suppose Guernsey calves were grazing, they let us stroke & pet them, looking at us with the mildest eyes. The marvellous cleanness of everything here, the cows & sheep look as if they were washed every day, & the cats! They are simply spotless, also very fine. The other day when we were in St. Peter Port Market, there was a very large cat sitting by a woman at a stall, so I put out my hand to stroke it & the woman said "oh he won't hurt you Miss, he is a *faithful* cat"

Monday evening

We have just come in (6 o'clock) after a long day, & gladly find your letter awaiting us. I am so sorry you are having such bad weather. Here, they say it is a bad summer, they have not known an August so changeable since 1869, but of course we do not think it bad, occasionally we have had a shower, nothing more, glorious blue sky & white fleecy clouds. I take my cloak & then I am alright, but I have only had to use it twice since we came, & then only for a few minutes. Yesterday was glorious I went to Forest in the morning the Church is very old, consecrated in 1133, & it has not been re-seated for 300 years, you cannot imagine what it is like; they are now collecting money to restore it, the Rector is a young Oxford man, but he

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performs the service abominably, we were out at twelve & there was a Celebration All the afternoon we sat on the cliffs & read & in the evening I went to St Martins about 3 miles away the service was in French, but I made out bits of the sermon. George came to fetch me home To-day again has been glorious if you could have seen the colour of the sea, a blue which is really black; George has never seen it bluer in Italy, I don't know what you would think of this island it is lovelier than anything you ever imagined. The climate I think is lovely, I can walk a great distance without exhaustion I feel very well indeed & only trust I shall keep so I am very brown, the very first day, my face began to burn.

To-day we have been to quite another part groping on low rocks, I have got a few pieces of sea-weed, we saw some lovely anemones, all colours.

Well I must really stop now. George wants to go to Post & it is nearly dark, & these lanes are pitch.

Heaps of love dearest, & much love to Dora.

Your loving Madge

IV

Hotel du Gouffre
Forest
Guernsey
Aug. 28th 1889

My dearest Nellie

I have just come in & found your letter to my great joy. I feel so sorry to think you are having such bad weather, it is really dreadful. Well dear here it is really past description, the place seems to grow into one till I feel I could live here for ever. As I told you the first few days we had a shower sometimes, but not to be mentioned, & since Saturday the days have been perfect if you could only see what I am looking at, not one *single* cloud has passed the sky this day, it is of Italian blueness shading off into white against the horizon, the sea of course the

same colour & just by the rocks very green. Really this climate seems to suit me perfectly in spite of the power of the sun the sea-breeze tempers the heat & of course owing to the smallness of the island you are hardly ever *really* inland. I never feel exhausted, I seem to be able to walk for miles, all George & I want is you to brighten us into laughter & fun & we should be perfect. To-day George has gone to Sark to look for lodgings we think they will be cheaper than an Hotel, if we can we intend to go on Friday. I walked to St. Peter Port with him this morning, we had breakfast at 7.30 to catch the boat at 9.30 he will have had a glorious passage, not a ripple on the sea. Then I wandered about the town, & I also bought a bathing costume, I have not bathed yet for want of one, of course in these little bays people have to undress behind rocks.

I did not want to be home till lunch time so I went to Matins at the Town Church. I am so sorry I could not get [there] on Sunday, it is such a nice church, daily service & weekly &

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Saints' day Celebrations it seems strange wherever we go we can find a Church after our own heart except in Wakefield. It makes my spirit sink within me to think of returning to the burden of Halls & Stratons,¹¹ one might live in peace even in Wakefield. I wonder if I should grow into a strong person if I lived here always. I am glad you are laying in a stock of St. Martins'. Yesterday we spent the day at Saints Bay the most lovely bay in the Island I think, I might have bathed if I had had a costume. No words could describe the heathery, ferny slopes down to that bay ending in massive granite rocks, which at low tide you can climb about the inland view is as beautiful as the seaward. We enquired the terms of lodgings near this bay for another time & they range from 30 to 35s for two bedrooms & a sitting room! think of Seascale £2.10! if only we could come for 5 or 6 weeks sometime, ah if only we could get Mother here, she would sit in Saints Bay from morning till night, it is like a shelter of rest. You feel shut away from the world & all wickedness here, of course in St. Peter Port, one comes a little nearer to it, but I have only seen one policeman, in the country here they have none, & the lanes at night are safer than the streets of a great town, there are no really poor wretched people, our landlord says no one need starve that will work, there are no workhouses, it seems like a little Paradise, only I expect really there is the same human nature, but think of London & here; Oh London oppresses me, I either feel selfishly inclined to recklessly enjoy myself there or else to sink into the depths of despair.

The more we hear of Sark the more prepared we are to enjoy it. Dont write till you hear again. My face is like a Sailors & all my neck, you would not know me Oh dear why must one's life be passed with fearful burdens in a depressing place like Wakefield when one might choose such places I hope you have heard from Mother we have not I should like to hear a word of her. Good-bye dear, I am glad you are enjoying yourself so much Love to Dora & yourself from

Your loving Madge

V

Guernsey
Aug. 29th 1889

My dearest Mother

This is our last evening in Guernsey we go to Sark to-morrow; George went over on Wednesday to see for lodgings, the hotels were quite full & all the little houses, but one person was communicating with some one however she let us have the rooms if we would stay for a fortnight, so as George liked the place & the person he agreed to that, the air I suppose is even more bracing there than here. Well, such weather as we have had since Sunday, yesterday & to-day not one *single* cloud could be seen in the sky, one steady blaze of sun from rising to

setting; the heat to-day has been very great, of course increasing every day, but there is generally a nice fresh breeze from the sea. I had a lovely bathe this morning in Saints Bay, a most lovely spot, how I should like to seat you there. I bought a bathing costume, of course people have to undress behind rocks.

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I do hope you are not feeling *very* lonely, I expect Theresa chatters to you enough, rather too much, I hope she is good & waits on you well.

I have eaten a quantity of grapes the black ones are only 10^d a lb.

It seems so long since we set off having seen so much. I wrote a long letter to Mrs. Whiteley last night, but don't tell the Halls for I really can't bother to write to them.

I am glad to say I feel very well I have had a little headache sometimes when I get up, but it has passed off, my appetite is good & I feel none of my usual weary exhaustion, even the heat does not seem to affect me as it does in a close town. There is only one thing we want, someone to be bright & merry & make us laugh, George & I are too serious, we want a little fun in a holiday It is certainly a beautiful place, we have seen all the South Coast & the greater part of the east, the lanes are most lovely, & what they must be in Spring I can't imagine.

If the weather is like to-day we shall have a nice crossing to Sark to-morrow, not a ripple on the sea. Our address will now be: Miss Massey

Sark

so do write a note, I want to hear from you. With much love to all friends

Your loving Madge

VI

Miss Massey

Sark

Sept. 3rd 1889

My dearest Mother

I was so delighted this morning to find your letter when I came in to lunch, how quickly it came, you posted it on Monday I got it on Tuesday by 11 o'clock. We laughed at you thinking the address short, but you see there is no town or village here, only cottages scattered here & there, so every one is known by name. I only wish you could be here, though I am afraid you would not be able to see many of the wonderful things they are so difficult to get at.

If you could see my old blue skirt, it is almost in rags, we have to go through brambles & scramble over rocks & down precipices that are awful to look at but we are very careful. The most wonderful & beautiful caves we have been into, lined with anemones of all colours. Of course it is rather tiring, because the shore cannot be reached anywhere without going down fearful cliffs & in some places it is not possible, but the views from above are magnificent the grandeur of the coast [!] As we walk I eat blackberries, they are abundant.

It has been *very* calm since we came, I should certainly like to see one rough day. The week we came to Guernsey I suppose the waves were magnificent.

I am so delighted to hear you are well, & that Theresa is so good, it makes me feel in such good spirits, fancy that infant cooking for you.

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I am glad you are having better weather, last night we had a thunderstorm, the lightning was beautiful, very white.

I have a splendid bathe every day, you see it costs nothing people undress behind rocks,

the only drawback is, the beach is all stoney, no sand, so it is rather painful to the feet but the water is transparent & delicious, it gets deep directly so you have only a few steps in to go.

Fancy Mrs. Hall going to Scotland I am glad Mrs. Whiteley comes to see you, give her my love & the Halls if you see them I thought of you having Mrs. Hodgson¹² back again, I hope you did not tire yourself. The time is going fast now, we must make the best of it; what a lot I shall have to tell you when I get back.

With heaps of love dearest

Your loving Madge

VII

Miss Massey
Sark
Sept. 5th 1889

My dearest Nellie

I wonder if you asked me any question in your last letter, it is not in my pocket & I am too lazy to look for it.

I am so glad you have had a few extra days, I hope they have been finer. This week has gone so quickly I cannot believe it is Thursday To-day it has been so hot we have been sitting nearly all day, after sunset the dew is so heavy, everything is wet on you.

I think we have nearly walked round the island now. We have seen the views from all sides, but the tides are very awkward this week, it is low tide too early & too late, & it is only at low tide we can get down to a shore or see any caves, we dare not go when the tide is rising, because there is no way of escape from some places, you cannot imagine the caverns there are here, the whole coast is undermined by them, & the terrific places you look down from the cliff, we are getting quite used to precipices.

I envy you having had Mr. Mackerness¹³ for a fortnight. There is an Early Celebration in English on Sunday I am glad to say.

Mother writes in the best of spirits, that makes me cheerful. We leave here a week on Saturday morning, but we should not get letters that morning, so after Wednesday write to 7.K. I shall only stay three or four days in London & then we shall be all together once more, settle down for the winter, it seems funny does it not?

To think we have never seen a train since we got out at Southampton, nothing but the wide sea, well if there is any abiding virtue in sea air, I ought to be better.

How strange that you should be reading "Les Misérables" I like it very much indeed. There is much that I shall be able better to describe in words than by writing. I expect soon

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there will be a "sign-post" to Sark & Guernsey I think I must stop, it is nearly dinner-time (7 o'clock) I hope it won't be rough when we return.

Very much love to all.

Your loving

Madge

VIII

7K. Cornwall Residences
Sept. 15th 1889

My dearest Nellie

We arrived safely last night at about a quarter past nine, the boat had a quick passage, &

got to Southampton at a little after 5, so they put on a special train to Waterloo 5.45.

It was rather gloomy for a wonder when we left dear little Sark & I heard the wind blowing in the night, so I thought the sea was getting ruffled ready for us, it had been so calm. There was a fresh breeze & few white breakers in the currents round the island, a great many people were leaving that morning, who came all the way to London, we caught the South. steamer alright, the boat rolled a good deal till we got far out of the currents & away past Alderney, & after that it began to get calmer till it got to the Solent, where it is quite calm. I stayed on deck all day, I several times felt very bad, but I managed to stave it off & as soon as it was calm I was alright & walked about. George had a good dinner, but I dare not venture, I only ate biscuits & grapes.

We passed the Needles, they are funny white rocks, after we enter the Solent it takes more than two hours to reach Southampton. I had no idea it was so long or so broad, & how big the Isle of Wight looks.

We are going to St. Paul's this morning it is fine but cloudy.

I was so glad to have a letter when I got in, it was just like you. George is much put about there is only one Spectator awaiting him & that is Aug. 31st. Is it Alge's fault?¹⁴

I shall come home on Thursday get in about tea-time, but I will send you a P.C. before then.

Much love to all.

Your loving

Madge

Notes

¹Her account, in Appendix C to her brother's letters to his family, of his last visit to Wakefield in the summer of 1901, is no longer acceptable verbatim. At the time she says George paid a brief visit to his relatives prior to travelling back to France, she was on holiday in Switzerland. She must have relayed Margaret's impressions.

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²See Vol. 1 of the *Collected Letters of George Gissing* (1990) and John Halperin's *Gissing: A Life in Books* (1982), where she is wrongly identified as her mother in the former volume, as Ellen in the latter.

³These two letters of the early summer, as well as those printed below and the portraits previously mentioned, are in the possession of Xavier Pétremand, while Pierre Coustillas holds a copy of the 1880 portrait annotated by Gissing and a copy of the portrait taken at Bridlington in 1903. Gissing refers to the latter in his last letter to Algernon, dated 28 November 1903, to be published together with the portrait in Vol. IX of the *Collected Correspondence*.

⁴"The Gissing family in Wakefield," *Wakefield Express*, 21 February 1953, p. 6.

⁵See "Recollections of Margaret and Ellen Gissing," January 1976, pp. 1-12.

⁶It has never been published or acted, nor has the manuscript been discovered.

⁷This statement is based on a report from Ros Stinton, April 1992.

⁸We are grateful to Anthony Petyt for sharing with us his knowledge of Margaret's will, as well as for research about various persons whose names occur in her letters to her mother and sister.

⁹Ellen was on holiday there with her friend Dora Carter, formerly of Wakefield, who is mentioned below. Dora had apparently made suggestions about accommodation in Guernsey.

¹⁰Theresa was the Gissings' young servant, about whom there is a pathetic entry in George's scrapbook. The only Mrs. Whiteley who lived in the Agbrigg area was Phoebe Whiteley, the forty-nine-year-old wife of Benjamin Whiteley, a joiner. She is not likely to have

been the person Margaret had in mind. Margaret probably meant Kathleen Whiteley, a doctor's widow of forty-two who lived at 15 Burton Street, Wakefield, with her two sons, aged nine and seven respectively. In the 1891 census returns she is said to live on "private means." The Halls were most likely Mrs. Sarah Hall, who lived in Stoneleigh Terrace with her unmarried daughter Gertrude J. Hall. See George's letter to Ellen of 24 September 1888.

¹¹The Stratons were the vicar of Wakefield and his wife Emily. Norman Dumenil John Straton (1840-1918) was vicar of Wakefield from 1875 to 1892, in which year he became bishop of Sodor and Man. By a coincidence the curate-in-charge at St. Catherine's (1886-1891) was also called Straton, but Balfour Straton is given as single in the 1891 census.

¹²Considering the number of Hodgsons living in Wakefield at the time, no identification of this particular Mrs. Hodgson is possible.

¹³Doubtless some Scarborough clergyman whom Margaret and Ellen had met previously while on holiday with the Carters.

¹⁴The *Spectator* was circulated every week among the family.

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Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (eds.), *The Collected Letters of George Gissing. Volume Two, 1881-1885*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1991. xxx + 393 pp.

Among the illustrations in this volume is a photograph of Gissing from 1884. Rarely seen hitherto, it shows a face which is instantly recognisable and yet curiously unfamiliar. In this it is rather like the portrait of Gissing that emerges from the letters. All the well-known features of his early life are here but differently angled, and freshly apparent, because of the flood of day to day detail – and the editors' illuminating notes.

This second volume of the *Collected Letters* takes Gissing from his early to his late twenties. It was a time of harassment and hardship, of intense intellectual and spiritual development, and stupendous literary effort. During this period, with some false starts and rewritings, Gissing produced "Mrs. Grundy's Enemies," *The Unclassed*, *Isabel Clarendon* and *A Life's Morning*. By the end of the period he is deep into *Demos*. Although all these novels eventually saw the light (except "Mrs. Grundy," the manuscript of which has been lost), Gissing was persistently frustrated by publishers, whose muddle and tardiness he bitterly denounced. This, though, was only one of his problems.

One wonders which to marvel at more – the scale of Gissing's output or the obstacles he faced. His primary problem, which he succeeded in removing, was Nell, his alcoholic ex-prostitute wife. At the outset she is merely "ailing, as usual," but before long she is having delirious fits in candle shops, chemists' and hospitals. Rowdy and gossipy, she has, Gissing notes, "about as much idea of entertaining a visitor as my writing-chair has." Enraged by her disruption of his work and leisure, he develops palpitations and headaches and, in "animal self-defence," tries to pack her off to an invalid home. This is in early 1882. It is not, though, till the end of that year that they separate for good.

There follows a period of immense activity, but Gissing still struggles with his second problem – poverty. At this stage he did not earn enough from his fiction to be able to scorn other sources of income. For a time he made an extra £32 a year by writing articles on current affairs for a Russian journal, *The Messenger of Europe* – "tremendous toil," done with much loathing." His other paid work, "tuitioning," was less hateful but even more onerous. Employed to tutor Frederic Harrison's sons, he soon expanded his circle of pupils and found himself

travelling for four hours a day and wearing out a pair of boots every three weeks. He was also keenly conscious of the painful contrast between the unhappiness of his own situation and the comfort of the households he visited.

A period of distress, then, both emotionally and financially; yet the effect was not to radicalise Gissing but to consolidate his conservative intuitions. Over these years he moved from Positivism to pessimism, from a socialist to an aristocratic viewpoint, from belief in reform to immersion in art. At the beginning of the period covered in this volume he is dating his letters by the positivist calendar, lecturing on “Practical Aspects of Socialism,” and defending political assassination. By the end he is condemning William Morris for attending what was, as the editors point out, a perfectly respectable political meeting which the police gratuitously disrupted.

Gissing’s impulse towards social reform was emotionally entwined with his fondness for Nell. When this wilted and he got rid of her, he searched for an alternative *raison d’être*, settling first for the consoling creed of the scorned but uncompromised artist. The impression he gives in these early letters is of someone trying desperately to forge an identity, socially, professionally and ideologically. This was, of course, partly a natural process of coming to maturity. But in Gissing’s case it was made much tougher by what was possibly his greatest problem—his lack of a guide or mentor.

Gissing was thirteen when his father died: the event affected him for the rest of his life. In his own mind his imprisonment at Manchester, his tragic error in marrying Nell, and his subsequent struggles with poverty were all linked with his rudderless origins. Running poignantly through the present volume is the theme of the absent father. At twenty-three Gissing confides to his brother Algernon: “I often feel as if I should like to have some relative near me whose advice & sympathy I could be sure of in the ever-recurring difficulties of my life.” Later he writes in similar terms to Frederic Harrison, himself a surrogate father, kindly but censorious. What Gissing felt the want of was not just emotional guidance but practical influence and financial support. “My own unspeakable sufferings,” he told Algernon, “are largely due to the fact of my never having had a beginning in life [...] with but one foot on the lowest rung of the ladder, I could have risen to something definite.”

Lacking guidance himself, Gissing set up as a guide, dispensing advice to his brother and sisters on matters of reading, study and belief. When Algernon aspired to become a novelist,

Gissing came manfully to his aid, sending not only practical tips (“the secret of art in fiction is the *indirect*”) but also specimen narratives, blocked out in considerable detail. Yet his brother’s gift for getting nowhere often baffled even Gissing’s enthusiasm. A note of desperation begins to creep into his encouragement of Algernon’s legal career. “The inscription at head of new note-paper is very satisfactory,” he writes. “I suppose no absolute work presents itself as yet?”

His sisters seemed to promise more fertile soil, in which Gissing was anxious to implant his own notions of literary and cultural development. “I should like by degrees to direct your reading, & indeed I think I could make you into a very fairly cultured woman,” he reassures his nineteen-year-old sister Margaret. All that is needed, he explains, is three hours a day of application in solitude. Carried away by keenness for this plan, he begins to sound like an encyclopedia salesman: “I guarantee, that, if you pursue my advice for *a year* you will find that most of the people with whom you come into contact are much your inferior in culture & intelligence.” It was never quite clear why this should be desirable, but Gissing pressed on with his “preachments” and reading-lists. “I take it for granted,” he later wrote to Ellen, “that you know all Milton’s shorter poems by heart.”

He was also anxious to improve his sisters socially. One of the most fascinating episodes in this volume concerns his relations with Mrs. Gaussen, a refined lady of colonial background, who engaged Gissing to tutor her son James and later invited Ellen to London. The model for Isabel Clarendon, Mrs. Gaussen was obviously idolised by Gissing. She offered him an entrée into county society and an insight into the London “season.” But she also alarmed him with her superiority. In preparation for her first social call, he moved to more respectable – and expensive – lodgings off Hampstead Road. When she threw out her invitation to Ellen, he wrote tremulously to Algernon: “What about toggery?” The answer comes in a check-list sent to Nelly to make her ready for her Society début:

Mrs. Gaussen suggested *white cashmere* for the evening dress [...] Never mind how simple the dress is, but let it be of good stuff & *well made*. It must be pretty low, I think; dresses are worn so at present. A new pair of shoes for evening wear will be essential [...] However, don’t let *everything* be new; that is to be avoided [...] Bring some of your favourite music, & have a few things by heart; no doubt you have already.

He concludes, not wholly convincingly: “You will find the Gaussens admirably easy to get along with.” Nelly duly came to London and, Gissing reports, “looked very well indeed. Mrs.

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Gaussen gave more than half an hour to doing up her hair with her own hands.” On Nelly’s return to Wakefield, Gissing directed her to write to the great lady at least once a month, “& in a way which will give her the satisfaction of feeling that you appreciate her wonderful goodness & prize her friendship highly.” The whole episode – half comic, half pathetic – is an eloquent comment on Victorian class requirements and the social insecurity of the Gissings.

The editing of this second volume of the letters is well up to the standard set by the first. There is a separate introduction to the volume and a new note on editorial procedure. The fine chronology of Gissing’s life is reproduced with only a minute change of layout. The annotation is meticulous and comprehensive; every individual mentioned by Gissing, every writer, every literary or political allusion, is identified and tirelessly glossed. Matters that were hazy or speculative to Gissing are revealed in the glare of retrospective precision. It is possible that some readers might find this excessive – a possibility recognised by the editors in the General Introduction to the project. Not everyone, for instance, will be fascinated by the minutiae of Algernon’s parochial activities – his election to a library sub-committee, his seconding a vote of thanks to teachers, his reading of a paper on plant names. Still, it is no doubt better to err on the side of excess rather than paucity. And it must be said that much of the annotation gives an admirable sense of the factual context of Gissing’s everyday experience as well as supplying information that allows us to appraise his judgment. Here we have Gissing in detail and close-up – the portrait of an emerging major writer. One is grateful to the editors and publisher for restoring and framing this portrait.— David Grylls (University of Oxford)

Annette Federico, *Masculine Identity in Hardy and Gissing*. Rutherford, Madison, and Teaneck, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991. 148 pp.

This is a thought-provoking study of the concepts of masculine identity in characters created by male novelists at the end of the Victorian Period. The timeliness of this topic is obvious, now that we have been flooded for several years with analyses of perceptions of feminine identity in 19th- and 20th-century fiction by female writers.

Annette Federico has focused upon male protagonists in four novels each by George Gissing and Thomas Hardy – these particular novelists having been chosen not on aesthetic grounds, but rather for five other criteria: their “popularity” (this criterion is the weakest, but never mind); their realism; their “thematic profundity”; their “complex and serious approach to the problem of sexual identity”; and “their noticeable ambivalence in their treatment of masculine character.”

Dr. Federico classifies male fictional characters of the 1880’s and 1890’s into four types, which are two pairs of opposites. First, there are the virile seducers, of whom Gissing’s Lionel Tarrant and Reuben Elgar and Hardy’s Alec d’Urberville are late-Victorian examples. The main difference between the late-century examples and mid-century ones (such as Steerforth) is that the “core” of the male egoism of the later group is anxiety instead of ignorance.

The second stereotype, labeled “Pathological Gentlemen” or “Chaste Saints,” consists of men whose “extremity of male continence and consistency [...] is as destructive as the sexual indulgence” of the first group – destructive to themselves as well as to their women. Angel Clare is the best example; others are Clym Yeobright and Diggory Venn, of *The Return of the Native*; Giles Winterbourne, of *The Woodlanders*; and Gabriel Oak, of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Gissing’s Edmund Langley (of *Sleeping Fires*) is mentioned as a protagonist in a middle position between the extremes of the first two types.

The third stereotype is that of the romantics who idealize their beloveds in various ways. Hardy’s Jocelyn Pierston seeks the perfect *Well Beloved* in three generations of women named Avice. Gissing’s Everard Barfoot (in *The Odd Women*) seeks the perfect Modern Woman to be his sexual, mental, and spiritual equal.

Fourthly, opposite to the romantics are the realists, who indeed do recognize the needs and rights of the New Woman, but who become victims (the “Other Victim”) in trying to accommodate themselves to her; Jude Fawley is the best example of this type in Hardy; Harvey Rolfe (in *The Whirlpool*) is the Gissing example used.

Since a main reason for writing this book was to show how different the “New Man” of the 1880’s and 1890’s was from the “solid, monolithic patriarchal” hero drawn by the mid-19th-century novelists, Dr. Federico reminds us often of the Thackerayan, Trollopean, and Dickensian protagonists who are highly confident, virile types, totally in charge of their lives and their women, not aware of (much less, guilt-ridden by) their egoistic attitudes. Steerforth is the author’s favourite example, and he does indeed fit the description of the macho hero imbued

with hubris. But is he technically a protagonist? Surely, the real protagonist of Steerforth’s book is David Copperfield, who, like Nicholas Nickleby, Martin Chuzzlewit, and, above all, Pip, was searching for his identity in the thick of many different conflicts, including gender ones. Thackeray boasted that *Vanity Fair* had no heroes or heroines. Though George Osborne fits the early-19th-century stereotype of the virile and egoistic male, Thackeray kills him off early in the novel, leaving Dobbin as the leading male figure. Dobbin, David Copperfield, and Pip were surely forerunners of the ambivalent late-century protagonists searching for their identities, sexual and otherwise. Dobbin is a good example of Type 2, the Chaste Saint; he and Pip and David are all good examples of Type 3, romantic dreamers of idealized beloveds; but they eventually all end up more or less as Type 4’s – self-victimizing realists. Though they are not destroyed like Jude, they are sadder and wiser at the close of their respective novels. They have been victimized partly by themselves, partly by old-fashioned women (Dora and Amelia), and partly by forerunners of New Women (Becky Sharp and Estella). Of course, Dickens and

Thackeray were themselves reacting against the super-virile, un-guilt-ridden heroes of the 18th century (the Tom Joneses, Mr. Lovelaces, and Roderick Randoms) as they moved toward the type of protagonist so interesting to Dr. Federico.

The test of a good scholarly book, it seems to me, is the degree to which it jogs the reader's recognition of hitherto unnoticed truths, and generates the reader's application of these truths to examples of authors and works beyond the scope of the book in question. Such is *Masculine Identity in Hardy and Gissing*. The reader who has always admired Gissing's and Hardy's insights into human nature now has the pleasure of recognizing Dr. Federico's four stereotypes as illuminating not only the male characters in the four novels by Gissing and the four by Hardy which are offered here for laboratory examination, but also many more protagonists, especially in Gissing's novels. For example, Edwin Reardon, Harold Biffen, and Osmond Waymark can be seen as even better examples of the "Other Victim" than Harvey Rolfe.

Dr. Federico herself recognizes that her types "persist outside these particular novels and outside of that particular era as well." If she had had another 200 pages at her disposal, she could have analyzed many additional fin-de-siècle authors, such as Arnold Bennett (think of Clayhanger, that very complex "Victim") and George Moore (whose male characters illustrate the full range of her types) and even Henry James (Hyacinth Robinson, Merton Densher,

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Lambert Strether, and Caspar Goodwood are variations of Victims, Saints, and Idealists). Galsworthy, Lawrence, and Joyce would be early-20th-century subjects. Furthermore, the same sort of analysis could be applied to playwrights and plays; one immediately thinks of G. B. Shaw and Eugene O'Neill.

Thus, Gissing and Hardy were by no means the first, nor were they the last male writers to be concerned with the desire of men to "carve out for themselves a viable sexual identity." But these two novelists seemed to be more excruciatingly aware than their colleagues were of the complexity and vulnerability of the male psyche – doubtless because of their own poignant sensitivity to their own encounters with life. But that is subject matter for two more books. – Marilyn B. Saveson (Otterbein College, Westerville, Ohio)

Messages mainly from Librarians and Booksellers

It had been known for some years that the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library was to be sold and dispersed; the transfer of the Gissing Collection to the New York Public Library, where it became accessible through its former librarian, Mihai H. Handrea, who was in charge of the Shelley and his Circle Collection, was only a temporary solution, and in the last year or two access to that very important source of Gissing material became virtually impossible. The situation changed radically last April when we were informed that the whole of the collection had been acquired, through Bernard Quaritch Ltd, by the Lilly Library, Indiana University. We are very grateful to both Arthur Freeman, of Bernard Quaritch Ltd, and to William R. Cagle, Lilly Librarian, for telling us about this transaction. The news has been received with great satisfaction by Gissing scholars as the Lilly Library is an ideal home for such an important collection, which comprises hundreds of Gissing's letters and many manuscripts, from a wealth of juvenilia to the manuscript of *Veranilda*. It would have been very sad – nothing short of a cultural disaster – to see the Pforzheimer Gissing Collection dispersed.

Mr. Cagle communicates that the Lilly Library has a grants programme, described in a brochure which can be obtained through the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington,

Indiana 47405-3301. Short-term fellowships are offered “to support visiting scholars pursuing graduate, post-doctoral or equivalent research” in the collections of the Lilly Library. “The

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length of the grant will depend on the applicant’s research proposal; Fellowships must be used within one year of the award date and recipients are expected to be in residence in Bloomington during the period of their awards. [...] Applicants are asked to submit a résumé and a brief research proposal” to the Lilly Library.

The Ryburn *New Grub Street*

A new high quality hardback library edition of *New Grub Street*, edited by Professor John Halperin, was published by Ryburn on 29 June. It is available in an Imperial Bonded Leather 250-copy limited edition with superior matt coated paper and head and tail bands (ISBN 1 85331 041 7; £30) and in Hardback (ISBN 1 85331 024 7; £25). Both editions are sewn in 16-page sections and promise to be of interest to the Library and academic markets as well as to Gissing enthusiasts.

The text of this edition has been carefully researched and produced with reference to the original manuscript at the New York Public Library and with the assistance of Professor Pierre Coustillas. John Halperin’s introduction and extensive notes not only place the novel in its historical and literary contexts but also investigate its timeless theme of the collision of the creative impulse with material circumstances.

To order copies of the new Ryburn edition of *New Grub Street*, please send your order, clearly indicating which binding you require and your name and address, along with a cheque for £27.50 (Hardback version) or £32.50 (Imperial Bonded Leather version) inclusive of postage and packing. Payment – in sterling please – should be made to The Gissing Trust and orders and cheques sent to Mr. A. Petyt, Treasurer, The Gissing Trust, 10 Station Street, Sandal, Wakefield WF1 5AF. Orders made in this way will enable the Trust to benefit from a 15% commission.

The John Rylands University Library of Manchester, Mr. David Riley, its Keeper of Printed Books, tells us, has acquired a copy of *Workers in the Dawn*, the only title until last April which was wanting from its collection of Gissing first editions. The bibliographer Michael Sadleir, Mr. Riley reminds us, rated Gissing’s first novel as one of the three rarest first editions in the whole range of nineteenth-century fiction, the other two being the first novels of Thomas Hardy (*Desperate Remedies*) and Anthony Trollope (*The Macdermots of Ballycloran*). The

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book is in the original olive-green cloth, blocked in black with gilt spine lettering; it is the copy at one time owned by Reginald Baliol Brett, second Viscount Esher (1852-1930), a collector who gained the reputation of always securing the best and most attractive copy of any book he wished to obtain. The acquisition of this well-known association copy was celebrated by the *Times Higher Education Supplement* on the front page of its number for 5 June. A photograph

shows David Riley leafing through the three volumes. The Rylands Library has also recently acquired an interesting association copy of *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* inscribed "To Edward Clodd, alias Edmond Roden, from CKS[horter], alias Carew Latter, in memory of a good fellow [Gissing] much maligned here and elsewhere." Annotations by Clodd include details not to be found in Morchard Bishop's edition (1958), and there is a four-page letter from Roberts to Clodd about the volume. Cuttings of articles by Shorter (published in the *Sphere*) about Gissing and the controversy aroused by the book are attached to the endpapers and preliminaries; these also have been substantially annotated by Clodd.

A small exhibition devoted to the life and work of Edward Clodd can be seen at the Moot Hall Museum, Crag Path, Aldeburgh, until August. The leaflet sent by his grandson Alan Clodd gives an account of the very active life of a man who was rightly said to have a genius for friendship and can be described as bank secretary, anthropologist, folklorist, and author. Gissing had no better male friend. Clodd's books, including his first scarce title, *A Guide to Aldeburgh* (1861), are on show at Aldeburgh, also the one book about him, the memoir by Joseph McCabe (1932). Since Gissing's letters to him were published in 1973, four new items of correspondence, two on each side, have emerged from oblivion. The two letters from Clodd will be read – with great interest we venture to predict – in the last volume of Gissing's collected correspondence.

The Gissing Centre in Wakefield has reopened for the summer and autumn seasons on Saturday afternoons from 2 to 4.30 p.m. Among this year's features is a display devoted to Gissing's father. It includes such mementoes as his visiting card, advertisements for his shop in Westgate, copies of his books on ferns and on the flora of Wakefield as well as the funeral card issued after his lamented death. Visitors, as previously noted, will be able to watch short videofilms devoted to the novelist's life and work.

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Two important catalogues of Gissing material were circulated in the last few months. The one issued by Jarndyce, the Bloomsbury antiquarian booksellers, includes 205 items ranging from the first edition of *Workers* to some fairly recent biographical and critical studies, and many early English editions. The other catalogue, obtainable from The Fox Book Company of Tacoma, Washington, lists such interesting items as autograph letters to Mrs. Gill, the well-known typist (see her advertisements in *The Author*), and to E. L. Price, a friend of Clara Collet's whom Gissing met in Rome in 1898. The letter to Price is tipped in a presentation copy of *Charles Dickens, a Critical Study*. Other outstanding items are Gissing's copies of *Faust* (Stuttgart, 1868), signed by Bertz "London, 27. November 1879" and by Gissing in 1880, and of the Grimm brothers' *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (Berlin, 1850) with the inscription "GRGissing Oct/ 79" on the title page. The most expensive item listed is the memorandum of agreement for the publication of the American edition of *The Town Traveller*.

To conclude, a nicely produced 50-page illustrated book entitled *Dorking People*, by Coffey Holland, must be mentioned. Published by Kohler & Coombes in 1984, it has somehow never been referred to in this journal. It consists in short biographies of a number of people who made a reputation for themselves and either lived in or had some significant connection with Dorking – besides Gissing of course, they include Evelyn, the diarist, Defoe, Sheridan, John Stuart Mill, Meredith and E. M. Forster. The book is priced at £3.90, and can be obtained from Ros Stinton, bookseller. Thanks are due to her, as well as to Shigeru Koike, Yukio Otsuka and Shirley Slotnick, for sending bibliographical information which is listed below.

Recent Publications

Volumes

Paul Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Volume Three: 1886-1888*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992. Off-white paper-covered boards with a grey tape binding and, on the spine, gilt titling on dark green panel. Dark green dust-jacket with pattern in light green. xxxii + 354 pages. \$55.00.

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George Gissing, *George Gissing: Lost Stories from America*, Five Signed Stories Never Before Reprinted, a Sixth Signed Story and Seven Recent Attributions, edited with introduction and commentary by Robert L. Selig, Lewiston/ Queenston/ Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992. x + 185 pages. \$59.95. Scholars can obtain this book with a substantial discount from the publishers.

George Gissing, *The Nether World*, edited with an Introduction and notes by Stephen Gill. Oxford: The World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 1992. xxxiv + 404 pages. £5.99.

George Gissing, *The Nether World*, translated into Japanese by Saburo and Harumi Kuramochi, Tokyo: Sairyûsha Ltd (2-2-2 Fujimi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, 102 Japan). 515 pages. The book includes a map of London, a list of characters, notes and a translators' postscript. Yen 3,800.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Francesco Badolato, "L'umanesimo cristiano in Gissing, Manzoni e Pater," *Merope*, Third Year, No. 5, November 1991, pp. 63-90.

David Lodge, "The Art of Fiction: Titles," *Book World* (Supplement to the *Washington Post*), 8 March 1992, p. 2. An entertaining article, largely about *New Grub Street*.

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