

THE GISSING JOURNAL

“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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George Gissing’s *Thyrza*:
Romantic Love and Ideological Co-Conspiracy

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George Gissing's novels present difficulties in appreciation for critics of all sorts. Uninterested in formal experimentation, unconvinced of the possibility of genuine social change, possessed by a passion for monuments of antique culture, Gissing is most commonly seen as a pessimistic fuddy-duddy. For feminists in particular, his personality presents serious hurdles. How can one find an ally in the man who wrote in an 1893 letter that "The average woman pretty closely resembles, in all intellectual considerations, the average male idiot"?¹ Yet feminist critics, among others Karen Chase and Deirdre David, have found Gissing of interest, most notably in *The Odd Women*. A brief glance over the rest of his fictional output reveals a preoccupation with that atypical being the intelligent woman. Gissing demonstrates a consistent respect for the mental life of his sympathetic female characters; in such works as *In the Year of Jubilee* and *Our Friend the Charlatan* women best exemplify the idealism chastened by bitter experience that Gissing admires. The typical Gissing novel takes a keen interest in those problems that women uniquely experience because of their place in a patriarchal society.

Thyrza (1887), my immediate concern, is unlike much of Gissing's other work in its lack of emphasis on the wandering paths of human consciousness. But this novel does, typically, use the analysis of gender divisions to structure a critique of English society. Here Gissing uses women to expose a cultural system that is intrinsically hostile to the human self-development its official ideologies ostensibly promote. Society's propensity for suppressing women becomes the

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principle that unites the apparently widely separated realms of the ideal and the material.

Since it is possible that not everyone here has read this novel, I will offer a very brief plot summary. *Thyrza* depicts the efforts of Walter Egremont to uplift the workingmen of Lambeth by bringing them culture. His initial lectures on English literature divert his small audience for a time, but his subsequent, misbegotten talks entitled "Thoughts for the Present" are a disaster. Egremont plans to open a free library in the district and chooses as his librarian Gilbert Grail, the only man who has truly benefited from his lectures. However, when Egremont and Thyrza Trent, Grail's fiancée, fall in love, this scheme as well disintegrates. Thyrza leaves Lambeth and pursues a program of self-culture for two years, while she awaits Egremont's return from America. By the time he comes back, however, he has lost his passion for her; convinced by his friend Mrs. Ormonde that she is happy without him, he stays away from her. Thyrza nobly returns to Grail, but dies of a weak constitution (or a broken heart) before they can marry. Egremont engages himself to the genteel, intellectual Annabel Newthorpe.

As in many other Gissing novels, a central concern of *Thyrza* is the tug of war between idealistic aspirations and compelling material circumstances. The clearest figuration of this struggle comes in the narrative's contraposition of Egremont and James Dalmaine. Egremont, repeatedly called "The Idealist," has an altruistic desire to lift up the people of Lambeth. Dalmaine, a cynically pragmatic Member of Parliament, wishes to advance his own career through a political advocacy of social reform. He owes allegiance only to what Egremont calls "the spirit of trade"²—the every-man-for-himself ethic of capitalist competition that sees only self-interested actions as valuable. Narrative sympathy clearly rests with Egremont. Gissing is always aware of the power of physical conditions, and he always acknowledges the inevitability of a struggle for existence. But, here as elsewhere, he is looking for a way out of the brutality of a materialist approach. In *Thyrza* he explores three forms of idealism that might offer an alternative: religion, culture, and love.

The novel dispenses with traditional Christianity almost summarily. Religion is a superseded form of spiritual aspiration, to which only the conventional or unintellectual can subscribe. Mary Bower's evangelical faith is an irrelevant curiosity, while Lydia Trent's final embrace of Christianity is an anachronism from which Thyrza averts her eyes. Gilbert Grail

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observes to Egremont that "religion has no hold upon intelligent working men in London"; the

latter responds in agreement, “For good or for evil, it has passed; no one will ever restore it” (93).

But in the very next sentence, Egremont indicates that a new ideal will replace religion: “And yet it is a religious spirit that we must seek to revive. Dogma will no longer help us. Pure love of moral and intellectual beauty must take its place” (93). Like Matthew Arnold, Egremont proposes to have culture do the former work of religion. He sets out in his program of lecture to workingmen “to inspire them with a moral ideal” (14) and to create in them enthusiasm for “spiritual advancement” (15).

In *Culture and Anarchy* Arnold had of course famously enunciated the serious social implications of the “study of perfection” that is culture:

the moment, I say, culture is considered not merely as the endeavour to see and learn [a knowledge of God’s universal order], but as the endeavour, also, to make it prevail, the moral, social, and beneficent character of culture becomes manifest.³

Egremont anticipates that in time his own efforts as well will lead to material change.

“It seems to me that if I can get them to understand what is meant by love of literature, pure and simple, without a thought of political or social purpose—especially without a thought of cash profit, which is so disastrously blended with what little knowledge they acquire—I shall be on the way to founding my club of social reformers.” (16)

With this program Egremont clearly means to provide an alternative to a materialist ethic, represented in the preceding passage as the “thought of cash profit.” Indeed, he explicitly rejects Dalmaine’s suggestion that the education of the working classes serves immediately pragmatic ends, such as making them better citizens (135) or more competitive workers (8-9).

Egremont’s new form of religion, however, proves no more successful than the one it replaces. Except for Gilbert Grail, no listener is responsive to his message. Paradoxically, exposure to culture leads two of the working men, Bunce and Ackroyd, “to offer opposition to everything savouring of idealism” (409). In one especially telling passage, Gissing explicitly holds up Arnoldian language to scorn, while showing that Bunce will not respond to Egremont’s paeans to the aesthetic beauties of Christian legend:

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It was his very humaneness which brought him to this pass; recitals of old savagery had poisoned his blood, and the “spirit of the age” churned his crude acquisitions into a witch’s cauldron. Academic sweetness and light was a feeble antidote to offer him. (171)

“Culture” is inadequate to the task of disarming a passionate atheism that stems from something in human nature more fundamental than aesthetic sensibility.

And, not surprisingly, Egremont’s lectures on English literature do not turn out to be the most direct route to social improvement. It becomes increasingly evident that, for all his insincerity of purpose, Dalmaine is a more effective social reformer than Egremont. Dalmaine has no belief in culture, and utter contempt for his working-class constituents, but, as his future father-in-law observes, he benefits society.

“ How much do you think he cares for the factory-hands he’s always talking about? But he’ll do them many a good turn; he’ll make many a life easier; and just because it’s his business to do so, because it’s the way of advancing himself... There’s your real social reformer. Egremont’s an amateur, a

dilettante.” (140)

Even Egremont, upon his return from America, disavows his former cultural aims, embraces Walt Whitman and the cultivation of a healthy physique, and avers that “Thousands of homes should bless the name of [Cornelius] Vanderbilt” (422). If, by his own confession, Egremont has “grown coarser” (421), his stint in the economic trenches has taught him the realities of modern life. As he says, “these fifteen months of practical business life in America [have] swept my brain of much that was mere prejudice, even when I thought it worship” (424). The exploration of culture has seemed chiefly to demonstrate its uselessness for both spiritual and practical purposes. This idealism is not so much a means to elevation as to irrelevance or even disempowerment.

Yet the narrative has not abandoned “the ideal,” but replaced it with another that seems to supersede that of culture. Significantly, the explanation of Egremont’s failed lecture on the aesthetic beauties of Christianity concludes with the following assertion of its unintelligibility to the majority of his auditors: “To the others it was little more than the sounding of brass and the tinkling of cymbals” (174). With this allusion to I Corinthians 13, Gissing suggests that Egremont’s words fail in charity, or love. And indeed love, especially romantic love, emerges as the highest form of idealism. When Egremont explains to Mrs. Ormonde that his love for

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Thyrza has led him to abandon his social projects, his language may be over-passionate, but his meaning seems consistent with a pervasive valuation of love:

“[What of] The library?” [Mrs. Ormonde asks]

“Gone. I can give no thought to it, for I am suffering a greater loss. Be human! Be honest! Would you not despise me if, loving her as I do, I came to you and puled about the overthrow of my schemes for founding a public library? Let it go! Let the people rust and rot in ignorance! I am a man of flesh and blood, and the one woman that the world contains is lost to me!” (343)

Romantic love has no perceptible connection to social reform, but it is productive of that self-awareness and self-perfection that were the promises of Arnoldian culture. The centrality of love to Egremont’s self-realization is clear enough. Before the opening of the novel, he has wandered over the sea “in search, he said, of himself.... Some there were who said that the self he went so far to discover would prove to have a female form. Perhaps there was truth in this; perhaps he sought, whether consciously or no, the ideal woman” (10). At the close of the novel, Annabel asserts that his loss of love for Thyrza was the profoundest failure of his life and the determinant of his future mediocrity: “The crisis of your life was there. There was your one great opportunity, and you let it pass. She could not have lived; but that is no matter. You were tried, Mr. Egremont, and found wanting” (489). Other characters, such as Luke Ackroyd, reach their moments of highest self-realization through acts of devotion to a beloved. Thyrza herself provides the strongest example of the power of love. Her two years of waiting involve diligent reading in history that will prepare her to become Egremont’s mate; this program of self-improvement involves the activation of an intelligence that she has always known she had (398). The music lessons that she loves have value for her because they will enable her to express herself perfectly—she imagines communicating the full depth of her nature to Egremont in song: “So I can sing, and no one can sing like me; but only because I sing for you, and with my soul I love you!” (399).

So romantic love has come to seem the transcendent ideal in a novel that has been desperately searching for some form of transcendence. Thyrza’s faithful love for Egremont is a kind of apotheosis of romantic love: a passion that ennobles her and could have elevated him. Gissing reported weeping as he wrote her final scenes⁴; the narrative encourages us to mourn

her tragically inevitable death. Yet Gissing's particular delineation of romantic love proves

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crucial to the demystification, not only of love itself, but the whole sociocultural system of which it is a part. And here Gissing's deployment of female characters becomes indispensable to his critique. For it is women's experiences of victimization in a patriarchal society that provide the telling evidence for the interconnection of oppressive material conditions and supposedly transcendent ideals. Romantic love is implicated in culture and in capitalism, and cannot do anything but ensnare and exploit its victims.

Paradoxically, Gissing enables his critique by gendering the concept of romantic love with observations of almost mawkish sentimentality. The first edition of 1887 contained passages Gissing would delete in 1891; one of these editorializes about Thyrza's self-reliant friend Totty Nancarrow.

I have wrought very imperfectly if you do not like Totty Nancarrow, if you do not feel that she is really a woman, and therefore not unworthy of our attention. Nay, it is true you must be the reader whom I have in mind, he who cares not where a woman live, or what form of language be on her lips, so that she look out of womanly eyes and have in her that something which is the potentiality of love.⁵

So true womanhood is equated with this "potentiality of love" that Totty is said to have. That love is intrinsic to femininity is suggested as well by an anonymous singer at the "friendly lead"—an informal concert at a Lambeth pub that is the most authentic expression of working-class experience in the novel. Gissing's lingering glance at this otherwise unimportant woman indicates his sense of the particular poignance of unrealized female dreams of romantic transcendence.

The girl had a drunken mother, and spent a month or two of every year in the hospital, for her day's work overtaxed her strength. She was one of those fated toilers, to struggle on as long as any one would employ her, then to fall among the forgotten wretched. And she sang of May-bloom and love; of love that had never come near her and that she would never know; sang, with her eyes upon the beer-stained table, in a public-house amid the backways of Lambeth. (43)

The strength of the association between women and love is sufficiently powerful that Gilbert Grail plays a surprisingly subordinate role in the narrative. His intense love for Thyrza makes him an excellent exemplar of love; his impoverishment makes him an excellent example of frustrated self-development. Yet Gissing's presentation of love so foregrounds female experience that Grail swiftly subsides into insignificance in the last half of the novel.

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The identification of love as a particularly female experience informs, whether directly or indirectly, the narrative's use of Thyrza at once to exemplify and explode romantic love. The novel uses Thyrza's strong bonds with her community, particularly her love for her sister, to call into question the development of self that romantic love initiates. The self-culture that Thyrza undertakes comes at the expense of her prior relationships with others. For the first result of her acknowledgment of love for Egremont is her exile from her neighborhood— what John Goode has called "the sealing off of Lambeth."⁶ This situation stands in useful contrast to Ludwig Feuerbach's ideas in *The Essence of Christianity*, which *Thyrza's* exaltation of romantic love evokes, and which Gissing had read in 1882. Feuerbach values love in part because it creates an

awareness of species in the individual:

In love, the reality of the species, which otherwise is only a thing of reason an object of mere thought, becomes a matter of feeling, a truth of feeling; for in love, man declares himself unsatisfied in his individuality taken by itself, he postulates the existence of another as a need of the heart.... The individual is defective, imperfect, weak, needy; but love is strong, perfect, contented, free from wants, self-sufficing, infinite; because in it the self-consciousness of the individuality is the mysterious self-consciousness of the perfection of the race.⁷

In light of Feuerbach's grandly communal conception of love, the love in the novel seems fairly paltry. Love in *Thyrza* fosters greater individuality—it alienates the self from the race. Because she is preparing herself for the return of Egremont, Thyrza cuts herself off from her sister Lydia (at first totally); she is absent from the deathbed of her grandfather. Her final heroic gesture, her return to Grail and reintegration into Lambeth society, can take place only once romantic love has failed her. The narrative's verdict on Thyrza's death indicates that romantic love has been not so much constitutive of genuine identity as competitive with primal feeling. As Thyrza dies in her sister's arms we are told that "of the two great loves [for Egremont and for Lydia] between which her soul was divided, that which was lifelong triumphed in her life's last moment" (473). In its promotion of individualism, romantic love bears a strong resemblance to Dalmaine's selfish acquisitive capitalism, the ideology it purports to counteract.

Indeed Thyrza's love is connected as well to the compromised world of Culture. The reading in history she undertakes may involve the development of her intelligence, but it also involves entry into a particular stratum of English society. Thyrza is not simply fashioning an improved self, but a specifically *middle-class* self. As Egremont realizes, Mrs. Ormonde's

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patronage has ensured that Thyrza has for two years "lived in preparation for a life of refinement" (444). And this life has involved as much self-distortion as self-realization. As I have mentioned, it has involved alienation from Thyrza's earliest associations. It has also involved the restriction and appropriation of her musical gift. Thyrza takes voice lessons ostensibly to become capable of demonstrating the essence of her love to Egremont. Music has figured throughout the book as the purest means of self-expression, whether it is the "music of the obscure ways" (111) in which Grail hears the undiluted experience of the natives of Lambeth or the song Thyrza sweetly sings at the "friendly lead" that is "a true expression of the life of working folk" (44). But the cultivation of a musical gift involves Thyrza in oppressive regulation:

She had looked forward to learning new songs, and she was allowed to sing nothing but mere uninteresting scales of notes.... The teacher, like most of his kind, was a poor creature of routine, unburdened by imagination; he had only a larynx to deal with, and was at no pains to realise that the fountain of its notes was a soul. (396)

Thyrza is being fitted for the concert stage, the world of high culture. Interestingly, her first exposure to a concert of art music had prompted her to renounce (however briefly) her gift: "I shall never pretend to sing again" (226). Just when the narrative is making Thyrza most emblematic of truthfulness to the ideology of romantic love, she is most obviously hedged in by the class interests of the literary and musical worlds. For, like her other efforts to perfect her romantic love, her music training entangles her in a web of class interests that is inimical to the expression of this characteristically feminine mode of being.

Another example of romantic love makes it clearer that culture is not merely irrelevant

and ineffectual, but actively destructive. In passages deleted from the second edition of the novel, Clara and Harold Emerson, a married couple with whom Thyrza lodges for a time, offer a vulgarized association of love and culture. Harold fancies himself an artist, and is composing a poem that he claims will have a greater effect on society than did the French Revolution. Clara's adoration of Harold makes her slave away to support his life of aesthetic leisure; the pretense of high culture allied to romantic love leads to a woman's exploitation. Harold only briefly shakes her composure with his infatuation with Thyrza, whom he styles his Muse. He seems in some sense an ironic double of the equally ineffectual social architect Egremont; at one point Thyrza

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notes a specific similarity in their expressions of concern for the corruption of society (III: 101-02).⁸ Yet Egremont's influence is ultimately even more pernicious to the woman who loves him. A more oblique passage suggests that romantic love and emotional violence are intimately connected. Totty Nancarrow declares her love for Luke Ackroyd with unusual, but haunting indirection—by letting him know that she has just followed him home from the police station. Her proof of this act of devotion includes describing a notice that is posted outside the station: “A man had deserted his wife and left her chargeable to the parish” (198). Here Gissing interestingly conflates the recognition of love with a wife's mistreatment by her husband. Both this case and the Emerson ménage establish for romantic love a kind of guilt by association with both marital and cultural irresponsibility.

The case of Paula Dalmaine indicates most clearly that romantic love is all too easily complicit with other strategies of oppression. Paula has married James Dalmaine, even though she cherishes a tenderness for Egremont. After their marriage, Dalmaine does his best to control her, dictating her interests and even the subjects of her social conversation. He wishes her, he says, to “keep to the sphere which is distinctly womanly” (296). When Paula commits the impropriety of visiting Egremont's rooms alone Dalmaine seizes the opportunity to blackmail her into complete submission—her romantic folly has provided him with the weapon he has sought:

He was fond of Paula in a way, but he had discovered since his marriage that she had a certain individuality very distinct from his own, and till this was crushed he could not be satisfied. It was his home policy, at present, to crush Paula's will. He practised upon her the faculties which he would have liked to use in terrorizing a people. (368)

While we may remember the novel's suggestion that Dalmaine is ultimately an effective social reformer, we see, through his relish for domestic tyranny, the propensity for social tyranny that underlies his model of reform. Again romantic love has provided, not a vehicle for transcendence, but an opportunity for patriarchal social control: it seems always to lead back into the heart of a problematic social order—whether the world of high culture or the underlying economic reality of capitalism.

I have shown that Gissing's sentimentality has associated women with romantic love. He establishes as well a somewhat less sentimental identification that in the long run offers the most satisfactory alternative to the pursuit of a compromised ideal of any sort. When Thyrza,

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abandoned by Egremont, determines to return to Grail, she calls upon a new ideology of womanhood.

There are some women who never know what love is, who marry a man because they respect and like him, and are good wives their life long. She would be even as one of these. Suppose love to be something she had

outgrown; the idleness of girls. Now was the season of her womanhood, and the realities of life left no room for folly. (467)

Of course, for Thyrza little life of any sort remains at this point: her weak constitution will soon kill her. But her friend Totty Nancarrow embodies a similar deromanticized realism in her own marital negotiations. Totty has long evaded the grasp of a rich uncle, who repeatedly proposes “that she should surrender her liberty in return for being housed and dressed respectably” (384). Now this uncle has died, leaving a will that continues this attempt at control: Totty is to have £250, but only if she marries a man the trustees approve. She does not let this bequest drive her into a hasty marriage with Ackroyd, the man she could love; in time she makes the prudential selection of Bunce, in whose household she already has considerable authority as friend to his children.

Unlike the women whose romantic passion led them to self-immolatory behavior, Totty has carefully engaged with practical reality and discovered a strategy for survival. Her marriage will involve some diminution of the freedom of conduct that has characterized her and that Thyrza saw as “something of an ideal” (39). Yet the dream of a wholly pure ideal has proven delusory; transcendent ideals, however appealing, have proven to be most effective in producing victims. Totty’s own version of the ideal, her own spirituality, consists of a decidedly untranscendent sort of Roman Catholicism.

To Totty her religion was a purely private interest... What was it to any one else if she had in secret a mother to whom she breathed her troubles and her difficulties?... Her thoughts did not rise to a Deity; she thought but seldom of the story which told her that Deity had taken man’s form. The Madonna was enough, the mother whose gentle heart was full of sorrows and who had power to aid the sorrowful. (392)

Totty’s allegiance is to a powerful but very human Mary; a mother who will tend to her individual needs. On the one hand this points us once again to characteristically female capacities as a challenge to male institutions. However, it is also evocative of the individualism that makes for the heedless selfishness of a James Dalmaine. Perhaps in the world of *Thyrza* the

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only means of evading social control is to adopt some variant of its strategies. In any case, Totty’s practicality does not represent a completely satisfactory option in this novel. At one point the narrative describes Annabel Newthorpe in the following way: “The idealism which she derived from her father would not allow her yet to regard life as a compromise, which women are so skilled in doing practically, though the better part in them to the end revolts” (161). In allowing one woman at least to escape the idealism of the father, Gissing has not constituted an alternative approach to life with the capacity to satisfy that better part, or to challenge the gender categories that enable a description of cultural hegemony.

Gissing never entirely abandons his longing for some means of spiritual transcendence of the material, nor a hope that it might in turn transform the material world. The later Gissing would endow a single heroine with the ability to retain both a measure of idealism and a clear-sighted understanding of material constraints—a unified perspective that, in the case of Rhoda Nunn in *The Odd Women*, permits rational reform of existing social institutions. But the world of *Thyrza* demands that heroic women choose the path either of self-destructive purity of spirit or clever accommodation to existing structures. In this novel, women enable a telling analysis of oppressive cultural systems, but are unable to change anything.

¹George Gissing, 2 June 1893, *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Benz, 1887-1903*, ed. Arthur C. Young (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961), p. 171.

²George Gissing, *Thyrza* (1891: Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984), p. 93. Future references to

this edition will be noted parenthetically.

³Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy, Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, ed. A. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton, 1961), pp. 409, 411.

⁴"Thyrza herself is one of the most beautiful dreams I ever had or shall have. I value the book really more than anything I have yet done. The last chapters drew many tears. I shall be glad when you know Thyrza & her sister." George Gissing, "To Ellen [Gissing]," 1 January 1887, *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, ed. Paul F. Mattheisen et al., 4 vols. to date (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992), Vol. III, pp. 76-77.

⁵George Gissing, *Thyrza* (London: Smith, Elder 1887), Vol. III. p. 49. Future references to this edition will be noted by volume and page number.

⁶John Goode, *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979), p. 103.

⁷Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, tr. George Eliot (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989), p. 156.

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⁸His speech "recalled to her certain words of Walter Egremont's, spoken when he sat in the parlour in Walnut Tree Walk. Gilbert Grail, too, was wont at times to speak on the same subject. She did not know whether to be glad or troubled that Mr. Emerson should hold the same views" (III, 102).

The Emancipated: A Comedy in Italy

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When Gissing, early in 1889, decided to write *The Emancipated*, Italy had long been present in English literature. But it was more often than not invested with negative values: a sinister land of dagger, poison, plots, hypocrisy and Papistry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and later on with the Gothic novel, the pale shadow of Roman grandeur for the Grand Tourists who despised its present squalor; and a tragic country in the nineteenth century with the tradition set up by Mme de Staël's *Corinne*.

There was a change of mood from the mid-1850's onwards with the poetry of Robert Browning, who celebrated Renaissance Florence, paganism and sensuous enjoyment of life. The same goes for Pater and Symonds, for whom the humanist values and the individualism of the Renaissance should be a model. The interest of the English in contemporary Italian politics and in the Risorgimento, together with the sense of irretrievable degeneration at home (lamented by Ruskin for example), account for the new role and aspect of Italy in fiction and in literature at large.

Nevertheless, most of these works focused on Rome, Florence or Tuscany, and Venice. Gissing consequently pioneered in setting the action of *The Emancipated*, his only "Italian novel," in Southern Italy. It was an area which few people had ever visited and which, for him, stood for precisely everything he could not find in England: permanence versus degradation and change, beauty and happiness versus the ugliness brought about by industrialisation, particularly in Wakefield, his home town, or in the urban hell of London. Indeed, nineteenth-century Southern Italy was in many ways similar to the ancient Roman world, with the survival of myth, paganism, and a pastoral mood.

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The Emancipated is in many respects an interesting novel, but it is exceptional on two

accounts. It is first a far cry from Gissing's earlier works which dealt with the urban working-class world. Owing to its location, its subject-matter, and its tone, it is commonly said to herald a new vein in Gissing's writings. Besides, it is one of the rare instances in English literature in which Italy has a "comic" role in promoting the happiness and fulfilment of two of the main characters. The narrative rests on an ironic structure showing the moral and psychological pilgrimage of the characters from blindness to self-awareness and the discovery of the truth. Their blindness stems from their imperfect self-knowledge, which is initially made worse by the Italian setting. The development of the novel then represents a painful process of emancipation and gradual liberation from prejudices and illusions.

In fact, Italy is only present intermittently in the novel. The whole of the first part (chapters 1 to 16) takes place there, with the protagonists going astray at this stage. The second part starts in England (chapters 1 to 5) in *medias res*, then shifts again to Italy (chapters 6 to 9) where Mallard, Miriam Baske, and her cousins, the Spences, soon joined by Cecily, are all gathered. Chapters 10 to 17 are set once more in England where *The Emancipated* ends. Three years and a stay in England separate the two "Italian" episodes.

This space and time scope offers two advantages: first openness, which is synonymous with freedom of action for the characters, who are not prisoners of too cramped a setting and can move between Italy and England, both physically and psychologically. This makes choice and the resolution of the action possible. Moreover, the three years between the two stays in Italy enable the reader to assess the evolution of the action and of the characters, who are back in the very places where they once went astray. Their second visit announces a new start in their lives, with a change in Italy's symbolism and value, too. The Italian setting seemed to be part and parcel of the characters' errors in the first part, and to foster the tragic potentialities of the plot. On the contrary, it promotes gradual emancipation and a "comic" renewal in the second part.

The word "comedy" should not be taken too literally, though, as irony is one of the mainsprings of the novel. In *The Emancipated*, comedy is not immediately recognizable as such, and is initially concealed by misleading appearances. Indeed, the major part of the novel dominantly stresses the characters' mistakes and the suffering these entail. There doesn't seem

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to be much room for hope. Yet self-knowledge and maturity eventually get the better of blindness, and the meaning of the title becomes clear.

The description of the Muse of Comedy during the visit to a museum in Rome gives a good definition of the type of comedy on which *The Emancipated* rests:

Thence they passed to the Hall of the Muses, and spoke of Thalia, whose sweet and noble face, with its deep, far-looking eyes, bears such a weary sadness. Comedy? Yes; comedy itself, when comedy is rightly understood. (II, 9, p. 351; The Hogarth Press, 1985)

The message of the novel is that the fusion between comedy and darker elements is the very essence of life. The process of enlightenment necessarily involves mistakes, however painful they may be, but it represents a genuine enrichment.

Italy is the ideal setting for this "comedy of errors" experienced by those English characters who are made more vulnerable by the change of place. Being in a new and foreign country deprives them of familiar landmarks and safeguards, and the first stay in Italy leads to an apparent form of tragedy. Italy is not only different and "exotic" for the English tourists of the novel; it is also invested with the poetry and romanticism of the South. Its fascination is strongest for Cecily Doran, an "emancipated," learned and well-travelled young lady whose imagination and sensitiveness, overdeveloped from childhood, were not in the least stifled by her modern education, and are depicted as a source of "bodily feebleness" (I, 2, p. 19). Her imaginative excess and her idealism are the cause of both physical weakness and sentimental

unbalance, and are exacerbated by the contact with Italy, as Cecily herself shows when she describes the effects of Naples on her: "Such feeling I have never known; as if every nerve in me had received an exquisite new sense." (I, 2, p. 24). This psychological make-up is quite ironic, considering the education Mrs. Lessingham, her aunt and guardian, gave her. In the chapter entitled "Proof against Illusion," Cecily's aunt proudly expounds her principles of education, without suspecting that her niece will soon violate them dramatically: "Of course, I very soon understood that the ordinary *surveillance* and restrictions and moral theories were of little use in her case" (I, 8, p. 128).

This very absence of strict guidance will enable Cecily to meet, fall in love with, and elope with Reuben Elgar in chapter 14. Mrs. Lessingham's complacent remark has a particularly ironic ring: "I won't say that every girl can safely be left so free as I have left Cecily [...] I have

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done my best to help her to see things as they *are*, not as moral teachers would like them to be." (I, 8, pp. 128-29). Now, the narrative gives much evidence about Cecily's propensity to idealise everything, especially in Italy. She falls in love with Reuben, whom she had not seen for six years, when she meets him again in Naples, because he is for her the archetype of the bohemian artist, and because the heady southern atmosphere gives their reunion a poetic quality.

Reuben's personality has points in common with Cecily's, though there are differences in degree. Her strong imaginative faculty is reminiscent of his, but he is furthermore unstable, temperamental, and ruled by his passions. He is a man of moods, as he himself admits: "When I fume and rage like an idiot, that's only the blood in me getting the better of the brain" (I, 4, p. 64). His arrival in Italy occurs after two years' loose existence in England, and he expects artistic creation and the change of place to amend him. He tries to whitewash himself from his past mistakes by blaming them on destiny and determinism, which place our actions beyond our control (I, 7, p. 115). He imagines that falling in love with Cecily will be a guarantee of stability.

Italy is only responsible for the lovers' double illusion in that its atmosphere is so exhilarating that it prevents them from assessing the true depth of their feelings. The sunny and carefree Neapolitan world causes a form of moral intoxication; Cecily and Reuben cannot suspect how precarious but binding their relation is, nor can they foresee the long-term consequences of their rash plan to elope. They promise to love each other for ever in the dead city of Pompeii, among ruins. The location of the scene clearly foreshadows failure and misery:

[.] her fingers still crushed the spray of maidenhair [...] It must be dead when she reached home, but that mattered nothing; would it not remain the sign of something deathless?
She believed so. In her vision the dead city had a new and wonderful life.
(I, 9, p. 153)

The scene when she rechristens Reuben "Romeo" because of his dislike for his name, which reminds him too much of the Methodism of his childhood, also shows how mistaken she is (I, 12, p. 188). The Shakespearian intertext is not only connected with Italy; it also presents tragic undertones. It testifies to the lovers' dangerous tendency to view their situation in a poetic

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light, as the narrator repeatedly stresses: "and again they lost themselves in rapturous dreamland" (I, 12, p. 189). The night before their elopement shows the same loss of contact with reality: "It was the night of Homer, the island-charm of the *Odyssey*" (I, 14, p. 216). Indeed, chapter 14 is ominously entitled "On the Wings of the Morning," an echo of the Icarus theme.

After spending a few months in England, Cecily starts adopting a more realistic vision of Italy, although her married life is still happy. Unlike Reuben, she has no desire to settle there immediately, being aware of its lulling qualities: "Italy she loved [...] but it was the land of

lotus-eaters. They would go there again, but not until life had seriously shaped itself" (II, 3, p. 265). In fact, they will never visit the country together again. Their relations are getting irretrievably worse and their baby dies (II, 5, p. 307). Reuben is eventually murdered in Paris by a jealous husband after leading an adulterous, drunken existence. When Cecily takes stock of her wasted life, the image of ruins evokes the key Pompeii scene: "helpless amid the ruin of her hopes, she could look forward to nothing but long endurance" (II, 12, p. 401).

Mallard the artist, a sedate, mature man in his late thirties, also falls a victim to the spell of Italy. Although he is Cecily's guardian and has not seen her for six years, he thoughtlessly falls in love with her when he escorts her from Genoa to Naples. The chapter entitled "The Artist Astray" gives a detailed description of his feelings. When he considers his dead-end situation, he realizes that the Italian setting played a major role: "It had all resulted from this confounded journey taken together! Why, knowing himself sufficiently, did he consent to meet the people at Genoa [...] Why had he come to Italy at all just now?" (I, 5, p. 83). He is well aware that his failure is a foregone conclusion. There are too many obstacles: differences in age and social status, as Cecily is wealthier and almost twenty years younger than he is; and her requited love for Reuben as early as chapter 5. He is tortured by both passion and jealousy, and his walk among the ruins of Baiae, a counterpart to the Pompeii scene, emphasizes his hopeless situation (I, 5, p. 89). Yet he is strong-willed enough to leave Naples in chapter 6, hoping to find some solace in isolation and artistic work, but he is suddenly deprived of his creative power: "Never before had he utterly lost the power of working. In every struggle he had speedily overcome, and found in work the one unfailing resource. If he were robbed of this, what stay had life for him henceforth?" (I, 11, p. 175). In the second part of the novel, when he comes back to Italy on his own after three years in England, he looks back on his past mistakes, regarding the spell of the South as their leading cause and as a persistent threat: "But there was

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always the danger lest that witch of the south should again overcome his will and lull him into impotence of vain regret" (II, 6, p. 308).

Italy has definitely a harmful influence in the first part of *The Emancipated* because it offers too many sensuous experiences, and the aesthetic, amoral quality of existence in the south makes the characters live in terms of the moment, as if their reason has been annihilated. At the end of the first part, Mallard experiences both a sentimental and an artistic failure. But he is also going astray from another point of view. He is so much engrossed by his unrequited love for Cecily that he more or less ignores Miriam Baske, despite his admission that her face is "remarkable" (I, 1, p. 11). Actually, the narrative insists on their similarities: "Mrs. Baske and Mallard resembled each other in speech. They had the same grave note, the same decision" (I, 1, p. 7). When Mallard, racked by love and jealousy, tries to conjure up Cecily's face, Miriam's regularly takes over in his mind's eye:

In fact, to see Miriam cost him no effort at all; equally at will, he heard the sound of her voice [...] If he endeavoured to make [Cecily] present, as a rule the picturing faculty was irresponsive. (I, 11, p. 172)

This passage encapsulates the future development of the novel. However blind he may be in neglecting Miriam, Mallard is not the only one to be blamed. Her stubborn refusal of life, art and Italy makes her a particularly austere and forbidding character who both arouses Mallard's curiosity and deters him. The comparison with Cecily is not in her favour: "Miriam looked very cold, very severe, very English, by the side of this brilliant girl" (I, 2, p. 21). Like Cecily, Miriam makes a mistake, but unlike her, she resists the "romanticism" of the South, refusing to surrender and fulfil herself in this radiant world. She is a "Puritan at Naples," as Mallard remarks after their first meeting.

Chapter 1, entitled "Northerners in Sunligh," seems to present an irreconcilable opposition. It sums up Miriam's situation through the contrast between her severity and the

pagan lust for life, symbolised by the sun: “the dress, however, was severely plain, and its grey coldness, which would well have harmonized with an English sky in this month of November, looked alien in the southern sunlight” (I, 1, p. 3). Miriam bitterly rejects the Neapolitan world, and considers her stay there as an “exile.” Her austerity is both physical and moral. Moreover, although she was brought up in Bartles, Lancashire, with strict Methodist principles, she lacks

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compassion and forgiveness. She initially condemns Italy because she is deeply convinced of its immorality: Naples is “abandoned to heathendom” (I, 4, p. 55). Her wholesale rejection includes landscapes, monuments, art and people, and it equates beauty with evil because it gratifies the senses. Edward Spence gives a good definition of Miriam’s prejudices:

‘she won’t allow an expression of interest in anything Italian to escape her [...] [I] tried to make her confess that this view was beautiful. She grudged making any such admission. It is in her nature to *distrust* the beautiful.’ (I, 1, p. 11)

Her distrust of beauty is at first genuine, even if it soon gives the impression of being a question of half-hearted principles only. In spite of her love for Mallard she utters a damning condemnation of art in his presence in chapter 5, although his artist’s life has little enough to do with the loose, frivolous existence associated with his craft by religious censors. And she concludes in a dry, uncompromising way that they speak different languages. After a while, her rejection is only the result of pride, as she *will not* betray what she considers as weakness if she changes her mind. Her stubbornness leads to a form of self-maiming. She wrongs herself; her severity checks any intimate relation with Mallard.

And yet Italy has much in store for Miriam as her brother, Reuben, lucidly tells her: “You are a child come to Italy to learn what can be made of life!” (I, 4, p. 67). His remark, which lays stress on the themes of innocence and learning, leaves her totally unmoved, but it will slowly grow on her. Chapter 13 is entitled “Echo and Prelude”; it indeed echoes Reuben’s words by presenting Miriam’s awakening, and it also heralds her emancipation. It consists of a flashback on her childhood and youth in Bartles, partly written in the present, a sign of the strong, enduring hold, even in Italy, of the dreariness, drabness and grim rules which stifled her better self. Chapter 13 also explains how Miriam was caught in the trap of religious hypocrisy through her education, background and marriage. As she lacked real enthusiasm, and out of frustration, pride, and ignorance, made herself a prisoner, she was compelled to become a paragon of faith and virtue. The rest of the flashback reveals the dawning of vital forces in her, catching her unawares:

What a distance between those memories [...] and this room in Villa Sannazaro! Its foreign aspect, its brightness, its comfort, the view from the

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windows, had from the first worked upon her with subtle influences of which she was unconscious. (I, 13, p. 203).

Still unable to assess the changes under way, like the child Reuben evoked, she discovers herself and begins to surrender, though cautiously and with qualms of conscience to the charm of Italy:

The name of Italy signified perilous enticement, and she was beginning to feel it. The people amid whom she lived were all but avowed scorners of her belief, and yet she was beginning to like their society. Every letter she wrote to Bartles seemed to her despatched on a longer journey than the one before.

(I, 13, p. 204)

This awakening enables her to discover the aesthetic side of life which her conscience had ruled out, and to make up for all the wasted years:

Her childhood had known nothing of fairyland, and now, in this tardy awakening of the imaginative part of her nature, she thought sometimes of Capri much as a child is wont to think of the enchanted countries, nameless, regionless, in books of fable. (I, 14, pp. 211-12)

Her emancipation is still a long way off, and her discovery of simple pleasures deals a severe blow to her self-esteem. Out of pride and lack of self-confidence, and in fear of being judged, she thinks she is condemned to keep her mask on. Likewise, she behaves as coldly as in the past towards Mallard in spite of her inner metamorphosis, and her passionate desire for his company. He cannot suspect her evolution or her love for him.

He leaves Italy in her absence, at the end of the first part, without being able to say goodbye. They will meet again three years after this frustrating misunderstanding, after leading separate lives in England, in the first five chapters of the second part. Their psychological evolution takes place behind the scenes, as it were, and remains unsuspected until the action shifts again to Italy. Mallard's realization of his own change is presented in a retrospective narrative in chapter 6, Miriam's in chapter 7, and the consequences are later to be made tangible in a dramatic manner.

The image of Italy and its meaning changes between the two Italian episodes. It no longer generates illusions and errors but fosters self-discovery, favouring a "comic" resolution of the action with the convergence of the main characters.

Cecily's case, when she comes back to Italy with her aunt, her relations with Reuben being already very shaky, has to be studied separately: the dice are cast for her and a return to

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Naples can hardly change her situation. In the first part, Mrs. Lessingham's letter to Mallard, telling him to discourage Cecily from getting involved with Reuben, read in part: "We must save her from becoming wise through bitter sorrow" (I, 11, p. 176). Now Cecily's arrival in Italy, in chapter 8, testifies to the close link between suffering and wisdom. Grief has aged her physically and morally; she has lost her enthusiastic outlook, and the visit to Rome, in chapter 9, gives her no pleasure: "Had she stayed here on her first visit to Italy, on what a strong current of enthusiasm would the hours and the days have borne her!" (II, 9, p. 348). This is strongly reminiscent of the Italian section of *Middlemarch* when Dorothea Brooke sees the reflection of her wasted life in the dead world of Rome.

Although her situation cannot be altered, even in Italy, her health improves and she has some glimmers of hope when she goes back to England. Her deteriorated relations with Reuben, his disappearance and his shameful death definitely crush her. Still, the end of the novel has an optimistic message in spite of the tragic closure which seemingly characterizes Cecily's fate. She is both a widow and quite disillusioned, to Mrs. Spence's infinite sadness, but Mr. Spence quotes Boccaccio's *Decameron*: "First love is fool's paradise. But console yourself out of Boccaccio. Bocca baciata non perde ventura; anzi rinnuova, come fa la luna." Lips that have been kissed do not lose their chances; they renew themselves like the moon.

In the second part, Italy is also a symbol of hope and regeneration for Mallard and Miriam.

Chapter 6 presents Mallard in *medias res* back in Italy. The description of the landscape connotes renewal, paralleling the beginning of a new life for him. The action is significantly set in early spring whereas the first part started in November:

March rains had brought the vegetation into luxurious life; fern, acanthus,

brambles, and all the densely intermingled growths that cover the ground about the ruins, spread forth their innumerable tints of green. Between shore and mountains, the wide plain smiled in its desolation. (II, 6, p. 307)

Mallard's past and his future regeneration coexist in the description. In fact, the main purpose of his return to Italy is to exorcise his memories and to make sure that he has quite got over his weakness. He has now regained his zest for work, his balance, his equanimity: "He had loitered about the familiar places in Naples [...] and at each step he could smile with contemptuous pity for the self which he had outlived" (II, 6, p. 309). His self-respect largely

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accounts for his recovery and his new start:

When he came hither three years ago, it was with the intention of doing certain definite work; this purpose he now at last fulfilled, thus completing his revenge upon the by-gone obstacles, and reinstating himself in his own good opinion. (II, 6, p. 309)

The lush spring vegetation corresponds to the end of artistic sterility, and to the birth of a new man with a new outlook on life. His vision of Italy has consequently changed; he has come to realize that Italy is only dangerous for, and a source of unbalance to, the visitor who is overwhelmed by his passions or too weak to resist the rich and multiple aesthetic experiences that the country offers. In the second part, the influence of Italy is wholly beneficent. It makes Mallard peacefully carefree, and quietly in love with life, as he confesses to Miriam: "There comes back to me at moments the kind of happiness which I knew as a boy—a freedom from the sense of duties and responsibilities, of work to be done, and of disagreeable things to be faced'" (II, 7, p. 333).

He also becomes aware that seeking inspiration from Italy is ill-advised, as the country fosters individual fulfilment largely at the expense of artistic creation:

'I can do better work when I take subjects in wild scenery and stern climates, but when my thoughts go out for pleasure, they choose Italy [...] Here I am not disposed to work. I want to live, and I feel that life can be a satisfaction in itself without labour.' (II, 7, p. 334)

Conversely, this very influence led to lack of realism and irresponsibility for Cecily, Reuben and Mallard in the first part as they were psychologically unprepared and not strong enough to adopt this form of *carpe diem*.

For Miriam Baske, the lessons in life started in the first part are continued for three years in England, where she can look back on her mistakes, analyse herself, and perfect her psychological and aesthetic education with her cousins' help. The Spences are instrumental in her discovery of Greek and Latin writers.

When they are both back in Italy, Mallard, who is again emotionally free, notices how much Miriam has changed; she looks younger and in better physical and moral health: "her eyes no longer had the somewhat sullen gleam which had been wont to harm her aspect" (II, 6,

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p. 311). He also notices that she dresses and behaves quite differently, but she looks as worried as of old in his presence.

Without clearly understanding why she still has not found peace of mind, Mallard undertakes her artistic education. In Rome, they visit together tourist sites such as the Sistine

Chapel or the Palazzo Borghese in the chapter entitled "Learning and Teaching." "Learning" refers to Miriam's initiation, but in addition the word suggests the mutual discovery of the characters who are learning to know each other. Miriam makes Mallard's task difficult because she constantly hides her real feelings as is evidenced by their chance meeting in the Vatican:

Mallard noticed the sudden change from cold remoteness of countenance to pleased recognition. The brightening in her eyes was only for a moment; then she smiled in her usual half-absent way, and received him formally. (II, 7, p. 318)

She nevertheless confesses that thanks to him she has a different conception of life, which is a first step towards frankness. But she cannot be brought round to disclosing herself, out of pride, and to confiding freely in Eleanor Spence. For this reason, she is condemned to a form of sentimental hide-and-seek with Mallard, and she cannot put an end to her unbearable feeling of loneliness:

On this loneliness she threw the blame of [...] her frequent insincerity [...] If she could but have disclosed her heart in the humility of love and trust, how would its aching have been eased! [...] And yet her soul was weary of untruth [...] Only by a strong human hand could she be raised from her unworthy position and led into the way of sincerity. (II, 8, pp. 340-41)

Her self-criticism supplies additional evidence of her lack of candour as she never utters the name of Mallard, whose hand is clearly the one she craves. Cecily's return to Italy arouses her jealousy and she anxiously witnesses the young woman's meeting with Mallard, a typical comedy scene, together with the love triangle motif, although it has darker undertones in the context: "her eye caught their reflection in a mirror and she watched them closely without seeming to do so" (II, 8, pp. 344-45).

The mirror theme is a recurrent metaphor in *The Emancipated*, one which sums up Miriam's problem, namely her personal conflict between outward appearances and intimate depth. The mirror is an emblem of duality; instead of a close correspondence between the original and its reflection, it reveals a painful division. It presents a mask, not a real face.

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Similarly, it contributes to Miriam's mistaken perception: she misreads a revival of Mallard's former feelings in the reflection she watches on the sly whereas he is freed from his love for Cecily.

At the end of chapter 8, Miriam turns down his offer to visit an artist's studio with him. Puzzled by her refusal, he contrives a *tête-à-tête* conversation with her, during a visit to the Vatican a few days later. Although she is flattered by his attention, she will not doff her mask: "she set her face in a hard expression that it might not betray her sudden gladness" (II, 9, p. 353). She leaves Italy with the Spences the next day, saying goodbye to Mallard very coldly and inconclusively, as could be expected from the title of chapter 9, "Silences." It shows the misunderstandings on which their freshly renewed relation rests:

Miriam could not obtain the conviction that, as a woman, she strongly interested Mallard; and the artist found it very hard to persuade himself that Miriam thought of him as anything but a man of some talent, whose attention was agreeable. (II, 9, p. 353)

Their second parting, like the first, leads to a separate return to England, with the maturing process going on behind the scenes. But Miriam experiences this phase as an exile.

Before settling in London with the Spences, she decides to visit Bartles. She feels so estranged that she shortens her stay there, convinced that she has irremediably broken with her past, and with “that narrow provincial life” (II, 11, p 375). Miriam and Mallard meet intermittently in London between the end of chapter 11 and chapter 16. The former comparative friendliness of the second Italian episode is replaced by distant, impersonal civility. Rome becomes a paradise lost in Miriam’s memories: “She felt that henceforth her relations with Mallard were established on a perfectly conventional basis [...] Here was no Vatican in which to idle and hope for possible meetings. The holiday was over” (II, 11, p. 377).

In spite of this painful standstill, she passively and proudly waits. Mallard finally understands why she refuses to give Cecily any moral support and breaks the silence during a long, tense interview in chapter 16. He tries to get her to admit the causes of her coldness to her sister-in-law; fruitless though the attempt may be, Miriam’s mask is cracking. A little later, Mallard arouses her jealousy on purpose during a dinner-party and, to put the finishing touch to his shock treatment, sends her a letter mysteriously inviting her to come to his studio. As soon as Miriam arrives, he asks her to mend a case in which he puts his sketches. She sets to work

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submissively, unaware that she is sitting for him at the same time. He then shows her the two portraits he has drawn side by side, and the title of chapter 16, “The Two Faces,” acquires its full meaning when he asks her if she can recognize the model:

The one represented a face fixed in excessive austerity, with a touch of pride that was by no means amiable, with resentful eyes, and lips on the point of becoming cruel. In the other [...] all these harsh characteristics had yielded to a change of spirit; austerity had given place to grave thoughtfulness, the eyes had a noble light, on the lips was sweet womanly strength. (II, 16, p. 437)

Miriam bows silently when confronted with such crushing evidence and listens to Mallard’s interpretation of the severe face: “It is that of an utterly undisciplined woman, with a possibility of great things in her, but likely to be dangerous for lack of self-knowledge and humility.” This face symbolises her past self, still occasionally alive. The second face represents the final phase in her education:

‘The second is obviously her sister, but how different! [...] she is “emancipated” [...] that is to say, she is not only freed from those bonds that numb the faculties of mind and heart, but is able to control the native passions that would make a slave of her. Now, this face I love.’ (p. 437)

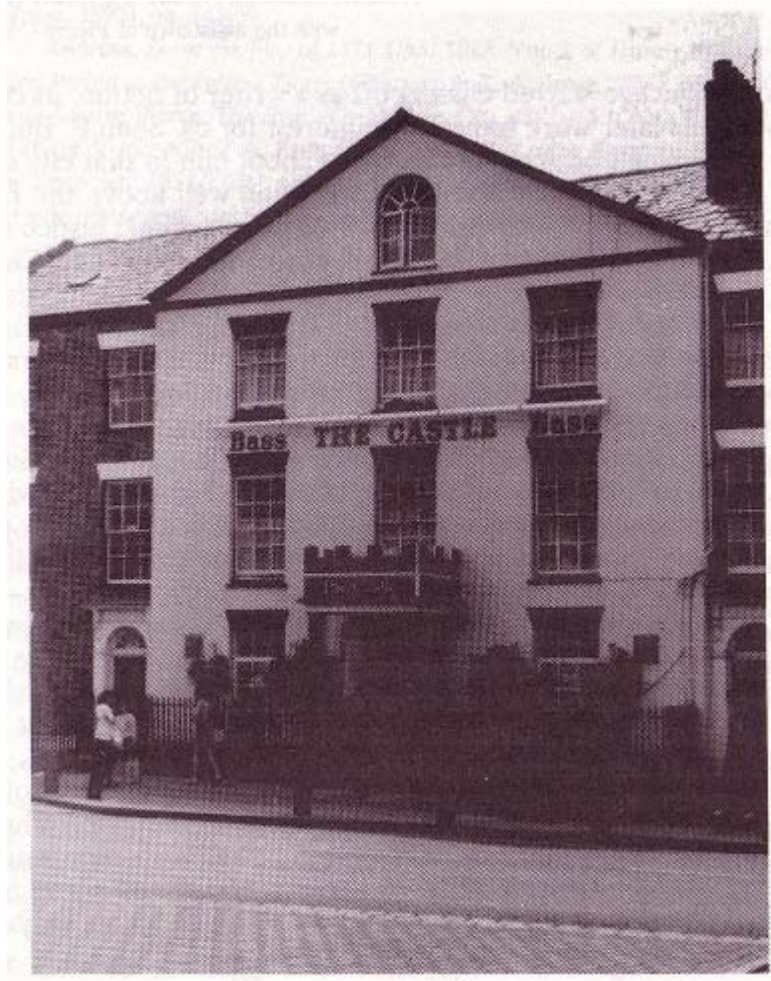
Through the theme of the double, and the contrast between surface and depth, the painter modestly succeeds in declaring his love. It is worth noting that he addresses Miriam in the third person out of shyness but also to allow her to watch herself from an objective distance. This ultimate division will enable Miriam to achieve her long expected self-integrity.

With her final admission, the last obstacle falls away and her jealousy of Cecily is exorcised. After long wavering on the verge of potentially tragic failure, the action has a truly “comic” resolution.

The following chapter, aptly entitled “End and Beginning,” reveals that Mallard and Miriam have been married for two months. While Miriam was sewing for him in chapter 16, Mallard had asked her about the plan she had in Naples to present the Bartles community with a new chapel. When she admitted to having grown out of the religion of her youth, he suggested the alternative of having public baths built instead.

Indeed, the reader discovers in chapter 17 that the baths will actually be built, an echo of Roman antiquity and paganism. Italy remains present to the very end, asserting its joyful regenerating power as far away as the Methodist North.

The Castle Hotel, Caernarvon, Wales



There Gissing had lunch on Saturday, 18 April 1896, during his trip to Northern Wales, where he was collecting material to be used in *The Whirlpool*. Gwyn Neale's booklet on Gissing and Wales will contain illustrations like the above photograph, which was taken by Françoise Coustillas in the summer of 1984.

The Critical Response to Gissing and Commentary about him
in the *Chicago Evening Post*

Robert L. Selig, Purdue University Calumet
with the assistance of Pierre Coustillas

Because Chicago started Gissing off as a writer of fiction, its critical response to his later work has special interest for us. Shan F. Bullock's reviews of Gissing's books and comments about him in that city's most literary paper, the *Chicago Evening Post*, stand well above the rest in eloquence, sympathy, and insight. It would satisfy poetic justice were the same *Post* that had

published two of his attributed Chicago stories in 1877¹—a case of a newspaper’s reappraisal of its own earlier discovery. In fact, though, the struggling original *Post* had ceased to exist in 1878, when its owners, the McMullen brothers, sold out to Victor Lawson and Melville E. Stone of the *Chicago Daily News* who bought the *Post*’s assets mainly for the included Associate Press franchise but killed off the rival paper itself.² The *Chicago Evening Post* of 1890 to 1932 had no connection, except the name, with its ancestor. The new paper was begun by John R. Walsh, publisher of the *Morning Herald*, as the *Herald*’s evening sister, and this *Post*, unlike its forerunner, laid special stress on its literary section.³

The new *Post* recruited as regular reviewers such distinguished writers as Henry B. Fuller—the author of the pioneering big-city novel *The Cliff-Dwellers* (1893) and for two years its chief literary editor—and Shan F. Bullock himself, an important Anglo-Irish short story writer and novelist who served as its London correspondent. As a book-loving portrayer of the ignobly decent, Bullock had a profound affinity with Gissing and a deep appreciation of him. Through Bullock’s efforts and others’, the *Chicago Evening Post*’s recognition of Gissing as a major British novelist earns a significant place in the critical record. The complete *Post* reviews of Gissing follow in chronological order.

[Professor Selig’s work on this article as well as on the previously published “Gissing and Shan Bullock” and “The Critical Response to Gissing in the *Chicago Times Herald*” was facilitated by a Scholarly Research Award from Purdue University Calumet.]

¹See George Gissing, *Brownie: Now First Reprinted from the Chicago Tribune Together with Six Other Stories Attributed to Him*, edited with introductions by George Everett Hastings, Vincent Starrett, and Thomas Ollive Mabbott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 55-71;

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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, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), pp. 145-59.

²A. T. Andreas, *From the Fire of 1871 Until 1885: Vol. 2 of History of Chicago from the Earliest Period to the Present Times* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1886), pp. 700-01.

³Bessie Louise Pierce, *The Rise of a Modern City, 1871-1893: Vol. 3 of A History of Chicago* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 418; Louise Seymour Jones, “Horatio Winslow Seymour, 1854-1920,” unpublished biography in typescript written 1948 by Seymour’s daughter and held by the Chicago Historical Association, pp. 44-45.

Anon., “Books of the Week: Tried to Ransom a Woman,”
11 May 1895, p. 5

George Gissing is the historian of the lower middle class, who finds his inspiration in the tragic dullness of its life. He has accustomed us to expect excellent work from his pen, and if his last book, “Eve’s Ransom” (Appleton & Co.) is not poignant and powerful as are some of its predecessors it carries on every page the same imprint of unexaggerated truth. Written throughout in a lighter key, it is less sordid, sunnier and pleasanter in effect. The hero, Hillyard [sic] is a mechanical draughtsman. When we meet him first he is sick to death of his life of drudgery, and in his passionate longing to escape from bondage, his mood of desperation, centered in self, is leading him to yield to brutalizing influences. By an unlooked-for chance the man who ruined his father pays the son a long-standing debt of £400. Hillyard, thirsting to have a taste of freedom, vows that the money will purchase him £400 worth of life. “While this money lasts I’ll feel that I’m a human being.” Fortunately he has a conscience and the sanity of taste that finds “no enjoyment in making a beast of oneself.” In holiday mood he goes in quest of Eve Madeley, whose photograph in his landlady’s album haunts his fancy. When at last he

meets her, Eve, by a curious coincidence, has become possessed of £25, and is spending it in securing a span of "repose, satisfaction, enjoyment." The resemblance in the condition of their lives, in their aims, in their passionate longing to touch life, draws the two together. Unfortunately the shadow of an unhappy love casts its gloom over Eve's spirit. Her ways perplex Hillyard, but he becomes her friend and conducts himself toward her with chivalric delicacy. The larger part of the £400 is spent in the ransom of Eve from bondage. How it is paid and what comes of the generous expenditure we shall leave our readers to discover for themselves. The end comes somewhat as a surprise, but it has the convincing unexpectedness of truth. Eve acts as such a woman would act. Without being ignoble, she has lost the finer sensibilities in her struggle for existence, and her strongest feeling is terror of the poverty that once dragged her down to be one of life's miserable captives. The character Patty Ringrose, who is employed in her uncle's music shop, is a lifelike sketch of a sprightly, superficial, yet

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thoroughly human girl. Every character in the book bears the stamp of being observed from life. If not the most characteristic, the story is one of the most attractive of Mr. Gissing's books.

Anon., "Books of the Week: In the Year of Jubilee,"
July 27 1895, p. 5

The impression gained by the reader before he has progressed beyond the twentieth page of George Gissing's latest story is that he has stumbled into the presence of some uncommonly vulgar people. At the end of the second score of pages he is hopelessly sure of it. There are not a few persons in this cynical world who decline to read Mr. Howells' novels because, as they put it, they have no time to waste on ordinary folk. Perhaps these same critics might feel disposed to tell Mr. Gissing that it is time spent without justifying compensation to pore over the details of the lives of vulgar characters. The word vulgar is used advisedly, and does not imply the harmless definition of the Latin *vulgus*, but vulgar in its broadest and most offensive significance. Charles Dickens had a way of treating vulgar types of humanity, but—well, Mr. Gissing is not Mr. Dickens

The interest of "In the Year of Jubilee," which is, after all, an uncommonly well written story considering the handicap specified, centers in Miss Nancy Lord and Lionel Tarrant. Miss Nancy is the daughter of an eccentric tradesman who specified in his will that his daughter shall lose her share in his fortune if she marries before she is twenty-six. Mr. Tarrant is an easy-going, selfish young man of good family, who has expectations. Naturally they marry, with the intention of keeping their marriage a secret until Nancy comes of required age, and Tarrant, whose expected fortune has been lost meanwhile, goes off to America to make a new one. Unhappily the fruits of marriage are soon realized in poor Nancy's case, her secret is thereby discovered and she is thrown upon the world to make her living. Then Tarrant returns, unsuccessful and disgusted with the step that has fastened a wife upon him. A quarrel of course follows and husband and wife are estranged. Both are hot-headed, yet both have certain well-defined ideas of right, and it is the logic of events that they shall become reconciled, and with a little money left by Nancy's brother, start on a new life chastened by experience and wise through suffering.

This is a meager outline of the leading incident of the story. From start to finish it is an unpleasant narration, even if a degree of admiration is excited for Nancy Lord, who is worthy a better husband and a better fate. Yet the character of Tarrant, weak as it is at first, is not without its excuse, and the intent of the author is clearly more to blame the condition under which he was developed than to excite contempt for the hero. The germs of good were in Tarrant after all, and necessity and experience brought out the latent qualities of manliness and justice. The woman was the foil to the man. Where he was weak she was strong. Where her feminine conception of right led her to wrong and illogical conclusions his masculine mind brought her to

the knowledge of her fault. An author less vigorous than Gissing would have spared some of the weaknesses of each, but in so doing would have doubtless sunk into the commonplace, for in these middle-class people, whose romance in the year of the queen's jubilee is the subject of the story, there is a great deal of human nature as it exists, and not as the sentimental reader would like, perhaps, to see it.

Allowing for the fact that the other characters in Mr. Gissing's story are true to nature, it is still true that they are a vulgar lot, and serve no other purpose than to show what greater English novelists have already shown, how much of sordidness and wickedness and lust and vice of all kinds there is in London. Indeed, the reader can almost see the author smacking his lips over a particularly objectionable phase of human weakness and gloating over the vulgarity of the people he has selected as types for his characters in setting. The one exception to this herd of illiterates and motleys is the old housekeeper at the home of old Stephen Lord, and there is occasion for regret that her stanch and splendid character could not have shown more conspicuously. But Mr. Gissing gives the idea of a disinclination for dwelling on human virtue, and is apparently never so happy as when stirring up a cesspool and dilating on mortal rottenness.

The prevalent idea of the day that realism must be carried to its extent has been adopted in no small degree in Mr. Gissing's story. When Fanny French seats herself on the knees of her fiancé, Horace Lord, the author gives us an analysis of Mr. Lord's feelings, expressed in plain, unmistakable English. It is to be hoped that if Mr. Gissing's book is translated into the continental tongues these passages will be properly toned down, in order that the continental taste and sense of propriety may not be shocked. A very little of this sort of thing in any language will go a very long way, the realists and the disciples of the erotic to the contrary notwithstanding. (D. Appleton & Co.)

Anon., "Books for the Week: *The Paying Guest*,"
25 January 1896, p. 5

One of the brightest stories of the season is told by George Gissing when he sets down circumstantially the facts that led to the small domestic tempest which swept the erstwhile peaceful household presided over by the eminently respectable people, Mr. and Mrs. Mumford. "The Paying Guest" is deliciously natural throughout, and fairly sparkling with irresistibly humorous situations. The heroine is constructed on the most original lines, and possesses a bewildering wealth of faults, with not one of the virtues which seem indigenous to the numerous sisterhood of heroines. Louise is certainly trying, but there is a dash and frankness about her which quite makes up for her ignorance and amusing defiance of many sacred and revered rules of social etiquette. And George Gissing is consistent (a rare quality in a novelist), and stands by his heroine loyally, positively refusing to allow that young lady to emerge from the last chapter beautifully metamorphosed regarding her faults—a proceeding which he would have accomplished had he yielded to the accepted proprieties of novel writing. Louise starts out with

a volcanic temper and impossible manners and marvel of romances! she keeps these characteristics intact to the very end of the story. The trouble, which proves so vastly entertaining to read about, started with the Mumfords' desire to enhance their rather limited income by welcoming to their hearth and home a young woman who, through fault quite evenly distributed, cannot live at home. She pays handsomely and there is a tacit understanding that her hostess is to launch her into society, in a modest way. But the girl is really impossible and the "unmerciful disaster" which follows for ever in her wake has an alarming way of including others, which proves death to the domestic peace and happiness of the Mumford household. She is continually having ill-bred "rows" with her kith and kin, and such is the power of a bad

example she actually contaminates the high-bred and sweet soul of Mrs. Mumford, to such an extent that she too evinces a degraded inclination to “have it out” herself with those who cross her path. But how to get rid of “the paying guest” is a momentous question, and not until everybody concerned becomes entangled in the pettiest kind of squabbles does the way out of the difficulty appear. Mr. Gissing’s manner of telling a story is irreproachable; he elaborates just enough and no more, while he temperately refrains from exaggeration, no matter what the provocation may be. Much of the charm of his work lies in his delightful attitude toward his characters. He artfully conceals his personality, and recounts in the simplest manner possible what befell them, and never does Mr. Gissing intrude his views and his personality. His name is on the title page, to be sure, but after that he disappears from the scene and leaves his characters to live, move and have their being according to their own sweet will. (Dodd, Mead & Co.)

Anon., “Books of the Week: The Unclassed.”
16 May 1896, p. 5

George Gissing is in a very serious mood in his latest novel, “The Unclassed,” and as a member of the innumerable caravan whose office it is to write problem stories he sustains the reputation of his cult and gives the orthodox modern novel, with all the required embellishments. Mr. Gissing does not aim to be sensational; he is too sure of his readers to resort to cheap effects. He has a sincere purpose, and it is such a kind and humane one that whatever opinion may be as to his point of view one feels confident of the honesty of his motive. “The Unclassed” tells of conditions that in some instances are positively repulsive; he describes people who ordinarily would not excite our sympathies, but Gissing has a wonderful eye for composition and before he has finished we are made to judge people and events relatively, to look at the picture as a whole and to let the large, good things properly overbalance the petty features. Ida Starr, the heroine, is a girl whose mother is a social outcast, and on her death the child is left to make her way alone. That the worst befalls her is not surprising, and after several years of sad eventfulness, when she is still a young girl, she meets the very manly and generous-hearted hero, Osmond Waymark. This incident serves to entirely reclaim the woman and Waymark, though he

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knows her past and present, accords her a helpful and honorable friendship. Ida falls deeply in love with him, and, forsaking everything, goes back to her honest tubs and finds employment as a laundress—a profession she at one time followed. Before this Waymark had become interested in a young governess, and though strongly attracted by Ida, he engages himself to Miss Enderby, only to be miserable and to find in the end that he is entirely unsuited to her. A dear friend, Julian Casti, has married a cousin, a most vicious character and an early enemy of Ida Starr, and through the efforts of this designing woman, the unfortunate girl is convicted of stealing and sent to prison. The persecution tends to strengthen Waymark’s love for Ida, and a happy denouement is reached when Miss Enderby releases him and he, with all haste, asks Ida to be his wife.

As Mr. Gissing tells the story, Ida is a beautiful, gentle and deserving woman. To be sure she started in the world sorely handicapped, but the author relates her life’s history as though it were an account of the most humdrum existence. He does not mince matters and speaks of her degradation frankly and it does not occur to him there should be any comments on the facts he relates. The girl experiences no regrets. Osmond Waymark is not troubled by any somber thoughts in this direction and the whole affair is taken with marvelous composure by those interested. His charitableness not only covers up her multitude of grievous sins, but it blots them out utterly. Authors are grappling with this problem every day, but usually they throw in a dash of remorse as a piquant sauce. Mr. Gissing started out with the intention of meeting his duty squarely, and his duty as he conceives it in this case is to prove that the code of morals should exist for both men and women. How far he is successful is a question, but he does succeed in telling a wonderfully strong story, and one that is absorbingly interesting. (R.F. Fenno & Co.)

Anon., "Books of the Week,"
2 Apr 11 1898, p. 5

We have never had a Dickens "revival"; one of the few fortunates, his readers hardly decline with the passing of years. Biographical matter concerning the novelist finds an audience waiting; it has never been difficult to command the public's attention when Dickens is the subject. Much inferior stuff has been written about him, reckless ones have rushed in and busied themselves with a theme too great for mediocre talent, and yet their intentions were the best. In attempting a critical study of Charles Dickens George Gissing is encouraged by the thought that it seems possible now to regard Dickens from the standpoint of posterity; to consider his career, to review his literary work and to estimate his total activity in relation to an age which, intelligibly speaking, is no longer our own. The master story-teller has been dead twenty-eight years; through all the changes that time has brought his personality has endured this quarter of a century and more. It is Mr. Gissing's arduous task to define the quality of this personality, to

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explain the heights of this character, the scope of its achievement, and that he has performed his duty conscientiously the reader will testify.

Again and again Mr. Gissing notes the buoyant quality of Dickens' work, and one wishes the critic was not so heavy and ponderous in his methods. Not content with hazarding an opinion, he runs the author to earth and attempts to wrench the secret of his charm from him. To analyze Dickens' novels, point out their glaring faults, their exaggerations and inconsistencies is something his most ardent admirers are prone to do. To explain his charm, to tell why he is master of the art of story-telling, is quite another thing. Imagination, sympathy, enthusiasm, a splendid sense of humor, are attributes Dickens shares in common with others, and greater faults he had than many, but the baffling fact still confronts one, with his multitudinous sins against good literature, he is the most fascinating of all our narrators, the king of fiction writers.

Mr. Gissing offers his criticisms apologetically, as if he were guilty of disloyalty in pointing out flaws. Whereas Dickens' power is so patent that his deficiencies only emphasize the potency of that power, which easily atoned for all.

Speaking of the ethical aspect of his work, Mr. Gissing says: "He did not deliberately sacrifice truth to refinement. Moreover, he was convinced that he had done a moral service to the world. That both these ends were attained by help of unexampled buoyancy of spirit, an unflinching flow of the healthiest mirth, the kindest humour, should in consistency appear to us the strangest thing of all—to us who strive so hard for 'atmosphere,' insist so strongly upon 'objectivity' in the author. But in this matter Dickens troubled himself with no theory or argument. He wrote as his soul dictated, and surely could not have done better.

Admitting his limits, accepting them even gladly, he was yet possessed with a sense of the absolute reality of everything he pictured forth. Had the word been in use he must necessarily have called himself a Realist. This is one of the biographical commonplaces concerning Dickens. Everyone knows how he excited himself over his writing, how he laughed and cried with his imaginary people, how he all but made himself ill with grief over the death-bed of little Nell or of Paul Dombey. This means, of course, that his imagination worked with perfect freedom, had the fullest scope, yet never came into conflict with the prepossessions of his public. Permission to write as Smollett and as Fielding wrote could in no way have advantaged Dickens. He was the born story-teller of a certain day, of a certain class. Again, he does not deem himself the creator of a work but the laboriously faithful painter of that about him. He labours his utmost to preserve illusion. Dickens could never have been guilty of that capital crime against art so heartedly committed by Anthony Trollope. who will begin a paragraph in his novels with some such words as these: 'Now if this were fact and not a story...' For all that, Trollope was the more literal copier of life. But his figures do not survive as those of Dickens, who did in fact create—created individuals, to become at once and for ever representative of their time."

A critic, above all things, must not be emotional, and Mr. Gissing has carefully schooled himself to write in the most dispassionate strain. With a proper regard for precedent he pits Dickens with Thackeray (a time-honored and utterly absurd custom, and yet it seems to be considered a breach of etiquette to mention one without the other) and these passages in his book one enjoys least. When Mr. Gissing leaves rules and speaks from his heart about the novelist, then we have evidence of such broad, comprehensive appreciation that one's entire confidence in the commentator is immediately established. He knows Dickens intimately well, and gives a just interpretation of the author's work and character. It is by these flashes that the book is made delightful rather than by the conventional criticism which attempts to catalogue Dickens—ticket him and settle definitely his particular status in letters according to accepted standards. Under such treatment it will be observed the subject proves a very refractory and troublesome one to manage. ("Charles Dickens: a Critical Study," by George Gissing. Dodd, Mead & Co.)

Anon., "*The Town Traveler*,"
13 November 1898, p. 5

It pleases George Gissing to be in a merry mood once more, and his new story, "The Town Traveler," is in a jocular vein, quite different from the lugubrious strain of "The Unclassed" and "The Whirlpool." Once upon a time Mr. Gissing wrote a foolish trifle called "The Paying Guest." It was a capital bit of nonsense, but the author evidently feared to blazon a way for himself in the role of a funny man, so he gave up frivolity and returned to sedate themes. In "The Town Traveler," however, he breaks out again and is very gay. If there is any criticism to be found with Mr. Gissing this time it is that his characters are not always clearly defined. Mr. Gammon's bosom friend and counselor, as an example, is quite chameleonlike in his nature. Now he is a shabby personage not above accepting the smallest favors; another chapter discovers him a bold adventurer, who gives the impression of being fit for any treason, and still another installment of the story represents him as a gentleman born and a man of excellent principles. Mr. Gissing fails to give an explanation of the riddle.

Such inconsistencies do not prevent one from extracting a great amount of comfort from Polly Sparkes. Miss Sparkes, be it known, has a nasty temper, together with a fine disregard for the opinions of others, and her savage outbursts and scornful ways generally are vastly amusing. As well drawn as this excitable young person is Mr. Gammon, who is engaged in the perilous business of adjusting the affairs of other people, thereby suffering many times from the ingratitude of those he tries to help. A mysterious nobleman, with one wife too many, is the troublesome element of the story. He causes no end of mischief, and when matters become too complicated disappears, which is quite prudent under the circumstances. To restore him to his family is a wish very dear to the heart of Mr. Gammon.

The straightening out of the trouble proves disastrous all around, inasmuch as it brings to light the extra wife, a dismal incident it does no good to unearth for she is dead, and the wicked Lord Polperro also dies, a circumstance that smooths out matters without Mr. Gammon's interference. Taken all in all, "The Town Traveler" is a very good story; it amuses and is a bright exception to the many gloomy romances that are being doled out so persistently by well-meaning writers.

Anon., "*The Crown of Life*" in "Fifth Annual Book Number"
25 November 1899, Part 3, p. 2

Among the younger men George Gissing is hardly to be reckoned longer. He is in his forty-third year and "The Crown of Life," now newly published, is his fifteenth or sixteenth work of fiction. But he has made himself free from the imputation of youth by a still better title, for no account of the novel-writers of the day would be complete which failed to take into careful account his careful and highly finished work. It is a pleasure to record that the evident maturity of his genius enables him to produce books in which each is successively an improvement upon its predecessors.

Too true an artist to write a tendency novel, "The Crown of Life" may be described indifferently as a sentimental, a society, a historical or a political novel, since all these elements enter into it, as they enter into the life of that portion of English society which he so successfully depicts. "The Crown of Life" is, of course, love, and the strongest note in the book is the insistence upon love absolute, sentimental love in the old-fashioned sense, as a prerequisite for a successful married life. Not only is the lesson plainly taught in the long postponement of the happy day between the heroine and her staunch admirer, but all the minor characters of the tale as well are really happy or indifferently happy in accordance with their hanging upon the voice of nature rather than upon that of worldly wisdom.

But the author's art does not stop with that. Throughout the central part of the story runs a tale of politics of great interest. The hero is an Englishman, but one who has familiarized himself with Russia by an extended sojourn within Russian territory and a complete acquaintance with Russian literature. Another of the principal characters is a young statesman of the imperialist type. Abruptly contrasted with him are two of his elders, both of them lovers of freedom, and one of them an effective speaker in private life to that end. This last is John Jacks, and a part of one of his conversations with Piers Otway, the hero, is worth setting forth. It must be borne in mind that both these men are sincere and devotedly patriotic Englishmen, with whom their country's real greatness is everything, and her apparent greatness nothing. In other words they love their native land too dearly to be blind to her faults and are too wise to mistake mere grandeur or splendor as a substitute for that moral texture which alone proclaims a state healthy or decadent. [a long quotation follows.]

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This is but an example of the pure righteousness and fine philosophy which underlie the book, as much a part of rational modern life as the love and self-devotion which perpetuate the race. But there is nowhere the note of pessimism and despair; only the voice raised in warning, as the voice of intelligence should always be raised, to prevent the confounding of true and false ambitions and to say a word in season against the specious pleadings of selfishness, now as always the foundation of all the misery and injustice on the earth.

To those who like a novel because it contains a well-told love story moving decorously enough along the lines of modern conventionality, as well as those who like to dip beneath the surface of the smooth waters and see the darkling depths that underlie them, Mr. Gissing's latest story will appeal concurrently. His universality of interest is his most admirable virtue as a writer.

Anon., "*Our Friend the Charlatan*,"
26 June 1901, p. 5

You must read "Our Friend the Charlatan," by George Gissing. This latest work of that original novelist is the most entertaining book of the season. It is a strong satire on one of the most interesting problem characters of the age—the charlatan who has taken up the politico-sociological fad. He is known to every country. Mr. Gissing's hero is Dyce Lashmar, the son of an overworked rector in the provinces and a mother who is eccentric to the borderland of patience. He is a charlatan in mind, temperament and heart. There is nothing sincere about him. Even his political system is stolen word for word from a Frenchman's treatise on "Bio-Sociology." At a critical moment of his life he becomes acquainted with a

remarkable old woman, Lady Ogram, who is of plebeian origin, but who has wonderful vitality and ambition, and a temper like a devil.

She takes up with Lashmar and his theories, which she does not understand, on the recommendation of her secretary, a very remarkable young woman with whom Lashmar would like to have been smitten and whom he has known since childhood.

[A detailed plot summary follows.]

It is powerfully written, and Lashmar is splendidly drawn. It is one of the most natural and common characters to be met with in fiction. The analysis of the processes of his mind when he is successively confronted with various setbacks, his ruses to overcome the obstacles as they arise, his ineffectiveness, which prevents him from becoming a really successful scoundrel—all these things are brought out with the utmost vividness and truth. Lady Ogram is another good character, autocratic, acute, revengeful, yet with a warm spot in her empty heart for honesty, which she tries so hard to find in others. The niece, May Tomalin, is delicious with her bogus sociological work and her thinly veneered vulgarity. The book deserves a great success, for it contains much honest work.

Shan F. Bullock, "Strange Confession of Literary Man. George
Gissing's Latest Book a Half-Veiled Revelation of Failure.
Discouragements of Authors,"
26 February 1903, p. 4

There has just been published here [in London] a strange book called "The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft." It is issued behind the name of George Gissing the novelist, who supplies a preface explaining how Ryecroft's papers came into his possession, who Ryecroft was and why he left Mr. Gissing to discharge the duties of literary executor.

All this is interesting, of course; but those who know anything of Mr. Gissing's record, his tastes, opinions, habits, prejudices, his literary style and temper will soon discover that the private papers are verily Mr. Gissing's own. His name and record run constantly between the lines. So that here we have that very interesting form of human document, the published private confession of a literary man.

The book is in a way remarkable. It flings a terrible shadow on the literary life. Always we have known Mr. Gissing to be a scholar, a bookworm, a novelist of notable gifts and accomplishments. We knew that his career had been troubled, that of late his mind has been vexed with doubts and fears. We had a suspicion, judging by the kind and quantity of his recent work, that perhaps his best day was over. But never have we imagined him to be so utterly broken, so despondent, so hopeless, as he reveals himself in this book. Peace, perfect peace, absolute quiet, no worries, no cares, no desires, a little good food, many good books, his nook in the corner, his share of the sun—these are the needs of Henry Ryecroft. His life is lived. His travail is over. Without fear, yet without hope, full of ugly memories and battered in body and soul, he waits for the end. And this is our George Gissing!

Perhaps no more dismal record of a struggling literary life than this of Henry Ryecroft has been written. "New Grub Street," that excellent story, gave us glimpses and versions of what happens in our literary bohemia; but here we have the plain record, with every "i" dotted, of a man who has been through the literary mill from the very bottom and has come out wrecked at the top. Starvation, poverty, cold, disease, despair, loneliness, overwork, he has experienced them all; and now at last, when out in the sunshine, with friends at his call, with all his needs satisfied, with his name famous and a splendid record of good work behind it—he has nothing but loathing for the life gone through. He talks of "the cursed travail of the pen." He dilates almost to weariness on miseries and trials of the intellectual life. He tells you that every real student must sacrifice health and content to letters. And he finishes with these remarkable words: "With a lifetime of dread experiences behind me, I say that he who encourages any young man or woman to look for his living to literature, commits no less than a crime."

I ask you to remember just this: George Gissing has written some seventeen novels of the highest quality. His name is honored by all who respect literature. He is called a master by many.

In France his books have been the subject of a series of lectures before the academy. Lately he has achieved new fame as a critic of Dickens. And yet he can put his name sincerely to the confessions of Henry Ryecroft!

[to be concluded]

Notes and News

Gissing died in the Maison Elguë at Ispoure, near St. Jean Pied de Port on 28 December 1903, at 1.15 p.m., that is ninety years ago. No special celebration is called for ninety years after a writer's death, and few publishers have been tempted to reissue his works in 1993. Yet the publication of two titles in Everyman paperbacks, of *New Grub Street* in the World's Classics, the reissue of the same title in a larger format in Penguin, the publication of Gissing's American Notebook and that of a play based on *The Odd Women*, among other similar events offer some guarantee that the past year will not in retrospect appear to have been a lean year in Gissing studies. The *Collected Letters*, Volume 5 of which is scheduled for publication in the spring, are the most tangible evidence that new material is constantly being made available. The Edwin Mellen Press is soon to issue a fourth Gissing volume, his *Collected Poems*, edited like the American Notebook by Dr. Postmus, of the University of Amsterdam. An attractively illustrated monograph on Gissing and Wales, by Gwyn Neale, will throw light on the novelist's 1873 and 1896 trips to Wales, on people he met there and on some hitherto unknown sources for *The Whirlpool*. A French translation, also with illustrations, of *By the Ionian Sea*, will appear under the imprint of the Presses Universitaires de Lille, probably in the autumn.

Maria Teresa Chialant has sent us the programme of a three-day conference organized by the Università degli Studi di Salerno on 24-26 November 1993. The theme under discussion is perhaps easier to transcribe than to translate: "Per una topografia dell'Altrove: Spazi altri nell'immaginario letterario e culturale de lingua inglese." The names of some participants are well-known to readers of this journal: Patrick Parrinder, Carlo Pagetti, Clotilde de Stasio and of course Maria Teresa herself, who read a paper on "Northerners in Sunlight": gli esuli di George Gissing," that is Gissing's exiles. Little enough could the author of *The Emancipated* have

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imagined in November 1888 while he was visiting Salerno that a hundred and five years later some scholarly comment on one of his major themes would be offered in that very town. Will the forty-four papers that were read be published in volume form, one wonders?

Two Gissing manuscripts were exhibited recently in the Berg Collection, those of *New Grub Street* ("The One Bright Book of Life: Novels in Manuscript," 3 October 1992 to 13 March 1993) and of *The Emancipated* ("Dandies and Doughties: Writers in Britain 1890-1900," 2 April-25 September 1993). A forty-six page illustrated booklet by Francis O. Mattson, Curator of the Berg Collection, was devoted to the latter exhibition.

Reviewing *The Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography: Late Victorian and Edwardian Writers, 1890-1914*, vol. 5, Detroit: Gale, 1991 (21 articles on authors in the 10 volumes of the complete *D.L.B.*) Barbara Quinn Schmidt in *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol. 26 (Summer 1993), p. 116, rightly regrets the omission of Gissing in favour of Bram Stoker.

Like its immediate predecessors the 1994 Catalogue of Classic Books on Cassettes issued by Audio Book Contractors (P.O. Box 40115, Washington D.C. 20016-0115) offers *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* narrated by Grove Gardner (30-day rental: \$9.00; purchase: \$26.95).

Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Edited with an introduction by John Goode. Pictorial paperback. xxvii + 540 pp + 8 unnumbered pages of advertisements consisting of a select list of titles available in the World's Classics, the series in which the book is published. ISBN 0-19-282963-7. £5.99 or \$6.95. The critical material includes an Introduction, a Note to the Text, a Select Bibliography, a Chronology of Gissing, an Appendix on *New Grub Street* and London, a Map and Explanatory Notes.

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Michael Meyer, *The Odd Women*, after the novel by George Gissing, London, New York, Toronto and Hollywood: Samuel French, 1993. White card covers with dark green titling. 69 pp. ISBN 0-573-0 1852-9. Mr. Meyer's play was presented at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, in November 1992. The text of the play is preceded by a short introduction on Gissing and followed by a Furniture and Property List, a Lighting Plot, and an Effects Plot. No price given.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Hilary Morland, *Medicine and Society in Wakefield and Huddersfield*, Cambridge University Press, 1987. Mentions a number of Wakefield people known to the Gissings and referred to by Gissing himself in his correspondence—John Binks, the Rev. Camidge, W. R. Milner, Samuel Holdsworth, William Wood, etc. On p. 457, n. 120, the author analyzes the fictional case of Victor Duke, the failed practitioner in *New Grub Street*.

David Feldman and Gareth Steadman Jones, *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations since 1800*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. *Demos* is referred to on pp. 292-93, among other passages on Gissing.

Roberto Marchi, "Itinerari contributi ed interventi," *Il Ragguaglio librario*, Anno 58, no. 12, December 1991, p. 402. Review of *Da Venezia allo Stretto di Messina*.

D. L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to English Literature*, Second Edition, 3 vols., Chicago and London: St. James Press, 1991. Contains entries on *New Grub Street*, by David Grylls and on *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, by Jacob Korg in Vol. 3, pp. 1731 and 1790-91 respectively.

David Lodge, "The Art of Fiction: 43 The Title," *The Independent on Sunday*, 29 March 1992, p. 28. Mainly on *New Grub Street* and reprinted in Lodge's book on the art of the novel.

D. J. Taylor, "Reviewers and staff writers look back over the publications of the past year and pick their favourites," *The Independent*, 21 November 1992, p. 30 of "Weekend Books." Taylor selects Vol. 3 of the *Collected Letters*.

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Jeffrey Wainwright, "Running through the arguments: *The Odd Women/Manchester*," *The Independent*, 27 November 1992, p. 19. Review of Michael Meyer's play.

Peter Vansittart, *London: A Literary Companion*, London: John Murray, 1992. Gissing, *Thyrza* and "A Poor Gentleman" are discussed or quoted in several chapters.

D. J. Taylor, "Book Review: A First Class Grump about Going Second Class," *The Independent*, 26 July 1993, p. 17. Review of Vol. 4 of the *Collected Letters*.

"George Gissing: Magna Græcia," *Le Cheval de Troie*, no. 8, September 1993, pp. 51-56. French translation by Sylvère Monod of the passage on Alaric and his grave at Cosenza in *By the Ionian Sea*. This number of the Bordeaux-based journal is devoted to the English and their Mediterranean passion.

Peter Kemp, "Resurrection or Decadence? Guides to the post-war British novel," *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 November 1993, p. 24. Shows up errors about Gissing in Malcolm Bradbury's *The Modern British Novel* and in D. J. Taylor's *After the War: The Novel and English Society since 1945*.

Mark Samuels Lasner, *A Period Library: A Short-Title Catalogue of the Collection of Victorian Literature formed by Mark Samuels Lasner*, Washington. Privately printed, 1993. For the precious items of Gissing interest, see principally pp. 52-53, 94, 101, 125-26 and 130.

Francis O. Mattson, *Dandies and Doughties: Writers in Britain 1890-1900*. Checklist of an exhibition in the Berg Exhibition Room, April 2 to September 25, 1993, The New York Public Library, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, 1993. Among the treasures exhibited were the manuscript of *The Emancipated* and W. H. Hudson's copy of the three-decker with his autograph as well as John Davidson's *Fleet Street Eclogues* (Second Series), inscribed to Gissing on 25 September 1895.

Francesco Badolato, "Le short stories di George Gissing: Il giorno del silenzio," *Il Corriere di Roma*, 30 November 1993, p. 4. Review of *The Day of Silence and Other Stories*.