

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*.

Volume XXXI, Number 3

July, 1995

Contents

You Have Not Dunne 'Til You Have Done: The Story of Gissing and B. B. Dunne, <i>by Paul F. Mattheisen</i>	1
“The Salt of the Earth” and the Ethics of Self-Denial, <i>by Emanuela Ettorre</i>	19
A Hundred Years Ago: The Dinner at the Burford Bridge Hotel on 13 July 1895	31
Book Review, <i>by Pierre Coustillas</i>	36
Notes and News	40
Recent Publications	42

-- 1 --

You Have Not Dunne 'Til You have Done:
The Story of Gissing and B. B. Dunne

Paul F. Mattheisen
Emeritus, Binghamton University

In confronting an edition of collected letters, readers doubtless understand that the presentation of an accurate text is the primary editorial requirement. Sooner or later it also becomes clear that the nature and the extent of any documentation – scholarly accretion, as some might call it – depends entirely on the editorial philosophy employed, and that such philosophies differ very greatly among those who choose to become editors. On the minimalist side one may cite such scholars as the late A. J. Armstrong, founder of the Armstrong Browning Library at Baylor University, who held that the undocumented text alone is the business of the editor, and that anything else is the job of the intelligent reader. Such a view may acquire a certain attractiveness not only because it vastly decreases the editorial burden, but also because it neatly avoids the choices that must be confronted by any editor who wants to go beyond the unadorned text.

I do not mean to dwell on such matters here, but merely to note the difficulty encountered by editors in deciding what to do with the great number of names that pass before their eyes. Some kind of identification is clearly desirable, although there is some irony in the reflection

that the bigger names do not need it and the smallest ones require the greatest editorial labor to rescue them from the dust of history. But in the Gissing letters there is another range of names to contend with, those persons who may be lost to history, but who distinguished themselves in some way in their own time, or who acted out an existence of some importance to Gissing in his time. Some of these persons have been granted a rebirth in recent years through special studies presented in this journal – one thinks, for example, of Martha Vogeler’s excellent discussion of

-- 2 --

Dr. Jane Walker, and of R. D. Best’s interesting study of Alice Ward, a friend of Gabrielle’s and therefore within Gissing’s scope as well. Dr. Walker, though perhaps quite unknown now, was a woman of reputation in her own day, and is important to us because for a time she held Gissing’s life in her hands. Alice Ward was a known person in the journalistic world, and as Gabrielle’s friend she opens up a small window into the rather obscure personal life of Gissing during the late years in France. What inevitably remains quite unexplored, however, is names which emerge as giving us an unexpected surprise, whose apparent obscurity disguises lives which were not only of importance in our study of Gissing but were also of great interest in themselves. “The excellent O’Dunne” is named just twice in Gissing’s letters and only a few times in the diary, with hardly a clue that he deserved more identification than the mere life dates, if indeed those could be traced at all. But the curious quest to find him elicited the increasing interest and involvement of three editors, and resulted in one of their happiest discoveries.

When Gissing surprised himself in 1898 by successfully enticing the insular H. G. Wells to spend a month with him in Italy, a country renowned for the arts which Wells disdained, the two found themselves during the month of March at Rome in company with Arthur Conan Doyle and his brother-in-law, E. W. Hornung. Joining that little group was a younger person, an aspiring American writer with whom Gissing had boarded in Siena the preceding October, and who was happy to tag along as a charming neophyte learning the trade of journalism, although somewhat awed by the older writers who had already proved themselves. Brian Ború Dunne, named after an ancient Irish king, celebrated his twentieth birthday in Rome and was indeed destined to become a popular journalist in Santa Fe, New Mexico. At the time, he was on an extended educational and journalistic tour of Europe, and when Gissing left Rome on 12 April there was no reason to think that their paths would cross again or that their passing friendship, such as it was, would be memorialized in any way or even renewed in the future. The few diary entries tell us that they engaged in such activities as going to a museum, buying a bottle of wine together, and attending a Mass in honor of the Pope. When Gissing left Rome, Brian wrote to him “once or twice,” returned to America to join the staff of the Baltimore *Sun*, and later sent Gissing articles he had written. All of this seemed quite sufficient for an editorial identification, and although we did not have Dunne’s life dates, we knew also that Royal Gettmann had discovered him still alive and active in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in about 1959, and that he had

-- 3 --

shared some of his recollections of Gissing in a letter to Gettmann. It seemed unnecessary to go further.

But H. G. Wells was also among the little group in Rome, and Royal Gettmann, in his edition of the Wells/Gissing correspondence, quoted from a letter to Wells of 1933 in which Dunne described Gissing as “one of the most cheerful, luxury-loving, witty people I have ever met,” an assessment hardly consonant with the Gissing we see in the letters of 1898. This letter was not, of course, among the xerox copies which we had earlier obtained from the collection at the University of Illinois, but as we began to gather our efforts in the preparation of Volume 7, it

occurred to Pierre Coustillas that it might be interesting to look further into the source of such a rare estimation of Gissing, in a document which was pretty clearly to be found at Illinois. His enquiry brought him not only the letter from which Gettmann had quoted, but also a second letter, and two telegrams dealing with Dunne's proposal to write up his memories of Gissing in some form. He mentions such a project as a book in the same paragraph which contains the interesting description of Gissing:

At the suggestion of Orage, I am writing a book "Personal Recollections of George Gissing." I shall send you the MSS as I know you will be amused. I look upon Gissing as one of the most cheerful, luxury-loving, witty people I ever met. But he may have had a hell of a life. I read his *Letters*. Pretty dull stuff!

But no such book of recollections was ever published. In a telegram to Wells dated 8 April 1935, however, written when he had finished reading Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), Dunne seems to have recalled his earlier project, describing it now as a proposed article: "YOUR AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CHAPTER GEORGE GISSING SUPERB WISH TO DO SOME AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES OF MY OWN FOR LONDON TIMES KINDLY BOOST THIS IDEA CABLE REPLY BEST WISHES BRIAN BORU DUNNE+." Since A. R. Orage had then become the founding editor of the *New English Weekly*, it seems likely that this journal was now the intended destination, and indeed Dunne must have telegraphed Orage at about the same time, since later the same day he sent a follow-up telegram to Wells: "POSTSCRIPT ORAGE ASKED THAT THESE RECOLLECTIONS BE WRITTEN SHOWING GISSINGS REACTION BRITISH ROYALTY AND CAPITALISTIC SYSTEM REGARDS - BRIAN BORU DUNNE+." As suggested by the telegram, Orage was politically far to the left, and since the article was never published, we may suppose that Dunne could not tailor his recollections to Orage's editorial purpose. So the literary world never had the benefit of these recollections of Gissing, based on what Dunne claimed was "a year of conversation" with him.

-- 4 --

While all of this came to very little in itself, it did enhance our curiosity and encourage our view that Brian Ború Dunne was a subject to pursue. What were his antecedents, and what became of him? Gettmann had identified him as a journalist living in Santa Fe, and in the letter to Wells he said of himself that he was "still living in Santa Fe where I write for the *New Mexican*, the oldest paper in the Southwest. I am also secretary to U. S. Senator Cutting, of whom you no doubt have heard," and he gave his return address as "Care Senator Cutting, Santa Fe New Mexico, U.S.A." It seems likely that Wells had indeed heard about the great Senator Bronson Cutting, who, along with such influential friends as senators Robert La Follette and William Borah, was one of the most powerful political leaders of the time, helping to engineer the territory of New Mexico into statehood. In an earlier letter dated 15 June 1912, Dunne had asked Wells to help him find a publisher, in both England and America, for "my first book, 'Cures I Took in America,' which is my life's story from the year 1901 to 1911." The gist of it, he said, was this: "while working as a reporter on a metropolitan daily I became a nervous dyspeptic wreck; for eight years I travelled in the US & Canada in search of a cure; I took 69 'cures' which did not cure and finally I was cured by the 70th, a \$3 pair of spectacles adjusted by a scientific man!!!" It was indeed a very humorous book, published in 1914 as *Cured! the 70 Adventures of a Dyspeptic*, which reads like a comic record of all the medical frauds in America at the time, and certainly tells us how he came to Santa Fe, where, he told Wells, he had been for two years "enjoying good health & serving as City Editor of a daily paper here." And since he added "sometimes I write of you - I enclose a clipping from a paper I helped edit four years ago," was it not possible that he had also written of Gissing? Indeed, was it not even possible

that he had finished the memoir of his friend, and that the unpublished MS was still languishing somewhere among his papers – wherever they were?

That rather fragile expectation served to revive our interest in the only surviving letter we had from Dunne to Gissing, dated 23 January 1902 (to be published in Volume 8 of the *Collected Letters*). There he described the heat and the sweat of Baltimore and the conditions at the *Sun* which brought on his “general break down” and had led him to join his father in setting up in Alabama “a big German farmers colony I christened it, Hochheim.” The letter records his memories of the time in Rome with Gissing and Wells, but of greater importance to us was the passing remark that his father had “founded a colony in Florida in 1881,” and that “A French

-- 5 --

writer, Joanne or some such name, wrote a fine book on ‘La Floride’ & gave a chapter to describing my father & his work. I can’t find the name of the Parisian publisher, otherwise I would send you a copy. It is very amusing to us.”

It was this which especially piqued the curiosity of Pierre Coustillas, who then set about finding the identity of this vaguely named French writer, and indeed discovered that there was a French author by the name of Joanne who published many guide books, but alas none on Florida – surely an instance of Murphy’s Law applied to scholarly research. With the help of a former student, now a librarian, and a computerized catalogue, however, Pierre became convinced that the book we needed was one entitled *Un Français dans la Floride*, by Edmond Johanet (1843-1917), published not in Paris but at Tours (Alfred Mame et Fils, 1889), and a visit to the Bibliothèque Nationale confirmed the expectation that a chapter of it was devoted largely to an interview with Brian’s father, an ex-chief justice in Arizona, who had founded the Catholic Colony of San Antonio, Florida. Johanet, who belonged to a wealthy, cultured Roman Catholic family, had, by 1884, invested money in Florida land. He went there in November of that year, hoping to plant orange groves and to found a colony near Brooksville, but eventually lost most of his enterprise. He returned to France, yet in 1893 was back in Florida, as the head of a phosphate mining company, and settled with his family in Ocala.

Johanet’s chapter is an extraordinary account of the immense pain and hardship in setting up a colony in the wilderness of Florida, and of the equally great labor, endurance and ingenuity of the men and women who did it. The chapter is far too long even to summarize well here, but the opening description of Edmund Dunne is interesting:

With the simplicity of apostolic times, we were asked if we wished to see the priest. Then it was proposed that we visit Mr. Edmund F. Dunne, ex-chief justice of Arizona. He lives a good 15 minutes from the center of the city.

The “Judge” received us very graciously. He is a tall man, around 45 years old, blond, of Irish descent, and very possibly born in Ireland as well. He has lived in Rome and Paris and speaks impeccable Italian and French.

Another reason for our taking to each other was his library. There was a man who, in the back country of Florida, owned a study with shelves packed with books from floor to ceiling! Our great French writers: Bossuet, Pascal, Fénelon, Montesquieu, Montaigne, Littré’s dictionary. He is like no other, this man. Furthermore, he has an enquiring mind, is keen on hunting for manuscripts and documents. Judge from what follows here of our conversation:

-- 6 --

(Visitor) “Who guided you in the choice of the names which designate

your colony, your lakes? For instance, what is this name, 'Jovita,' which you gave to the lake I see here?"

(Dunne) "You would be a hagiographer par excellence if you knew that Saint Jovita's Day is the 15th of February, the day on which I discovered the lake in question here."

Dunne said that he often named various places according to whatever saint's day was celebrated on the date he discovered them. One day in New York he had been delighted to come across an out-of-print copy of *La Vie des Saints* [The Lives of the Saints] in which he found St. Jovita, and Johanet marvelled at the thought of purchasing in New York City a French book that was unobtainable in Paris. Dunne had thus been able to help Msgr. Moore, the Bishop of Florida, trace the life of an obscure saint on whom he could find no information in Europe, and chuckled over the fact that the information could be found deep in the Florida woods, in the library of a solitary person like himself. When asked why he seemed to prefer Italian place names to English ones, he replied that he had lived in Italy, and it was in memory of that beautiful country that he surrounded himself with Italian names.

When the visitor asked whether any Catholics were among the first colonists, Dunne replied that there were only a few, "but Catholics and Protestants have a very deep religious feeling, show an excellent spirit of tolerance, say grace before meals, are scrupulous about keeping the sabbath, – no working, fishing, hunting or shooting. The average Floridian is true to the motto inscribed on the papers of the state, 'In God we Trust.'" By this time the Catholic population had greatly increased, and when it came time to attend the Easter Mass, the visitor noticed that the whole colony, Protestant as well as Catholic, squeezed itself into the little church. The Protestants having no church of their own preferred to come to a Catholic Mass rather than attend no Easter service at all. In the eyes of a Protestant, "Catholicism isn't any more different for them than another Protestant sect, such as Methodist, Baptist or Puritan – all part of the great Christian family."

Dunne then described his founding the colony in 1881, getting in touch with Mr. Hamilton Disston from Philadelphia, to whom the State of Florida had just sold 4,000,000 acres; he was hired to represent Disston in dealing with the state authorities in the choice of properties. Dunne took the job on the condition that 50,000 acres would be ceded to him for the establishment of a

-- 7 --

Catholic colony, and he placed San Antonio on a raised plateau whose view looks out on some beautiful lakes. He talked about the Bishop celebrating the first Mass on Saint Antonio of Padua's Day, and showed the site on which was to be built a school to be run by nuns. Finally Dunne showed the visitor his beautiful orange and lemon orchards, praising the healthy climate, whereupon Johanet remarked that "Florida is decidedly an Eden." Since his lemon seeds had come from Sicily, Dunne said "I have been tempted to call our colony, from an agricultural point of view, 'Our American Sicily.'" The seeds of his beautiful Palma Christi were sent to him from Egypt, and he had planted them so that they would form magnificent avenues. Dunne then explained the composition and organization of the colony, and when they had all said a final prayer, the visitor "embarked again on a life in the wilds." "We all," he said, "had tears in our eyes."

It was time to get in touch with someone in the town of San Antonio, where there would surely be some records of the ex-chief justice from Arizona, and perhaps even of his son Brian. To that end Pierre wrote to the Public Library there. The letter was returned. He then wrote to the Public Library in Montgomery, Alabama, and was advised by the Archivist of the State of Alabama to try the State Archive of Florida. But the city of Tampa was a town of considerable size very near to San Antonio, and a letter to the Public Library there elicited an unsigned reply

advising him to “Try contacting St. Leo College, Cannon Memorial Library. This library should have historical material relating to the Dunne family.” But it happened that Arthur Young was just then planning to visit his sister, Dr. Anne Zimmer, who was spending the winter months near Tampa, and so the ball was passed to him, and he carried it to Tampa and thence to San Antonio and to the nearby College of St. Leo, founded to serve the needs of Edmund Dunne’s Catholic colony on land donated by him, and which had recently celebrated its hundredth anniversary. Dr. Zimmer, being a professor of American history, was of course delighted to prepare the way, and by telephone located a knowledgeable clerk in the town of San Antonio, who provided her with the names of Professor James J. Horgan, of St. Leo’s College, and of Mr. Fred Dunne, a descendant of Captain Hugh Dunne, who was an uncle of Brian Ború, so that when Arthur Young arrived at San Antonio he wasted no time. Fred Dunne, a man in his eighties, has led an adventurous life as a sailor, a carpenter, a world traveller and a jack-of-all-trades, lives now in a modest house in the country, and is at this time mayor of St. Leo, a small town adjacent to San Antonio. Professor Horgan was extraordinarily helpful, having just recently

-- 8 --

written *Pioneer College* (1990), a centennial history of St. Leo’s containing a detailed account of the founding of San Antonio, and consequently dealing at some length with the history of Edmund Dunne. He was also able to show Arthur Young an impressive genealogy of the Dunne family, purporting to trace its origin back to St. Patrick, compiled by Father Patrick Francis Quigley, St. Francis de Sales Church, Toledo, Ohio, in 1893, a document which Father Quigley hoped would add “new lustre and glory to the ancient Royal and Princely House of the O’Dunnes of Cualan, Desie-Tara and Iregan.”

According to Horgan, Edmund Francis Dunne (1835-1904) was a distinctive and complex man, a “visionary, exceptionally learned, principled in religious matters to the point of fanaticism,” “at once responsive and insensitive, but impossibly pompous and imperious, thin-skinned and sometimes vengeful, and ultimately both revered and vilified.” He was born in Little Falls, New York, moved with his father to California, studied law in San Francisco, became first a Douglas democrat and then a Republican, served in the California legislature and in the constitutional convention for the new state of Nevada, where he was an eight-term member of its judiciary, and gained a reputation for balanced fairness; he was praised in the Nevada *Winnemucca Argent* as follows: “The whole title to the Montezuma mine was given to his lone decision in preference to a jury ... Such confidence in the wisdom and integrity of a judge has never been paralleled on this coast – if anywhere. There is no man who can present a brighter record than Judge Dunne.” Again, according to Horgan, “His family history traces his lineage to the chief of the Clan Duin Desuig of pre-Christian times, and documents his claim to the hereditary Irish title of ‘Prince of Iregan.’ He was married in Paris in 1872 ... with two French counts and a marquis as witnesses. Two years later, he was appointed Chief Justice of the Arizona Territory by President Ulysses Grant.” His Catholic fanaticism, however, was at once his making and his undoing. A flamboyant address that he gave in 1875 in the Hall of the House of Representatives at Tucson, in which he championed the cause of Catholic schools and the use of public money to support them, caused him to lose his judgeship, and from then on to become a highly visible figure in the Church for three decades. Pope Pius IX made him a knight of the Order of St. Gregory in 1876, and Pope Leo XIII raised him to a Commander in the Order in 1879. Notre Dame University gave him an honorary Doctor of laws degree in 1880, and Pope Leo in 1884 created him a hereditary Papal Count. After losing his Arizona judgeship, Dunne

-- 9 --

practiced law in New Mexico and Utah, and when the state of Florida in 1881 avoided

bankruptcy by making huge tracts of land available at 25 to 40 cents an acre, he was chosen by Hamilton Disston, the largest land purchaser, to “assist in the selection and to supervise the taking out of the title deeds,” for which he was given the right of first selection of 50,000 acres, and the privilege of taking another 50,000 later, which enabled him to realize his lifelong ambition to establish a Catholic Colony. The work was accomplished, with incredible dedication and hardship, along with his cousin, Captain Hugh Dunne, as outlined by James Horgan. It was a rigorous enterprise, and in the early years he was criticized for being too exclusively Catholic in admitting new colonists. A visiting Pittsburgh dry goods merchant visited the colony in 1884, and while he thought the Judge “is too hard on the sinners,” and would sell land only to Catholics “who show a certificate from a priest that they are practical Catholics,” yet he spoke of the Judge as “a most noble gentleman,” and added “to know him is to like him.” The visitor was himself a Catholic, but would not live in the colony for several reasons, one being that “I would not purchase a home where a Protestant friend could not purchase beside me.” “I do not,” he wrote, “wish to convey the impression that the judge is a narrow bigot or hates Protestants, but he has an idea and is determined to carry it out. He is the only man in Florida who sells good lands at low prices.”

Edmund’s wife, Josephine, died in Florida in 1883. Of their five children, one of the girls died at the age of five in Ottawa, Canada, and the other two, Maria del Carmen and Hilda, became Ursuline nuns, doing their work chiefly in Montana and Alaska. By a special arrangement with Edmund, the two boys were granted a six years’ education at St. Mary’s College in Belmont, North Carolina, and the elder, Eugene Antonio, went on to Baltimore to become a lawyer and a judge on Baltimore’s Supreme Court. He adopted the old family name of O’Dunne and called himself count, not always to everyone’s approval. As to the younger brother, Marie Anacleto Brian (he added Ború, and for a time called himself O’Dunne), the family chronicle breaks off with his college education, and while the editors now possessed a good deal of information about his family, they still knew very little of the man himself. It was clear, however, that he must be tracked down, not only to complete the story of a remarkable family deeply involved with the early formation of Florida and the West, which had now become of great interest in itself, but also to discover more about his friendship with Gissing, perhaps

-- 10 --

through documents which might still be among his surviving papers – particularly the remnants of any notes he had drawn up for the memoirs he wanted to write for Orage – although, of course, editors often learn the deepest frustration by even hoping for such an outcome. It was my turn to take up the pursuit, however, and it began with a telephone call to Santa Fe.

Orlando Romero, the excellent and helpful Librarian at the Museum of New Mexico, was able to confirm that “B. B. Dunne,” as he was called there, did indeed establish himself as one of the most prominent citizens of Santa Fe, that he had been editor and columnist at the Santa Fe *New Mexican* for many years, that he had been secretary and land agent for the distinguished Senator Bronson Cutting, and that in the new Museum building there was a “B. B. Dunne” room named in honor of one of their most celebrated citizens. But apart from a few brief magazine stories and some obituaries, there was surprisingly little in the museum which could be of help. And the obituaries were of uncertain accuracy – a brief paragraph in the *Sun* claimed that Dunne “left Baltimore in the 1920’s when his health failed and traveled extensively in Europe and the South Sea Islands before returning to the United States and joining the Santa Fe *New Mexican*,” clear evidence that the Baltimore *Sun* had set. The piece in the Santa Fe *New Mexican* claimed that he took his A.B. degree from St. Mary’s in 1906 – which seemed unlikely, although we had no way of disproving it – but nonetheless it conveyed the authority of personal observation, and provided some details of his earlier life before Santa Fe:

The familiar misshapen hat and gold rimmed glasses worn by Dunne immediately identified him to any who saw him more than once. Dunne was a special secretary to Archbishop J. B. Pitaval from 1909-12 and secretary to Cardinal Gibbons; personal secretary and real estate manager for the late Sen. Bronson Cutting from 1909-35; contributed to a daily column from 1940 and a weekly column for about 10 years.

He taught five modern languages by phonograph systems in various parts of the United States and lectured throughout the country on the importance of the Spanish language. Before becoming city editor of *The New Mexican* for a few years, Dunne had worked with a Washington, D. C. newspaper, and with the *Baltimore Sun*.... Dunne was also a good friend of H. L. Mencken and had articles published in Mencken's "The American Language."

Besides these obituaries, a brief story in the *New Mexico Sentinel* in 1938 announced that Dunne would be leaving for Hollywood to meet a moving picture producer and then would write a book on New Mexico's "Old Timers." "Dunne knew personally scores of famous

-- 11 --

Southwestern characters including Charley Siringo, Captain Fred Fornoof, F. Coomer, John Willis (famous hunter and friend of Theodore Roosevelt), a half dozen territorial and state governors, dozens of Roosevelt Rough Riders, mining magnates, and many writers including the late Eugene Manlove Rhodes." And finally a feature story in the *New Mexican* of 10 December 1964, was given to the unveiling of a portrait of Dunne painted by his old friend, the New Mexican artist E. Horace Akin. Dunne "had come to work for statehood, he said, as his colorful father had done in Nevada. When B. B. Dunne died in 1962, it was on the last day of the golden anniversary year of New Mexico statehood." And then it added an interesting observation: "He had filled 72 notebooks with observations of the people he had interviewed in Santa Fe, and before his arrival, as a New Mexican staff member and correspondent for various other publications: William Jennings Bryan, the Wright Brothers, Marconi, inventor of the wireless, Mark Twain, John D. Rockefeller, Paderewski, the grandson of the Kaiser, Teddy Roosevelt, and many others."

All this of course presented us with a B. B. Dunne who was a good deal more interesting than we had imagined, and it was imperative now to search out any of his surviving children, perhaps especially his son, who in a 1962 obituary was identified only as living in San Diego, but was not to be found in a directory. At my request, Orlando Romero gave me the names of two older residents of Santa Fe who might have known Brian Dunne. Mr. Lumpkin, an architect, did not know Dunne personally, but had heard a good deal about him. He thought that one of Dunne's daughters still held property in town, probably the lot occupied by a bank, but she rarely came to town, and he thought she lived somewhere in California – she used to visit someone in La Jolla. Sam Balen owns the La Fonda Hotel, where Dunne used to hold forth in his celebrated afternoon "conversations," open to anyone who cared to drop in for a talk, and where Horace Akin's portrait still hangs above his favorite chair. He thought a daughter still lived in town, and quoted from the telephone directory which listed two C. Dunes. But one of the two phones had been disconnected, and the other might as well have been, for it was never answered. Sam thought that Dunne's son, however, became an engineer of some kind, and worked for an airline manufacturer, probably, he thought, Corvair. He did not know his name.

The rest of the story is brief. Corvair was not listed in the telephone directory, but I soon found it probable that it merged with, or was absorbed by, the larger company, General

-- 12 --

Dynamics. However, a call to General Dynamics brought me up against the California Law of Privacy: by that law, no one was allowed to say what position Dunne had held, or whether he was still living, or whether he was retired, or where he lived – in fact, no one would even confirm the information that he ever worked there at all. As I was confronting a law which evidently intended to halt biographical research, I remembered that one of the son's sisters either visited or lived in La Jolla, and on the slim chance of finding a clue, I called the telephone information operator to look for the name of C. Dunne or (as I had been told) a C. C. Dunne. "No," was the answer, "the only Dunne we have listed is a B. B. Dunne." The search had ended. Mrs. Dunne answered the phone, and when I asked to talk to Brian Ború, and she asked "which one?" I knew that the distinguished name, borrowed from an ancient Irish king, had been perpetuated unto a third generation.

I talked with B. B. II (to distinguish him from his father and his son) for nearly an hour, and I was relieved to find him friendly, even cordial, knowledgeable about the literary milieu of his father, quite aware of his father's relationship with Gissing; he knew about the family ancestors, and was willing to talk about all such matters, and even interested (*mirabile dictu!*) in what I had to say. He is in fact a distinguished atomic scientist, who worked with many famous scientists on the Orion project during the development of the atomic bomb, and in his retirement is taking up a new "career" in anthropology. He said he had a "large footlocker" full of his father's papers, which he had never found time to go through, but saved them in case some historian in the future might want to track them down. When I suggested that I had just fulfilled his prophecy, his offer to search through his father's papers for any materials about Gissing turned out to be even more generous than it first appeared: there were in fact three large cases of papers, and B. B. II spent seven months searching through them (uncovering them, as he said, from the sands of Santa Fe), with results that were significant on several levels. We have seen that his father had known a considerable number of famous people, from his days in Rome and his early years as a journalist in Baltimore and Washington, D. C. (where he interviewed Mark Twain, who promptly took over the interview, wrote it himself, and insisted that Dunne sign it as his own), but especially during his long life in Santa Fe, which as a center renowned for its climate attracted famous men around the world in search of health. According to B. B. II, he spent his later years writing up memoirs of these famous men, doubtless the 72 notebooks mentioned above, all of them still remaining unpublished at his death. And among these was

-- 13 --

indeed his memoir of George Gissing.

This memoir exists in several versions, but unfortunately on paper crumbling with age and quite difficult to piece together. At the present writing, the work of preservation is being carefully undertaken, and in due time it will be published, one of the rare intimate records of Gissing's personality to be preserved.

Much more could be said about the Dunne family, but my aim here has been to show how the chance pursuit of a minor and unlikely name in Gissing's letters led the editors to uncover the saga of a remarkable family in the late development of the nation, and a story of unusual importance to the study of Gissing. There is one further point to make, for among the papers of B. B. Dunne is another memoir of interest here. Senator Bronson Cutting, one of Dunne's closest friends, was an avid Gissing fan, who had read nearly all of Gissing's novels, and was extremely interested in knowing everything about the novelist. On many an evening Dunne used to regale his friend with stories from his "year's conversation with Gissing," and these stories form a portion of the memoir of Senator Cutting. At the time I spoke with B. B. II, we were preparing Volume 7 of the *Collected Letters*, which covers the time in Rome with Wells, Hornung, Conan Doyle, and Gissing, and he was most generous in supplying us with all the

materials we could use for that volume. It will not be available until the fall of 1995, however, and since there are portions we could not use, I take pleasure in producing them all here, with B. B. II's permission. They are merely extracts from the larger memoir of Senator Cutting, but they are a suggestion, at least, of what will be a more continuous narrative in the memoir of Gissing, from which I have added just a few passages at the end of these selections.

Extracts from the memoir entitled
"My Friend Bronson Cutting"

Bronson Cutting rarely read Dickens but on two occasions borrowed from my tiny library a velum bound copy of "David Copperfield." His friend Dr. Bishop once remarked: "I cannot read Dickens – too many details." My friend agreed with Morley Roberts in "The Private Life of Henry Maitland" that the charm of Dickens is a literary gem on every page.

As for Gissing, Cutting apparently had read all of his novels and approved of them as literary works of art. He learned much of Gissing from me and listened attentively night after

-- 14 --

night for weeks to stories on Gissing, his method of work, his poor pay, his struggle with poverty and with marital unhappiness. He was tremendously surprised by Morley Roberts' book which William Dean Howells denounced as an outrageous breach of confidence – but which was written to warn other writers – no doubt. My friend was particularly amused at Gissing using ME to get him information on the divorce laws of the U.S.A. with the camouflage that he, Gissing, wished to use the material for a novel! Judge O'Dunne of Baltimore looked up some of the laws for me, to give to Gissing. It seems Gissing intended to get a divorce in the U.S.A. and then abandoned the idea. Gissing was a superlatively unhappy man.

Cutting studied Gissing's career carefully and found that the popular and polished classicist was pretty sad throughout his life save for the period of one year when I was with him in Siena and Rome. I was only 19 years of age and some people said I pepped up Gissing by my innocent and absurd questions and boyish enthusiasm. Gissing had smiled for two days at this dumb question I propounded to him: 'Have you read Vanity Fair – a lot of it?'

My friend [Cutting] was amused at Gissing's sarcastic remarks [when I told him and Wells] about a sermon delivered by the late Cardinal PAROCCHI in Rome one night in the winter of 1897, concerning England and the history of a great island that once had been under the wing of the Catholic church – an island that should return to Mother church. Gissing asked in the presence of H. G. Wells, with deep sarcasm which made Wells chuckle:

'DID HIS EMINENCE OFFER ANY HOPE OF AN EARLY RETURN?

.....

Cutting liked Conrad and read all of his works. He described Conrad as the writer "of the most marvelous English seen in modern times." Later my friend said there was talk that D. H. Lawrence wrote even better English.

Gissing had invited H. G. Wells to visit Rome when Gissing and I lived in Rome, the winter of 1897 [March, 1898]. Wells and Mrs. Wells came for a fortnight [a month], stopping at a Piazza di Spagna hotel. I was Wells' guide around Rome – when Gissing was too busy to roam the streets. My friend [Cutting] asked me about every word Wells spoke. He would ask: 'And what did Wells say?'... My friend was not well impressed with the writing of Wells, until Wells grew older. Later in life my friend said Wells's short stories were excellent. He was much

-- 15 --

disgusted with an article Wells wrote on The Balkans for that Harper's magazine with flamboyant covers then edited by Norman Hopgood. He considered it silly.

A short time before he died Cutting finally met Wells in Washington and took him to luncheon in the senate luncheon room. Wells talked freely of the importance of Huey Long. Wells looked upon Long as the coming man in America.

My friend said: "Wells asked me: How is Mr. Dunne? Is he a man of parts. I told Wells: 'He is.' Wells added: 'Gissing knew Dunne much better than I. But we were all together in Rome.'"

Cutting said that he seldom enjoyed a description of three men roaming around a city as the stories of Gissing (aged 40) English classicist; H. G. Wells London journalist (at that time) aged 30 years and one B. B. Dunne, American student (aged 20), walking around the Eternal City, especially prowling around the Roman Forum with George Gissing lecturing on the subject. My friend shouted in glee: "A great trio. It would be hard to beat that—Gissing, Wells & Dunne!"

Cutting was amused to violent laughter at the terrific dislike Gissing took to Luigi Ferrer, European typewriter representative for the Underwood Typewriter Company, but in 1897 in Rome representative for the Elliott & Hatch Booktypewriter Co – a machine invented to write into books to save sewing the sheets. Gissing, it was said, was NO SNOB, but he denounced Ferrer as a mere typewriter salesman and thought I would get no mental uplift from running around with such people. I told my friend: 'After all, Gissing was earning seven cents a day writing for Chicago newspapers some time in the nineties [the seventies], and Ferrer was drawing down ten dollars a day in gold – and I thought Ferrer a man of parts.'

John Galsworthy was in Santa Fe about 1923 and heard the story at a tea party and commented: 'I might understand WELLS being annoyed at your going around with a typewriter salesman but not GISSING.'

Gissing was particularly annoyed at Ferrer for two reasons: Ferrer told risqué stories, with Latin temperament, in cafes. Ferrer had written me a letter: "I have just arrived in Venice Italy and the strangest sight meets my eyes – there are no taxicabs drawn by horses."

Gissing said: 'Ferrer is an incredible ass.' At a luncheon given for Wells, I mentioned Ferrer being bitten by a dog – on his fingers – and Ferrer asking me to learn to typewrite on the Elliott and Hatch machine to write his company in New York. 'And who is FERRER,' Wells asked, with his big blue eyes widening. 'Ferrer is an ass,' replied Gissing, as he carved a slice of an omelet to replenish the plate of Mr. H. G. Wells who sat at his left. Mrs. Wells was there and

-- 16 --

and she snickered.

Ferrer was probably or possibly an ass – he arrived in Baltimore in 1897 or 1898, looked me up, but I was out of town, called on my brother Judge O'Dunne and said to O'Dunne on short acquaintance (according to the judge): "I did well in France; I married a rich girl in Paris." Judge O'Dunne was furious. "How many typewriters have you sold in France since you took over the Underwood agency?" he asked Ferrer. "Forty," replied Ferrer. "That man is a fool," commented Judge O'Dunne to me afterwards.

Ferrer said that he had had three uncles presidents of the Republic of Columbia. A learned lawyer hearing this commented: "I do not doubt it at all. Don Pedro at the Phila Exposition saw a wheel that made so many hundreds or thousands of revolutions to the minute (as advertised on a card in front of the machine) and tartly commented 'That beats a South American Republic.'"

Cutting was intrigued with the way Gissing visited The Forum daily and brooded over Julius Caesar and Cicero. "He is just like Gordon Gardiner [a dilettante friend of Cutting's brother]," he said, "sticking around the Acropolis all day." My friend asked me to tell him every

word that a German shopkeeper had said to me in German, while I was in Rome, when I met this shopkeeper in a park and invited him to walk through the Forum and hear from my lips the wisdom that had flowed from the lips of Gissing concerning the Forum, Caesar and Cicero. The German, a rather small man with an uninteresting face, the mouth of which held a cheap German cigar, replied in German of a rather 'peasant' accent:

“ach was! das ist nichts.” [Bah! That's nothing.]

Gissing's comment was bitter, spirited and a gem of satire – the bitterest outbreak perhaps I heard Gissing make in a year of conversation: “Why did you not tell that ignorant ass that a visit to the Forum would have been lost on his dull and stupid mind?”

Extracts from the memoir entitled “Personal Recollections
of George Gissing”

(Foreword. – I am writing these reminiscences of George Gissing, perhaps a great literary man, principally for the amusement and instruction of young writers, and for the diversion of Gissing fans the world over – and people in all the English speaking countries and also in France have read Gissing. Many of them have written to Gissing..., and found a certain comfort

-- 17 --

in his struggle up the literary ladder, his sufferings, his remarkable courage. – The Author)

I first met Gissing in a boarding house in Siena, Italy. He was then at his prime, as some would call it – forty years of age, full of “pep” as Americans say, and loaded with ambition. He was a tall Englishman, with long brown-reddish hair combed back, clear blue eyes and rather pale complexion.

The King (Umberto) like everyone else in Rome amused Gissing. Poor Umberto, gray-haired, with enormous black eyes blazing like coals of fire, and the fierce mustachos, often drove through the streets. This brave monarch, as history tells, was mowed down by an assassin's bullet. The king felt it was his duty to show himself to his people and apparently never wore a bullet-proof vest. Maybe like Napoleon after Moscow he courted a cannon ball. I liked to look into Umberto's eyes and found that the way to get Umberto to look intently at you was to stand on the street corner as he drove by in his gorgeous carriage drawn by two fiery black steeds, and to fail to salute him. This may have seemed rude but after all an American tourist might not have recognized him as His Majesty. On one occasion I did this of a late afternoon and Umberto peered into my eyes — in wonder perhaps. It was rumored in ecclesiastical circles none too friendly to Umberto that the King “scraped for recognition.” Perhaps he felt he was unpopular.

Umberto's eyes were bloodshot. I told Gissing and he chuckled: “The old boy was out late last night ... grand drinking party, eh?” [1898 was a time of great turmoil in Italy, and in some places the riots caused by the rising cost of bread took on a revolutionary character. The immensely popular Umberto had been nevertheless the subject of attempted assassination in April of 1897, and was killed by an anarchist in 1900.]

Gissing could not understand how the Italian restaurant owners would tolerate the custom he witnessed of guests – Italians – ordering a glass of wine and then having it filled up at least 3/4 and calling it a half glass.

Gissing would sneak into a tiny restaurant off the Corso and take me with him just for one purpose – to see the 60-year-old Italian gentleman “pull” that trick, remarking: “That man is the perfect image of my publisher,” Boller [Bullen]. Every time the Italian called to the waiter to fill his glass not quite drained, Gissing would chuckle “Old Boller is pulling down another drink.”

-- 18 --

Gissing's sojourn in Rome was enlivened by a letter from a London friend asking him to call on Mr. and Mrs. Lamplugh (of course I do not use their real names [Lambart]) who were wintering in Rome. Gissing's research work was seriously interrupted by these visits – to a swank apartment on Piazza Venezia where the English tourist's mecca was located – PIALE'S. Gissing complained to me that Mr. Lamplugh was a fine London gentleman "with lords as common as blackbirds among his acquaintances" but that he had the astounding habit of showing up very late of the afternoon. Gissing was left for an hour or two – he had been asked to call at 4 p.m. – alone with Mrs. Lamplugh "who shocked me by discussing birth control." And also reading a poem from an English paper written "by a man in prison" and adding: "I know who wrote that poem." Gissing said that Mrs. Lamplugh had the audacity to mention the name of the poet [Oscar Wilde] "a name never mentioned in London polite society" – he explained.

Gissing said that Mrs. Lamplugh "gushed like an open faucet" even after her husband arrived in the library of the apartment, and that Mr. Lamplugh simply "punctuated with frequent coughs the amazing conversation of his wife."

As for Mr. Lamplugh, Gissing said that he confined his discussion to a recital of his difficulties in learning the Italian language which he was studying with a talented Italian teacher—a young woman. Gissing explained that "people that matter" in London cannot afford to study Italian as we had been doing, in and out of restaurants and shops, on street corners and at boot black stands. "An English gentleman cannot afford to make an ass of himself through publicly expressed grammatical errors," he added.

Gissing dreaded the visits to Mrs. Lamplugh's salon, as he said the London lady's conversation had grown so racy that he, Gissing, also had developed Mr. Lamplugh's coughing fits. But Gissing was cheered up by a letter from an English lord arriving in Rome – a friend of Mr. Lamplugh – inviting Gissing to an evening dinner.

Gissing was as joyous as a child receiving a new toy when he showed me the letter written in the English King's English, but sprinkled with expressions in French and Italian.

This dinner was a greater success than the Lamplugh's teas, for Gissing rolled out his London dress suit, and wore his boiled shirt and stiff collar, and white tie (he wore even a watch chain on his white vest) and felt "au courant." He seemed to find this garb an atonement for being seen in the Piazza Venezia wearing a gray soft flannel shirt and his unpressed clothes.

-- 19 --

"The Salt of the Earth" and the Ethics of Self-Denial

Emanuela Ettore
University of Pescara

J'ai passé à côté du monde, et j'ai pris l'histoire pour la vie. Michelet¹

I

George Gissing's main collection of short stories, *The House of Cobwebs*,² was published in May 1906, three years after his death, and, in spite of the general disinterest of critics in his short fiction,³ a serious consideration of his work can by no means afford to neglect their literary value. What in effect emerges is a strong semiotic and structural continuity between the novels and the stories which sees the latter coinciding neither with the first phase of narrative

production nor with the final phase of his literary career, but with the evolutionary process of his “profession” as a writer. Gissing’s short stories must not be regarded as an isolated narrative *corpus*, distinct from his novels, but as a continuation of his fictional world. The stories are undoubtedly linked to the particular circumstances of his life, representing as they did an easy means – in comparison with the difficulties involved in the publication of a novel – of complying with the demands of magazine editors, and consequently, of assuring him a source of income. Gissing’s letters clearly show how often it was precisely the need for money that drove him to write stories:

In about a week’s time, I shall be sending you certain short stories. As a matter of course, I send you everything of mine that appears, but pray do not take much trouble in criticizing these short productions. You know they really are potboilers.⁴

Will you believe that, in these days, I have finished my short story? How many men could do this? – But I must have money: that gives me the strength. I work with clenched teeth! [...] At present I am doing no work at all. But I am going to try to think out two or three other stories, which I might write as soon as I come to Autun. These would pay all the expenses of the removal and the winter rent of No. 13.⁵

It is on the basis of such statements that many critics have considered his short stories to be the inferior product of an otherwise talented author. But if on the one hand the stories were

-- 20 --

written as a result of an urgent economic need, on the other, almost paradoxically, they became a means of liberation from such an urgency. Although Gissing wrote his short stories under the impulse of strong economic pressure, at the same time he was aware of the fact that the form of the short story freed him from conventional narrative schemes. Even though still tied to the traditional three-volume novel, Gissing adopts a new technique that is characterized by a shorter narrative and a richly suggestive and allusive style⁶:

It is fine to see how the old three volume tradition is being broken through. One volume is becoming commonest of all. It is the new school, due to continental influence. Thackeray and Dickens wrote at enormous length, and with profusion of detail; their plan is to tell everything, and leave nothing to be divined. Far more artistic, I think, is the later method, of merely *suggesting*; of dealing with episodes, instead of writing biographies. [...] I think it is better to tell a story precisely as one does in real life, *hinting*, *surmising*, telling in detail what CAN so be told and no more.⁷

And if, as Sean O’Faolain affirms, “Telling by means of suggestion or implication is one of the most important of all the modern short story’s shorthand conventions”,⁸ it is also true that in his short stories Gissing adopts a more indirect style, one that necessarily requires that “tacit agreement” with the reader in the search for the systems and conventions of the text.

There is always, at the centre of Gissing’s stories, an incident of modest proportions; they never become dramatic and they never produce moments of suspense or pathos.⁹ The action frequently revolves round a “man of fine character and intelligence who is absolutely penniless and is therefore the sport of all that is most sordid and brutal in modern life.”¹⁰ The characters are never heroic figures, but people who live dull lives in which there is no possibility of

improvement or of hope for the future.¹¹ Many of the stories are nothing more than an account of passivity and resignation,¹² underlined by poverty, hypocrisy and ruthless social divisions from which the main characters are forced to escape or seek isolation. Poverty, money and loneliness are the recurrent paradigms of Gissing's works, of which his stories are a condensation since because of their economic form they are not affected by the extremity of details typical of the novels of late Victorian writers. Without doubt, the fact that many of these themes faithfully reflect the life of the writer is one of the reasons that has encouraged most of Gissing's critics to pursue the lines of biographical criticism as a means of interpretation.¹³ Virginia Woolf herself writes:

-- 21 --

Gissing is one of those imperfect novelists through whose books one sees the life of the author faintly covered by the lives of fictitious people. With such authors we establish a personal rather than an artistic relationship.¹⁴

But autobiography must not be considered as the only means of interpreting Gissing's works; if in one sense he makes art the reflection of his own life, it is also true that, as he himself declared to Gabrielle Fleury in 1898: "You will not find my true self in these books," or again some months later: "If I could some day tell you the story of my life, you would see in it a dreary sort of tragedy, but it would equally explain me."¹⁵ Thus it appears that Gissing had not yet narrated himself. His texts cannot be reduced to a mere transposition of the events of his own life, and although his narratives move between autobiography and fiction, Gissing was looking in his art for "a world within a world,"¹⁶ and this inevitably entailed a search for a space uncontaminated by the ugliness of the real world.

II

Before analysing the text of "The Salt of the Earth"¹⁷ (from now on SE) it may be useful to outline the diegetic structure of the story. Since Gissing is concerned with a minimum of plot element and a maximum of representation, its structural organisation will be seen to be a very simple one. To satisfy the demands of a naturalistic technique¹⁸ and to give the text a sense of realism the writer devotes his attention to the banal everyday life because, for him, it is here that realism resides. And if the plot itself may seem artificial, the structure of the story corresponds to the "forms" of an *ordo naturalis* so as to give more probability to the sequence of events. Thus, the plot of SE develops in terms of a series of microsequences that have as their common denominator the figure of Thomas Bird, a humble London office clerk, and, as is typical of Gissing's characters, a victim of society and of his sense of inadequacy to his times. From the very beginning of the story Thomas Bird is depicted as one of a crowd, almost as if immediately to confirm the loneliness and anonymity of a character of whom we are not even told the exact age:

"No eye surveying this procession would have paused for a moment on Thomas Bird [...] there was nothing to distinguish him from hundreds of rather shabby clerks who passed along [...] He might be thirty, he might be forty – impossible to decide." (p. 226)

-- 22 --

The narration revolves around Thomas Bird who, while wandering along the crowded streets of suburban London, and calling on some acquaintances, meets up with people who, out

of pure habit, ask him for money and favours. Incapable of refusing, Bird passively complies with every request, even the most humiliating, and returns home every evening full of bitterness, thus completing a circular pattern that is typical of Gissing's characters and shows him to be an individual without a temperament.¹⁹

The plot is articulated round four nuclei that set up its actantial structuring. To each nucleus corresponds an agent functioning antagonistically with regard to the protagonist. Among the antagonists we find:

- (i) Mr. Warbeck, who asks Thomas for money twice;
- (ii) Mrs. Pritchard, a "gadabout" affected with a hypothetical form of philanthropism who asks Thomas for money in order to help a sick girl;
- (iii) Mrs. Warbeck, who forbids Thomas to call any more since her daughter Alma—who has always been near to Thomas's heart—has apparently become engaged to a well-off young man;
- (iv) A desperate wife, who asks Thomas to finish off a job that her drunken husband has been unable to complete.

If we look closely, we may see that there are two perspectives which in turn determine the twofold narrative sequence; one which directly involves Thomas Bird, the other which concerns the world around him, his antagonists:

Thomas Bird	Antagonists
donor	beneficiaries
service to be given	help to be received
performance of service	help received
service accomplished	reception of help

All of these functions are characterised by a macro-opposition: Loss vs Gain. On an actantial level it may be seen that Bird functions as an ally, a subject-agent who assumes the process of improvement of all the other characters of the story as the main object of his life. But there never is any exchange of services; the help he gives is gratuitous and the movement unilateral, and furthermore, what is given never implies an expectance of compensation. In contrast to the process of improvement which Bird's actions produce to the advantage of the other characters, is the element of deception and the consequent worsening of the protagonist's

-- 23 --

condition. It is almost as if he wanted to subject himself to a sacrificial rite with the story finally sanctioning a biblical code that underlies the text. This code clearly appears in the title as well as being given a circular repetition in the *explicit*.²⁰ The biblical code is fully revealed in the idea of sacrifice and donation. If we consider the meaning of donation in its biblical sense, this supposes "a completely different interpretation of *do-ut-des* [...] To give is to put oneself into relation with a second person by means of an object which in reality is not an object, but a part, a piece of the self."²¹

Even if donating presupposes receiving something in return (not, of course, in commercial terms), since the gift at the very moment in which it is offered creates a link and a real and actual union between the donor and the receiver, none of this happens to Thomas Bird. If on the one hand the ethical behaviour of Bird allows us to presume his concept of a gift to be the biblical one above mentioned, for the Warbecks – and not only for them – the gift is conceived only in its utilitarian and egoistic sense. The gift received is the instrument of a satisfaction that is exclusively a personal and immediate one, and a means of staying alive in an environment that forces them to struggle in order to survive.²² Therefore, Gissing's story can be seen as a dramatisation of the attempt to reconcile the biblical code, connected with the values of

salvation and redemption (represented by Bird), with the Darwinian struggle for existence (characterised by Bird's antagonists). If the Warbecks, and with them nearly all the characters present in SE, are destined to follow the same track and to be always asking for money, thus inscribing themselves in a field of action in which they are seen as objects of a rigorous determinism, then it becomes legitimate to wonder to what point Bird's generosity is useful in modifying their condition. His help is literally inscribed within their fight for survival, but in the end their poverty remains the same. The attempt to bring changes to those who are destined to remain always the same is therefore a vain one. Besides, it is true that, as Darwin observed, variability is not a direct product of man since man cannot create varieties, he can only preserve and accumulate them.²³

Therefore, the story can be regarded as a negation of change, as the search for a limbo-like state of permanence and immutability. It is no accident that the protagonist himself denies any form of change, and any reiteration of lexemes relating to the sense of movement only repeats the circularity and monotony of a journey which is anything but explorative as well as the repetitiveness of a movement which is very close to paralysis:

-- 24 --

“For fifteen years he had *walked* to and fro over Blackfriars Bridge” (p. 226); “he *walked* away in a cheerful frame of mind” (p. 267); “Thomas Bird *walked* all the way home” (p. 268); “for three weeks he *crossed* and *recrossed* Blackfriars Bridge [...] His look was perhaps graver, his movements less alert, *but he had not noticeably changed*; his life kept its wonted tenor” (p. 275); “Thomas [...] *walked* a quarter of a mile.” (p. 277, my italics)

It is therefore appropriate that in this context the name of the protagonist – Bird – assumes an importance that influences the actual events of the story almost to the extent of justifying his continual journeying;²⁴ like a frightened bird that circles above the city and like a bird that can only live frugally, without ever touching the ground, he represents an object-prey; Thomas Bird is nothing more than the quintessence of a man incapable of relating to reality and thus a victim of his fellow creatures.

III

Strong and silent the tide of Thames flowed upward, and over it swept the morning tide of humanity. Through white autumnal mist yellow sunbeams flitted from shore to shore. The dome, the spires, the river frontages slowly unveiled and brightened: there was hope of a fair day. Not that it much concerned this throng of men hastening to their labour. (p. 265)

The descriptive sequence with which SE opens, besides heightening the effect of verisimilitude, with the presentation to the reader of London in the early morning, also provides a topological frame that has a functional structure in the text and includes the constituent units that are already metonymically enclosed within it. The description of the city and its inhabitants necessarily implies a series of isotopes that lie on a more profound level. Besides the poetical presentation of the landscape,²⁵ what emerges in the *incipit* is the aqueous *classeme* that originates in the double occurrence of the two semic figures *tide/Thames* and *tide/humanity*, and determines the initial opposition that underlies the text: *natural code vs sociological-behavioural code*. The flowing of the Thames becomes one with the human beings that flow along the streets of the city every morning, thus establishing a relation between the

fluidity of the river and the flowing of individuals who, all anonymous, reach their places of work. Hence the accent on the proairetic code which constitutes the basis of the series of events in which all the characters of the story are involved, including Thomas Bird. The humanity represented in SE is a humanity in constant movement and the spatial dimension is a horizontal

-- 25 --

one; in this way man's "march" is not intended as a vertical and irreversible movement, but as a circular one, towards a destination that negates itself. The movement of the characters in the first scene of the story therefore cannot be interpreted as a movement from one spatial dimension to another or from one temporal moment to another. It is intended as a reiteration and not as a change; the external movement is nothing other than the dramatisation of the internal paralysis of Gissing's characters.

The movement, however, is highlighted by a phonosymbolism that acquires a particular semantic value as a result of the use of the unvoiced and voiced dental phonemes /t/ and /d/ which are repeated no less than thirteen times in the first sentence: "*Strong and silent the tide of Thames flowed upward and over it swept the morning tide of humanity,*" almost as if to scan the steps of that "march"²⁶ which alienates and sets adrift autonomous individuals. But this phonosymbolism can only finally be antiphrastic since it does not indicate a real movement, but paralysis and inaction.

The linguistic choices of the *incipit* of the story are located along the axis earth-sea, where for earth is meant the city and for sea the flowing of the river. The city is depicted as an enclosed element and the river as an enclosing agent. Clearly then, London with its inhabitants and its streets almost becomes an actant-object dominated and encircled by the water of the river, which in turn is presented as a dynamic and dominating actant-subject. The flow of the Thames embodies and transports the people of the story, and in its horizontal movement inevitably sanctions the obliteration of the self and of vitality, the amassing of people and hence the loss of identity. Therefore, water becomes the symbol of death and immobility. Water as a permanent presence, as an absence of change, renders all men equal:

No eye surveying this procession would have paused for a moment on Thomas Bird. In costume there was nothing to distinguish him from hundreds of rather shabby clerks who passed along with their out-of-fashion chimney-pot and badly rolled umbrella. (p. 266)

What is represented, therefore, is a working class that is given no hope of change,²⁷ that lives a life of monotony and repetitive movements²⁸ and that is always close to madness.²⁹ And Thomas Bird, who is forced to live among them and is perhaps more acutely aware of the fact, faces the same fate. However, from his viewpoint, a message of *hope* comes from the natural world in the rays of the sun: "there was hope of a fair day" (p. 265); "For him, it appeared, the

-- 26 --

struggling sunlight had a message of *hope*" (p. 266). Although this is only an illusion, the innocence of the protagonist is such as to leave ample space for hope. It is no accident that the latter is one of the three theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) whose function is of prime importance to the text. In fact, Gissing borrows the three virtues central to the Christian religion and lends them to Thomas Bird. If by "faith" is intended the constancy and conviction with which Thomas Bird helps others, "charity" in turn suggests giving disinterestedly, that is, the capacity to give without asking for anything in return; finally "hope" can be seen as the prospect which has as its main aim the renewal of the self and of others. But contact with reality

immediately leads to the contradictions that render altogether vain the expectations of Christian thought.

In the *explicit* of SE the narrator declares that Thomas Bird is the salt of the earth, even though he is unaware of the fact:

So Thomas Bird went home. He felt better at heart, and blamed himself for his weakness during the day. He blamed himself often enough for this or that, knowing not that such as he are the salt of the earth. (p. 277)

If it is true that, according to Thomas Bird's rule of conduct, one must help, give and hope, it must also be admitted that he has sacrificed his life to the wills of others; chaste, virtuous and forever patient, he is an accumulation of positive virtues in the religious sense of the term. Animated by a missionary spirit,³⁰ he seems to hope for some future reward, whilst almost paradoxically living a masochistic existence in which giving is the only reason to exist.

Bird's journey can be seen as a journey of salvation which, spatially at least, is not projected towards the afterlife, but remains in the negative dimension of the present moment within the enclosed space of the city. And if the latter is represented to the Victorian mind as a *locus* of prime importance, in the semiosis of the story it becomes, besides a frame, the privileged space in which the diegesis is developed. The city thematised in SE is therefore presented as an enclosed, limited and claustrophobic space; it is also the space of despair and disorder, which, although allowing of encounters between people, causes the ruin of Thomas Bird.

As has already been noted, one of the main motifs of the action of the story is that of encounters. Bird's relationship with the other characters is based on a series of encounters that occur in part in the street. These encounters acquire a metaphoric significance in that they are presented as images of loss, both material – Bird gives money to everybody – and spiritual – he

-- 27 --

shows affection and comprehension without receiving anything in return. As a result of a series of coincidences the protagonist has four encounters, three with Mr. Warbeck and one with Mrs. Pritchard. Being a victim of himself as well as of circumstances, Bird can only remain indifferent and unchanging since he is only a person to whom things happen. A few moments before meeting Mr. Warbeck he had been walking "away in a cheerful frame of mind" (p. 267), but after saying goodbye to him and having lent him money, "he walked all the way home, and with bent head" (p. 268).

In this story space is not internalised, it is not something lived in but something through which people travel. The characters who walk along the streets of London are alienated from their environment, and there is no relationship between man and nature; the more nature seems to offer the promise of a fine sunny day, the more indifferent men are: "there was hope of a fair day. Not that it much concerned this throng of men and women hastening to their labour" (p. 265). There is not and never will be any contact between man and nature, precisely because they are both going in completely different directions.

The only spatial alternative offered to Bird, as an escape from the stifling atmosphere in which he finds himself living from day to day, is the utopian space of novels and stories:

He delighted in stories of adventure, of bravery by flood or field, and might have posed – had he ever posed at all – as something of an authority on North Pole expeditions and the geography of Polynesia. (p. 267)

If his existence moves between the banal and the monotonous, the myths of literature offer

themselves as a means to evade reality and to escape into an exotic world; they represent the dimensions of desire and fantasy that Bird has never managed to find in his relationships with others. But the effects of reading do not last long, they are only the fruits of a brief moment. Thomas Bird belongs to the reality in which he lives and does not attempt to move out of, and in the reader's mind he will continue to live in the same way, like an "unregarded atom" (p. 266). In his reality the individual has lost all significance; it is no accident that lexemes such as "throng," "tide," "march" and "procession" are used in the text and that, although they are hyperonimically associated with the human sphere, they also generate a plural connotation, a vision of the world in which the collective and the uniform have taken the place of the individual.

-- 28 --

In such circumstances man's role as an individual entity is notably reduced, and in Bird's case almost loses all value. That is why the sentences referring to Bird often begin with an adversative phrase or with verbs expressing negation or doubt to emphasise his immobility:

but it was then that Thomas Bird became her bondman (p. 271); *Never* had he dared to breathe a syllable of what he thought [...] *but* Thomas Bird had no more than his twelve pounds a month, and *did not venture* to call himself a gentleman [...] he had *never* heard her say [...] *not* seen (p. 272); *Never* for a moment had he flattered himself (p. 272); *But* it *never* occurred to him to think (p. 267); *but* Thomas *could not* decide at which end to begin [...] *but* [...] Thomas seldom had a surplus over the expenses (267); he had *no* influential friends [...] he *lacked* the capacity [...] (pp. 266-267) [my italics]

These are only a few examples in which the paradigm of negation is also expressed within the actual syntax. It is almost as if Bird were denied the right to speak or to exist. He even becomes a victim of his own silence. Thus his tragedy is also the tragedy of a non-verbalisation since he is incapable of expressing himself, while the reader can only grasp his traits through the voices and perspectives of the other characters, or in the reflections of the narrator's own judgments. When Mr. Warbeck keeps on borrowing from him, Bird never answers and hands him the money, and finally, when Mrs. Warbeck explains why he is no longer welcome to their house, Bird's reactions are everything but verbal: "a fire burned in the listener's cheeks" (p. 274); "Thomas smiled, and was endeavouring to shape a sentence" (p. 275); "Without speaking Thomas [...] walked [...] (p. 277). Unassertive as he is, Bird inevitably forgoes speaking, thus finding refuge in solitude and self-enclosure. In spite of this the narrator's attitude towards Bird is undoubtedly a positive one:

Yet when a ray of sunshine fell upon him, and he lifted his eyes to the eastward promise, there shone in his countenance something one might vainly have sought through the streaming concourse of which Thomas Bird was an unregarded atom (p. 266). A man of sociable instincts [...] An extreme simplicity marked his tastes [...] an easy man to deceive, easy to make fun of, yet impossible to dislike, or despise – unless by the despicable. (p. 267)

The narrative puts into evidence Thomas Bird's character not so much in relation to an axiological code, but to an ideal of internal coherence, of patient faith and refined selflessness. He manages to rise above the mass, and his strength lies precisely in his being an anonymous figure. It is thanks to him that, in spite of the bitternesses that circumstances have in store for

him, there remains a possibility of human redemption.

¹*George Gissing's Commonplace Book*, Jacob Korg (ed.), New York: The New York Public Library, 1962, p. 64.

²This collection comprises fifteen stories written by Gissing between 1893 and 1903, and selected by his brother Algernon.

³Little critical attention has been given to Gissing's short stories. However, the chapter entitled "Short Stories" in Frank Swinnerton's *George Gissing: A Critical Study*, London: Secker, 1924, pp. 125-36 may be mentioned as well as the chapter similarly entitled in O. H. Davis's *George Gissing*, Dorking: Kohler and Coombes, 1974, pp. 24-27.

⁴*The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz 1887-1903*, Arthur C. Young (ed.), London: Constable, 1961, p. 180.

⁵*The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*, Pierre Coustillas (ed.), New York: The New York Public Library, 1964, pp. 104, 139.

⁶See Carlo Pagetti, *La nuova battaglia dei libri*, Bari: Adriatica, 1977, pp. 217-41.

⁷*Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family*, Algernon and Ellen Gissing (eds.), London: Constable, 1927, p. 166. My italics.

⁸Sean O'Faolain, *The Short Story*, Cork: The Mercier Press, 1972, p. 177.

⁹Frank Swinnerton, *op. cit.*, had already noted the undramatic quality of Gissing's short stories; "Most of the stories in *The House of Cobwebs* are little narratives, depending hardly at all upon surprise or concentration, and consisting of a series of slight events which may be rounded off into a tale. They are, in short, undramatic. [...] The lack of this emotional heightening in the whole of Gissing's work is notable" (p. 129).

¹⁰Virginia Woolf, "The Novels of George Gissing," *The Times Literary Supplement*, 11 January 1912, pp. 9-10, in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, P. Coustillas and C. Partridge (eds.), London: Routledge, 1972, p. 530.

¹¹It is interesting at this point to note what James Payn wrote in 1895: "[Gissing's characters] are unhappy and frequently morose, their views are commonplace and sordid, they are often vicious in an unattractive fashion, yet we feel that they are real people, photographed from the life; indeed, they are themselves like photographs – cheap ones – ungainly, uncomely, and colourless. Their end, like their beginning, is almost always an unhappy one." *Illustrated London News*, 26 January 1895 in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage, op. cit.*, p. 236.

¹²One may recall stories such as "A Charming Family" in which the main character, a young woman, becomes the unwitting victim of the deceit and meanness of her tenants; or "Spellbound," which relates the story of a loafer who lives off his wife and finds gratification in lazing about in reading-rooms where he delights in the scent of printed paper. Also "A Poor Gentleman," in which the protagonist, reduced to poverty by a friend's speculations, will live in remorse for having accepted money while pretending to be a helper of the poor. These are only a few examples of stories which have passivity and "enclosure" as their central themes. Stories in

which any change is denied and in which the hero is practically non-existent.

¹³John Halperin, for example, states: "The critic who attempts to deal with Gissing's fiction phenomenologically from a narrow structuralist approach has little chance of understanding him. Gissing's work offers an unrivalled challenge to biographical criticism to show what it can do." "How to read Gissing," in *George Gissing: Critical Essays*, Jean-Pierre Michaux (ed.), London: Vision Press, 1981, p. 58.

¹⁴Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, Second Series, London: The Hogarth Press, 1932,

p. 220.

¹⁵Quoted in John Halperin, "How to read Gissing," pp. 61-62.

¹⁶*The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Volume Two 1881-1885*, P. F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young, P. Coustillas (eds.), Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991, p. 349.

¹⁷All the quotations that follow are taken from George Gissing, *The House of Cobwebs*, introduced by Thomas Seccombe, London: Constable, 1931, pp. 265-77. Page numbers will be given at the end of each quotation in brackets.

¹⁸Strict verisimilitude and extreme narrative restraint are elements of his naturalism. As Ruth Capers McKay shrewdly observes: "Gissing cared nothing about pleasing his readers so he wrote under only two masters, art and truth." "Gissing as a Portrayer of Society" in *Collected Articles on George Gissing*, P. Coustillas (ed.), London: Frank Cass, 1968, p. 28.

¹⁹John Goode writes: "Gissing [...] will become the creator of individuals who have no typicality, who expose the social world by the oddness of their situation, rather than the angularity of their personalities." *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*, London: Vision, 1978, p. 35.

²⁰"So Thomas Bird went home [...] knowing not that such as he are the *salt of the earth*" (p. 277, my italics). Here the author refers to a passage from the New Testament in which Jesus is talking to his disciples. The following are the three versions from the Synoptic Gospels: "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." Matthew, 5.13. "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another." Mark, 9.50. "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out." Luke, 14.34-35.

²¹Gerard van der Leeuw, *Fenomenologia della Religione*, Turin: Boringhieri, 1975, p. 277.

²²On the question of the struggle for existence it must be noted that the world Gissing narrates in this story is also the textualisation of a ruthless world in which losers and winners alternate and in which those who appear in the forefront are "those who combat hunger with delicate hands" (p. 265).

²³See Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, London: Penguin, 1985, pp. 71-129.

-- 31 --

²⁴As Roland Barthes reminds us: "Il Nome proprio si offre a una descrizione, a deciframento: esso è un 'ambiente' [...] in cui se deve immergere, calandosi indefinitamente in tutte le fantasticherie che esso porta con sé." *Il grado zero della scrittura*, Turin: Einaudi, 1982, p. 122.

²⁵One cannot help recalling Wordsworth's sonnet "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" here, and in particular the following lines: "This city now doth, like a garment, wear | The beauty of the morning; silent, bare, | Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie." Certainly, however, Gissing's description, besides leaving little space for the poetic, already offers itself as a thematising of chaos.

²⁶"It was the march of those who combat hunger with delicate hands" (p. 265).

²⁷"They had no hope, nor chance, of reaching independence" (p. 266).

²⁸"Their task was the same to-day as yesterday, regardless of gleam or gloom" (p. 266).

²⁹"These also had a fixed gaze, preoccupied or vacant, seldom cheerful" (p. 266).

³⁰Thus the continual "journeying" of the protagonist is justified. His is almost a mission, a circular journey towards a humanity that is heading for destruction.

A Hundred Years Ago
The Dinner at the Burford Bridge Hotel on 13 July 1895

There is a little known essay in the *Book of the Omar Khayyám Club 1892-1910* which celebrates a memorable literary event now exactly a hundred years old. It is quite appropriately entitled “George Meredith with the Club” and of unknown authorship, the only unsigned piece in the daintily printed volume. It was probably written by a member of the Club Committee in 1909-10, C. K. Shorter or George Whale, both on familiar terms with Gissing, rather than Frederic Hudson or W. R. Walkes. Edward Clodd would be the best candidate, if he did not refer to the same event in the introduction, which he signed with his initials. Whoever wrote the piece was well-informed and with the exception of Gissing himself, who recorded his impressions and briefly analysed his own performance in his diary, the author of it is, of all the men who ever related the story in print, the one who says most about what Gissing did and said.

The Club had been founded in 1892, a common admiration for Edward Fitzgerald’s free translation of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám being the main bond between the members, fifty-nine in number. The figure, Edward Clodd was to explain, had been whimsically chosen because, lopping off the centuries, that was the year when Fitzgerald published his immortal paraphrase of the celebrated Persian poem. Several times a year, the members of the Club would meet, usually in some restaurant like Frascati’s in London, occasionally in some suburban town like Great Marlow or Caversham-on-Thames; they were entitled to bring a guest, and thus it

-- 32 --

was that C. K. Shorter, whom Gissing had met recently at the Whitsuntide party given by Clodd at his seaside home of Aldeburgh, had asked Gissing to be his guest. On that occasion he became a member – and at the next meeting, in December 1895, he took Bullen with him. For obvious reasons, he was not to attend many more, but the dinners at Great Marlow on 20 June 1896 and at Frascati’s on 16 December 1898 he did attend with some pleasure.

We reprint here the three-page essay, which gives the flavour of the period, accompanied by a contemporary postcard from C. C. Kohler’s collection. To the best of our knowledge, no systematic research has ever been attempted to trace all the articles that were devoted to the event in the English and American press, but no reader will be disappointed if he turns to the following accounts: [Henry Norman], “Daily Chronicle Office,” *Daily Chronicle*, 15 July, p. 7; Claudius Clear [i.e., William Robertson Nicoll], “George Meredith’s Maiden Speech,” *British Weekly*, 18 July, p. 201; Arthur Waugh, “London Letter,” *Critic* (New York), 3 August, pp. 76-77; “Literary Gossip,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August, p. 4; “News Notes,” *Bookman* (London), August, p. 129; W. Robertson Nicoll, “London Letter: George Meredith’s Maiden Speech,” *Bookman* (New York), August-September, pp. 34-36. In his history of the firm of Chapman and Hall, *A Hundred Years of Publishing* (1930), Arthur Waugh described again this exceptional dinner in his chapter on Meredith, and he reminisced about it years later in his letter to Herbert Van Thal of 9 June 1939, which we published in our October 1994 number. – Ed.

George Meredith with the Club

Of all the dinners from 1892 to 1910 the Summer Dinner of 1895 stands out as the most notable, for George Meredith was present and made his first, and only, public speech. It was held on 13th July, at the Burford Bridge Hotel, which, already famous through its association with Keats and Robert Louis Stevenson, thus added one more, and not the least interesting, to its literary memories. It is near Flint Cottage, the home of the novelist, who had promised his old friend, Brother Clodd, then President, to join the Club in the course of the evening. When, as coffee was being served, Meredith entered the room, he received a great welcome, by which, it

was plain, he was deeply moved: 'My dear friends, my dear, good friends,' he murmured deprecatingly, as he paused, taken aback, at the nearest table. Brother Shorter conducted him to the seat of honour on the right hand of the President, on whose left was Mr. Thomas Hardy, and sitting there, with a sunlit window half-covered with vivid, fluttering greenery for background, he made an unforgettable picture.

Brother Clodd having, in a charming and eloquent little speech, extended to him the right hand of fellowship on behalf of the Club, Meredith, in reply, declared that Clodd was 'the most

-- 33 --



amiable of chairmen but the most dastardly of deceivers.' Never in his life before had he been on his legs to make a speech. Now, before he knew it, he was hustled over the first fence. But because he had not spoken before, members need not fear, nor say, 'Now this fellow is off, there will be no stopping him. He will be over-riding the hounds.' Laying his hand on Brother Clodd's shoulder, 'I have my hands on the fellow at this moment,' he laughingly said, 'I could turn on him and rend him; but I spare him.' After a few graceful and characteristic sentences concerning the Club, its object, and the Master, and expressive of his gratitude for his reception, he concluded: 'I thank you from my heart, every one of you.'

After Brother Edmund Gosse had read the verses which he had written for the occasion, Brother L. F. Austin proposed the toast of 'The Visitors.' Expressing the joy of the Club at the presence of Mr. Cook, of the *Westminster Gazette*, and Mr. Henry Cust, of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he said that to have withdrawn such a notable constellation from the murky atmosphere of politics to the clear and tranquil glow of the Omar Club was a considerable achievement. It was with pain, however, he had noticed that the *Westminster* and the *Pall Mall* had appeared that day as usual, for he had cherished the hope that, with a view to purifying themselves for the evening's ceremonial, Mr. Cook and Mr. Cust would abstain for one afternoon from the hideous orgies of the General Election. Politics had ceased to interest him since he gathered up the fragments of a distracted middle-age and fled with them from the Parliamentary Press Gallery, where nothing had cheered him in old times save the image of Mr. Massingham fast asleep, the sweet Endymion of the *Daily Chronicle*, wooed by the moonshine of John Burns. He was glad to see such eminent journalists forgetting politics and programmes, and other evanescent things, in order to worship, in a hostelry consecrated, he understood, to fugitive loves, the pure spirit of literature.

Adverting to the presence of Mr. Meredith and Mr. Thomas Hardy, Mr. Austin said it was difficult to speak of Mr. Meredith without an overwhelming sense of personal obligation, and the tremors natural to the neophyte who approached the burning bush of English letters. So much of the philosophy in our literature, of its divining imagination, of its illuminating humour, of its subtlest essence of life, had been nourished at that flame, that the most audacious critic might quail before Mr. Meredith in the flesh. In the early days of the Club there had been a yearning for feminine society. The argument was that true Omarians ought to be tended by fair

hands; and, if those hands were the hands of Rhoda Fleming and Tess of the D'Urbervilles, of Sandra Belloni and Eustacia Vye, of Rose Harrington and Bathsheba Everdene, of Lucy Feverel, and a Group of Noble Dames, the members of the Club would kiss them with a rapture which could now be expressed only in feeble words as a tribute to the great writers who had created them.

Mr. Thomas Hardy, in replying for the guests, said that all present must be thinking exclusively of Mr. Meredith that evening, and that his speech should therefore take the form of an anecdote. The first time that he ever met the distinguished author, who was the guest of the evening, dated some twenty-six years back. It was in 'a dusty back room' at Chapman and Hall's – whose 'reader' Meredith then was – to whom he (Mr. Hardy) had dispatched his first attempt, which he modestly described as 'very wild.' 'Promising,' ejaculated Meredith. The two had talked the story over, and so much had Mr. Hardy learnt that day from Meredith's encouragement and criticism, that the occasion had been largely instrumental in inducing him to persevere in literature. George Gissing, who followed, had a like recollection. He, too, had first met Meredith in the same office, and found that, without note or reference, he knew the

manuscript, *Workers in the Dawn* [actually *The Unclassed*], better than Mr. Gissing himself. This was praised, that condemned; and in that conversation he had learnt more than from any other source in the whole of his career. So much sympathy did Meredith show for a younger brother in letters that Gissing wondered who this astonishing 'reader' could be, and it was not till long afterwards that he knew.

Mr. Harry Cust provoked great mirth with a speech full of impromptu quips, of which the most successful was a burlesque of a much-quoted stanza in a well-known poem: –

She cares not for her broken vow,
Tho' God Himself came down to slate her;
She's mother-in-law to the North Pole now,
And maiden aunt to the Equator!

Mr. Cook also made a notable contribution to the general vivacity, which was crowned by a telegram from Mr. J. M. Barrie, who was prevented from attending by an engagement to rival W. G. Grace in a cricket match. 'Glorious victory,' telegraphed Mr. Barrie. 'We challenge the Omar Club.'

-- 36 --

Book Review

Christina Sjöholm, "*The Vice of Wedlock*": *The Theme of Marriage in George Gissing's Novels*, Uppsala, 1994. Distributor: Almqvist & Wiksell International, Box 4627, S-116 91 Stockholm, Sweden.

Only the author of this book, Christina Sjöholm, of Uppsala University, could tell us why she chose the theme of marriage in Gissing's novels as a subject for her doctoral dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, but as she cannot have been unaware, right from the beginning, of the wealth of material already available on this central theme, dissatisfaction with what she had read may well have been her strongest motive. The earliest reviewers of Gissing's novels did not overlook the importance of the problem, but it was essentially when gender studies became fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s that American and English historians and critics realized what a vast area Gissing's stories offered to prospective investigators. The reprinting of *The Odd Women* as a Norton paperback in 1971, followed by reissues of the other major novels and the publication of a number of semi-biographical, semi-critical studies, prompted further research, the result of which to date is a long series of articles and essays, let alone dissertations which, as Miss Sjöholm clearly saw, offer an ambiguous image of Gissing's attitude to women. Whether he was or not a misogynist is the implicit question that triggered these enquiries. Now, if critical assessments of *The Odd Women* have as a rule been very positive (one can dismiss the views of Lloyd Fernando and Coral Lansbury as suggested by other considerations than temperate literary research), neither *In the Year of Jubilee* nor *The Whirlpool* have found much favour among latter-day stalwart feminists, in whose eyes the presence in a novel of a female character who is not a standard-bearer of the quintessence of late twentieth-century feminism is an artistic flaw. Christina Sjöholm's subdued impatience with this stance informs her book.

Straightaway she sets out to refute the assertions of those critics who have been all too ready to establish a strong link between the views of fictional characters and those of the novelist. Although familiar with all the details of his life that are relevant to her enquiry, she chooses to disregard them because she is convinced – this is what she brilliantly demonstrates –

that he transcended his own predicament. No, she claims, he was not a misogynist, and she very opportunely and light-handedly reminds her readers that, if his novels contain vicious, depraved

-- 37 --

female characters, they also teem with male specimens of humanity that are not any more attractive. She is bent throughout on proving that his so-called ambiguity, far from being, as blindfolded feminists, male or female, are apt to believe, an artistic flaw – observing incidentally that contemporaries of Gissing who introduced bad wives and mothers into their fiction are never accused of misogyny – is actually one of his most shining virtues. The opinions of female writers of the period who were acknowledged radical feminists, notably Mona Caird, are quoted and placed alongside Gissing's statements with great effect. Very rightly, Miss Sjöholm points out the crucial significance of the oft-quoted passage on women's emancipation in the letter to Bertz of 2 June 1893, in which he noted that there would be no social peace so long as women were not educated very much in the way men were. That a period of "sexual anarchy" might result from this institutional reform did not worry Gissing. A lucid commentator, he viewed indulgently whatever excesses some forward-thinking women of the Girton type made themselves guilty of. Reason and commonsense would ultimately prevail.

Throughout the book Gissing's novels are fruitfully analysed as polyphonic narratives, in the way Mikhail Bakhtine, in his study of Dostoevsky, analyses the "plurality of independent and immersed voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices." Contradictions are to be found in each individual as much as in society, and most recent critics of Gissing, Miss Sjöholm observes, offer biased and lop-sided assessments of his pictures of married life because they focus their attention on female characters such as Ada Peachey or Alma Rolfe whom they either only see in part or out of social or narrative context. As she goes along she quietly yet firmly brushes aside the simplistic or ideologically twisted *obiter dicta* of such commentators as John Halperin (whom she accuses, after David Grylls, of "naive biographism") or Alice B. Markov (whose 1982 article "George Gissing: Advocate or Provocateur of the Women's Movement?" is shown to reveal a deep misunderstanding of the novelist's position). The book is among other things a plea for a subtler interpretation of Gissing's art than has been offered by the most extremist doctrinaire academics of the last two or three decades; it is a successful attempt to "desimplify" Gissing, made through a close analysis of his major novels of the 1890s, *The Emancipated*, *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*, *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool*. (If *Born in Exile* only gets a few references, the simple reason is that it is not a study in matrimony, but the record of an imagined failure in a tortuous

-- 38 --

quest for an upper-class partner.) The early, mainly working-class, novels are seen as a trial run for the maturer analyses of matrimonial problems in the late fiction, but even chapter I, which is something of a *catalogue raisonné* or typology of marriage from *Workers in the Dawn* to *The Nether World*, will be helpful to any reader bent on recapitulating the main lines of Gissing's thoughts about married life until his second matrimonial venture. Assuredly the five categories of unions under study would be a suitable framework for a detailed investigation of Gissing's early views on marriage. Besides the teacher-pupil marriages (*Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed*, *The Emancipated* and *Born in Exile* with the Malkin subplot) are the marriages *à la mode* of the Waghorn-Gresham kind, the exogamous marriages, i.e. marriages outside one's own class (*Demos*, *New Grub Street*, *Born in Exile*), the rational marriages (in *Thyrza* and *The Emancipated* for instance) and the happy marriages, remarkably few and significantly relegated to subplots – the O'Greens and the Mortons). However, Christina Sjöholm wisely remarks, it would hardly do to consider that the ideal has been reached – even in the best of cases "small

cracks are revealed on the glossy surface of matrimonial perfection.” The O’Gree *ménage* is too obviously Dickensian not to have satirical undertones, and neither Micklethwaite nor Morton has a wife with whom to discuss intellectual matters. Here as elsewhere religion is a cramping factor. In the last analysis “the only happy marriage which is not described as old-fashioned or coloured by irony or humorous caricature is the Spence marriage in *The Emancipated*.” Gissing’s comment on p. 349 of all one-volume editions would be worth meditating. Eleanor Spence “was a free woman, free in her love of her husband, free in the pursuit of knowledge and the cultivation of all her tastes. She had outlived passion without mourning it; what greater happiness than that can a woman expect?”

Another engaging characteristic of the book is the culture to which it testifies. We are reminded that the subject of *New Grub Street* was announced in *The Emancipated* when Madeline Denyer, after breaking her engagement to a poor artist because he refuses to act as Norbert Franks will later in *Will Warburton*, happens upon Daudet’s little-known novel *Les Femmes d’artistes*. If Dickens’s influence on Gissing has been duly charted, that of Daudet (whom Gissing compares with Dickens) still has to be thoroughly enquired into – a task which awaits Miss Sjöholm. “Madame Heurtebise” was doubtless still present in Gissing’s memory when he struggled to write *New Grub Street* in the summer and autumn of 1890. A passage in

-- 39 --

the Goncourts’ *Journal* on the more suitable artists’ wives is also likely to have been uppermost in his mind when he analysed the contrasting matrimonial ventures of Edwin Reardon and Alfred Yule, and had Biffen comment on the matter. Balzac’s *Physiologie du mariage*, it is suggested, would also bear closer inspection in the light of the treatment of married life in *New Grub Street*, despite the sharply different approaches to the subject in the flippant post-Napoleonic treatise and the tragic Victorian story. On the English side, the discussion is enlightened by side-glances at those writers to whom the women studies on the late Victorian period turn for comparison’s sake – Grant Allen, whose best remembered title, *The Woman Who Did*, has just been reissued by O.U.P., Mona Caird, Sarah Grand, Hardy, Meredith, Moore and Olive Schreiner, whose *Story of an African Farm* received high praise from Gissing. Last but not least, the expected comparisons with Ibsen (whom Gissing read) and Strindberg help to place the subject in a wider European context.

It is on *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool* that Miss Sjöholm writes most eloquently. Her comment amounts to a radical reassessment of these two novels, not only with regard to Gissing’s treatment in them of the theme of marriage, but concerning their artistic balance – a reassessment which takes into account the author’s fine irony, so often missed by his critics, past and present, and the correspondences and echoes in the narratives. “Gissing clearly recognized the clash between woman’s emancipation and her biological role, and with remarkable insight he described the difficulties, the marital complications and women’s suffering. It would be unfair to demand from him also a solution to problems which we are still struggling to work out a century later.” Thus ends the chapter on *In the Year of Jubilee* in an engaging, lucid book based on solid knowledge of the novelist and his time. Just as Virginia Woolf ended her first article on Gissing by exclaiming: “This man understood!”, one puts down this gallant and intelligent study of his works with the profound conviction that in turn this woman understood him.

The book, which is well printed, includes a list of Gissing’s novels and a very useful bibliography of works cited. Whoever chose the illustration for the dustjacket must be congratulated. It would have been hard to select a painting more appropriate for a book on “The Vice of Wedlock” – a phrase borrowed from *Born in Exile* – than Edmund Blair Leighton’s “Signing the Register.” Its symbolism is arresting.

Pierre Coustillas.

Notes and News

It now seems reasonable to hope that the nine volumes of Gissing's *Collected Letters* will be available by the end of next year. Some very elusive persons mentioned by Gissing have recently been identified, notably M. and Mme Dupré, who both taught English in Bordeaux, and the *normalien* Cognat, whom he excoriated in the diary. Besides the letters sent and received by Gissing from October 1902 to December 1903, Volume IX will include letters of condolence received by Gabrielle Fleury in late 1903 and early 1904, letters which were discovered too late for publication in the appropriate volume (the latest discovery is a postcard from Italy to Lawrence and Bullen dated 23 December 1897), the informal recollections of Gissing by Gabrielle Fleury, a list of recipients in the nine volumes, an index to Volume IX and a general index covering the contents of the nine volumes. Volume VII, due to come out this autumn, will contain twenty illustrations; one of them shows Gissing in Switzerland standing among the rocks near the village of Trient.

Mark Storey's edition of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (World's Classics, 1987) is now out of print and will not be reprinted. So we are told by Oxford University Press. *The Nether World*, which was published in the same series three years ago, has now gone into a second impression. No other reprint of Gissing's works is likely to be published by O.U.P. in the near future. Things are more hopeful in another quarter. A new edition of *The Whirlpool* is likely to appear in Everyman Paperbacks within a year or so.

Peter Ackroyd's novel *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, which was published last autumn in London by Sinclair-Stevenson is now available in America from Nan A. Talese/Doubleday under a title more likely to appeal to the transatlantic public, *The Trial of Elizabeth Cree*. In her review of the novel ("A Victorian Nightmare," *New York Times Book Review*, 16 April 1995, p. 7) Valerie Martin reminds us of the prominent part played by Gissing in the melodramatic events. Karl Marx is introduced "reading George Gissing's latest book [actually his first], while Gissing himself sits a few seats away, reading his own analysis of Thomas De Quincey's essay on murder." She goes on with a description of the Victorian underworld and an analysis of the plot and main scenes, styling the story "not so much a novel of ideas as a novel about some men who had ideas." Would the reading room of the British

Museum, she wonders, be peopled to-day with as many reformers as in the 1880s? No, but "let us not excuse our own age by resorting to the old chestnut that Victorian society was hypocritical and the endless moralizing and pontificating of its reformers was insincere, providing a camouflage for the deep evil of their intentions. George Gissing, who stalks the grim streets of Limehouse in search of his alcoholic wife, must surely be exempt from such a charge. (If Mr. Ackroyd's novel did no more than remind us of this brilliant and underrated writer, he would have done the contemporary reader a great service.) Mr. Ackroyd's Gissing is utterly believable—a man torn by his hatred of respectability and his need to have the respect due any man of intelligence and refinement, by his attraction to women who could not love him and his distaste for the shallow ambitions of those who could, and by his determination to write his way out of poverty and his contempt for those who never suffered it."

A few years ago we mentioned the publication of a pleasantly illustrated, well-researched

booklet by Gilbert Venn, *Discovering Exeter: St. Leonard's*, published by the Exeter Civic Society in 1982. Gissing and *Born in Exile* appear several times in it. Now we discover, again belatedly, thanks to its author, Hazel Harvey, the existence of another volume in the same series: *Discovering Exeter: Pennsylvania* (1984). She reminds us of Gissing's having lived at no. 24 Prospect Park and of his use of what is now Park Place in *Born in Exile*, from which she quotes on three occasions.

Calabria Sconosciuta (Unknown Calabria), an Italian quarterly magazine to which Francesco Badolato has contributed articles of literary, historical and topographical interest on several occasions, is a nicely produced publication profusely illustrated, which gives one the feel of Calabria past and present. Now in its eighteenth year, it is edited by Giuseppe Polimeni, who publishes articles on a variety of subjects, cultural, artistic and biographical. The annual subscription rate for readers outside Italy is L. 40,000. The address of the magazine is 8, Via Brancati, 89121 Reggio Calabria. Had such a journal been extant in Gissing's time, he would have been tempted to subscribe.

D. J. Taylor, the journalist and writer, never misses an opportunity to mention Gissing in his articles on literary subjects. He has a (friendly?) competitor in this field, Peter Ackroyd. Who could be surprised if some day they aired their views on him in a book-length study? The

-- 42 --

latest examples of passing allusions to Gissing in their book reviews are in the *Sunday Times* (review of John Sutherland's *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers*, 28 May 1995) and in *The Times* (review of Margaret Drabble's biography of Angus Wilson, 25 May 1995).

The Edizioni Corriere di Reggio have published a dictionary of *Scrittori reggini di oggi 1994/95*, in which Francesco Badolato appears in a long entry on pp. 22-23. Among his work in progress are a volume of letters Gissing wrote from Italy and a study of him as a lover of classical Italy.

Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *The Nether World*, edited with an introduction by Stephen Gill, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, [1995]. Pictorial paperback. xxxiv + 404 pages + 10 pages of advertisements. £6.99 or \$8.95. ISBN 0-19-281769-8. This is the second impression in the World's Classics.

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, edited with an introduction by Bernard Bergonzi, London: Penguin Books, [1995]. Pictorial paperback. 556 pages. £6.99. ISBN 0-14-043032-6. This is the eighth impression in the Penguin Classics and the fourteenth since the first Penguin edition, which was published in 1968.

George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, with an introduction by Margaret Walters, London: Virago Press, 1995. Pictorial paperback. Unpaginated introduction + 336 pages. £6.99. ISBN 0-86068-140-8. This eighth impression is like the previous ones except for the words "As read on Radio 4 Woman's Hour" in the left-hand bottom corner of the front cover.

Robert L. Selig, *George Gissing. Revised Edition*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995. Red cloth with pictorial dustjacket. xiii + 157 pages. \$22.95. ISBN 0-8057-7061-5. The first edition was published in 1983. This volume is no. 346 in Twayne's English Authors Series.

-- 43 --

Articles, reviews, etc.

Robert F. Tucker, "Recent Studies in the Nineteenth Century," *Studies in English Literature*, Autumn 1991, p. 829. Brief review of Vol. I of the *Collected Letters*.

Simon Gatrell, ed., *The Ends of the Earth*, London and Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Ashfield Press, 1992. This is Vol. 4 (1876-1918) of *English Literature and the Wide World*. Gissing's Italian experiences are frequently mentioned.

Murray G. H. Pittock, *Spectrum of Decadence: The Literature of the 1890s*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993. *New Grub Street* is discussed on pp. 117-21.

Penelope Mathiesen, "George Gissing: The Pforzheimer Collection," *The Friends of the Lilly Library Newsletter*, no. 23, Fall 1994, pp. 3-4. An excellent review of the exhibition of the Pforzheimer material relating to Gissing acquired by the Lilly Library.

Ioan Bowen Rees, "Poets and Pedestrians," *Planet: The Welsh Internationalist*, December 1994-January 1995, pp. 97-99. Review of *All the Days Were Glorious: George Gissing in North Wales*.

Claude Ayme, *Version anglaise: Filière classique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994, pp. 236-37. Introduces Gissing and offers a passage from *New Grub Street* for translation, with some linguistic comment.

Alan Symons, *Behind the Blue Plaques of London 1867-1994: The Complete Guide*, London: Polo Publishing, 1994. Gissing appears on p. 67. The brief account of his life is unreliable.

Francesco Badolato, "Cosenza in F. Lenormant, G. Gissing e N. Douglas," *Calabria Sconosciuta*, Anno XVIII, no. 65, January-March 1995, pp. 81-83. With black and white drawings from the early editions of *By the Ionian Sea*.

Pierre Coustillas, "Echoes of Gissing's works in Tono-Bungay," *H. G. Wells Newsletter*, Vol. III, no. 8, Spring 1995, p. 4.

-- 44 --

Francesco Badolato, "Gissing tra vittoriani e moderni," *Il Corriere di Roma*, 5 April 1995, p. 20. Review of the Everyman edition of *In the Year of Jubilee*.

J. H., "Fiction in Brief," *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 April 1995, p. 24. Review of the 1995 impression of the Virago edition of *The Odd Women*.

Francesco Badolato, "Lear, Gissing, Douglas: tre viaggiatori inglesi in Calabria," *Il Corriere di*

Roma, 20 May 1995, p. 6. With two drawings of Roccella and Stilo by Lear.

David Grylls, "The Mystery of Holmes's Ear," *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 June 1995, p. 14.
Review of *Transforming Genres: New Approaches to British Fiction of the 1890s*, ed.
Nikki Lee Manos and Meri-Jane Rochelson. Comments on Margaret Diane Stetz's essay
on "New Grub Street and the Woman Writer of the 1890s."

From Pandora's Hope: *A Study of Woman*
by Austin Harrison (1925)

Charles Dickens, who caught the spirit and aspects of most things, had ignored the woman's question; indeed, he typified the old masculine view of women. But George Gissing was a "feminist" writer. His theme was woman. If he had a message, it was this – the place and position of women in the State and society, her lifelessness in this condition of bondage and the need of release. His neglect at that time was due to the unpopularity of this theme which he presented in chill and lugubrious colours after the manner of the Russians. His realism was not understood. His motive failed to penetrate. Yet in his way he sought to do in England what Ibsen was doing with astonishing success in Norway.

Subscriptions

The Gissing Journal is published four times a year, in January, April, July and October. Subscriptions are normally on a two-year basis and begin with the January number.

Rates per annum are as follows:

Private subscribers: £10.00

Libraries: £15.00

Single copies can be supplied as well as sets for back years.

Payment should be made in sterling to *The Gissing Journal*, by cheque or international money order sent to:

The Gissing Journal
7 Town Lane, Idle, Bradford BD10 8PR, England.

* * *

Information for Contributors

The Gissing Journal publishes essays and notes on Gissing and his circle. Contributions may deal with biographical, critical, bibliographical and topographical subjects. They should be addressed to the editor, Pierre Coustillas, 10 rue Gay-Lussac, 59110 La Madeleine, France.

This journal is indexed in the *MLA Annual Bibliography*, in the Summer number of *Victorian Studies* and *The Year's Work in English Studies*.

* * *

Editorial Board

Pierre Coustillas, University of Lille

Shigeru Koike, Tokyo Christian Woman's University

Jacob Korg, University of Washington, Seattle