

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 XXXIII, Number 3

July, 1997

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Isabel Clarendon: ‘Hearts made sepulchres’

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In terms of its subject matter and the social milieu presented in it, *Isabel Clarendon* (1886) differs from the novels that preceded it, but nevertheless offers a deepening and clarification of several of the thematic concerns adumbrated in *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed*. It presents a number of unclassed characters whose differing responses to their circumstances are analysed by Gissing in order to establish the often very limited margins within which they can achieve self-fulfilment or self-expression. In his first novel, Gissing had made a distinction between the artistically gifted Arthur Golding and the sensitive and intelligent Helen Norman, who, realising that she has not artistic genius, is obliged to content herself with paying tribute to the artist by studying and contemplating his works, thereby enriching her own existence. In *Isabel Clarendon*, Gissing again draws a distinction between the artist and the ordinary individual, yet here dwells primarily on the ungifted sensitive who suffers acutely from his inability to find a place in life. Bernard Kingcote, the central unclassed character of the novel, does not possess his friend Clement Gabriel’s natural talent and artistic dedication. When Kingcote asserts that he has no intellect, only temperament, he is indicating that he has an artistic nature but lacks the capacity to give it expression. This is painfully illustrated when he falls in love with Isabel Clarendon, bringing to his love all the energy of a sensitive nature which has idealistically fallen prey to the illusion that love can prevail regardless of the realities

of normal life. When his passion reaches its crisis and fails, Kingcote tries to find contentment by subduing all desire and worldly ambition in an attempt to achieve resignation with a consequent removal from life's struggle and the demands of passion and love.

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The setting of a substantial part of the novel's action outside London is an innovation. In the late work, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903), life in the country is presented as recuperative and healing in comparison to the urban struggle for existence, whether this be the attempt at survival in rented rooms in shabby, anonymous suburbs or more gracious living among the artificial pleasantries of the drawing-rooms of the well-to-do. When we first encounter Kingcote, he is enjoying with great relief the change from city to country living, but the idyllic rural setting which appeals to him so much contributes ruinously to the unrealistic nature of the romantic love that he nourishes for Isabel Clarendon. He idealises her as the "Lady of Knightswell," instead of seeing her as a society widow who lives in the country between London seasons. Pierre Coustillas has drawn attention to this aspect of Isabel's environment towards which Kingcote has such naive reactions and suggests how the novel indicates a potential which the novelist never fully exploited:

The book represents a new departure and is the first in a series of novels which show what Gissing would have done in the "society novel" had he been encouraged to follow that direction or convinced by self-criticism that in that direction lay his best hopes.¹

It is likely that Gissing's visits to the Harrisons at their summer home in Surrey, Sutton Place, in 1883 and 1884, and his stay in August 1884 at the Oxfordshire country house of Mrs. Gaussen, whom he had met through the Harrisons, contributed to his depiction of the country house in the novel.

Isabel Clarendon recounts the brief and unhappy love of Bernard Kingcote and Isabel Clarendon, who are eventually obliged to recognise their mutual incompatibility and to separate. The relationship is carefully designed to impress upon the reader that its failure is inevitable and it is set against a convincingly portrayed social background peopled with well-drawn subsidiary figures one of whom, Ada Warren, is one of Gissing's most interesting women characters. The novel opens with Kingcote, the principal unclassed character, whom we meet as he rambles the country lanes between Salcot East and Winstoke, villages in an unnamed English shire. It is Midsummer's Day and Kingcote, "accustomed to his own society," is enjoying the English countryside but without "exuberance of vitality in his delight."² Thus, Gissing quickly indicates the depressive side of Kingcote's character and his lack of self-assertive vitality. He is on a short holiday, but the theft of his purse forces him to prolong his stay and he seeks the assistance of

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Mr. Vissian, the rector of Winstoke, who gives him accommodation for the night. From Vissian he learns of Isabel Clarendon, known as the "Lady of Knightswell," and decides to rent a vacant cottage near the village and live alone with his books for a while. So, the first chapter closes with Kingcote musing about the "gentle lady whose title has such a pleasant and stately sound of romance," while he listens to the song of a nightingale in the park outside Vissian's house. The episode ends, however, on a bleakly ominous rather than a romantic note:

The bird ceased. Over the country passed a leafy murmur, a hushed whisper of the tall dark trees, growing to a sigh, almost a low wail, dying

over Knightswell. Then an owl hooted thrice. The night had turned cold. (I, 26)

This subtle use of suggestion is pervasive in the novel and encourages the reader to speculate about possible developments and connections which are hinted rather than baldly stated. This method is particularly effective in exposing Kingcote's self-deceiving idealisation of Isabel. Henry James would seem to have left this novel out of account in making his well-known comment about Gissing's having cast the "business of distribution and composition" in novel-writing to the winds.³ Gissing, in a letter to his brother of 19 July 1885, expresses explicitly a strong preference for a style of writing that is suggestive and economical:

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 & no more. In fact, it approximates to the dramatic mode of presentment.⁴

Although the first chapter is devoted to Kingcote, the remainder of the first volume of the novel deals principally with Isabel Clarendon and her circle and gives the reader a clearer view of the heroine than that afforded to Kingcote himself. He remains in bookish solitude in his cottage and can only imagine the sphere in which she moves and the people she knows. Thus, when he and Isabel meet and fall in love, he voices his passionate adoration of her in terms that conflict with the reader's more informed impression of the "Lady of Knightswell." Even though Isabel explains that she is the compromised victim of her dead husband's vindictive will, his passionate idealisation of her is such that, as he says, "paltry conventional judgements" mean nothing to him. He is determined to keep Isabel on a pedestal:

In that I love you, you are to me a peerless woman. Have you not stooped to me from the circle of your glory? Are you not to me embodied goodness,

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purity, truth? What am I that you should love me, my soul's worship? [...] I loved your name long before I saw you. They talked to me at the rectory, and called you the Lady of Knightswell. I pictured you, and indeed not far unlike yourself; just so gracious, so bright, so gloriously a woman. [...] What kindness of fate that brought me that day past the cottage. (I, 287-88)

While Kingcote fails to take account of the reality underlying his idealised conception of Isabel, the reader is clearly informed of all the details of her background and the reasons for her present position. The second chapter of the novel informs us that Isabel might have had to accept the lowly position of governess had she not been rescued by Lady Kent, an old friend of her mother's who gives her a London season under her protection. This generous intervention:

bridged the gulf between social impossibility and that respectable limbo where every aspiration is sanctioned and a dutiful waiting upon Providence is taught to ally itself with the graces of self-assertion. (I, 28)

The implication here is that, as a governess, Isabel would have found herself consigned to a social limbo difficult, if not impossible, to escape. It is certainly true that in *Emily Hood*, the heroine of *A Life's Morning* (1888), Gissing was shortly to offer a governess heroine who manages to escape her predicament, but it should be noted that Gissing invests Emily with a much more impressive personality than Isabel's, and we are made to feel that Emily's social

elevation has in it a certain spiritual and intellectual justice. In marrying Wilfrid Athel, Emily moves into her rightful social sphere and is no longer unclassed. Nevertheless, had it not been for pressure from the publisher's reader, Payn, who made it a condition of publication that *A Life's Morning* should conclude happily with the marriage of Wilfrid Athel and Emily Hood, Gissing, despite his conviction that Emily deserved her elevation in spiritual and intellectual terms, might well have decided on a bleaker conclusion. It would certainly have been more characteristic of him to have shown Emily still working as a governess at the close of the novel, or, as Pierre Coustillas has suggested, it may well have been his original intention to have Emily die of heart failure before her marriage to Athel.⁵

Isabel, on the other hand, differs from Emily Hood in that she is not artistic and has no intellectual interests. Like Emily, she would, as a governess, have been one of what Gissing calls the "odd women" (the phrase he was to use, in 1893, as title for one of his best-known novels), those women who, voluntarily or otherwise, occupy the fringes of the Victorian marriage market and are superfluous and unwanted, excluded from society. In terms of her

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subjection to male power, Isabel is probably no less odd, strictly speaking, as an eligible young beauty doing the social round under Lady Kent's protection, but it is more likely that she will succeed in making a profitable move in the marriage market, as Lady Kent makes abundantly clear:

Whether was it better, to be pursued by rascals as a beautiful governess, or to meet face to face with honest men who would be likely to fall in love with beauty for its own sake, or at all events be willing to purchase it respectably?
(I, 32)

Thus, when Isabel marries the wealthy Mr. Clarendon, her decision differs little from that made by Monica Madden in *The Odd Women*, when she marries Mr. Widdowson. In each case, a woman accepts the financial security of a loveless marriage to escape occupations which have no social value, in which they are simply regarded as sexual prey. Both marriages are appalling failures and, in the later novel, Gissing charts the failure and its consequences in painstaking and often painful detail. As *Isabel Clarendon* opens, however, the heroine is already a widow at the age of thirty-six and appears charming, beautiful and contented. In reality, her husband has left a will which obliges her to bring up and educate his illegitimate daughter, Ada Warren. When the girl comes of age, Isabel will be required to hand over her dead husband's wealth and property to the girl and live, herself, on a modest £300 a year. Clarendon has vindictively played on Isabel's weakness of character, assuming correctly that she has too highly developed a taste for wealth, comfort and social prestige to be able to renounce them until absolutely obliged to do so. So, as the novel begins, we encounter Isabel in residence at Knightswell where she plays the attractive society widow and guardian of Ada Warren, living an active social life the gaiety of which is belied by the conditions of the will.

In subsequent chapters, Gissing provides a detailed account of Isabel and her set and we acquire a very different image of her from that entertained by Kingcote. If, as John Halperin suggests, Mrs. Gaussen was the model for Isabel, Gissing cannot have unreservedly admired her, since Isabel is, by Gissing's demanding standards, something of a philistine. What is unexpected and striking about his depiction of Isabel is that she remains sympathetic and attractive despite her defects. Isabel is a keen horsewoman and enthusiast of the hunt who does not read literature, preferring society magazines. Her friends include people who do not suggest that she has any great intellectual discrimination, the most striking of whom is Mrs. Stratton, an evident butt of

Gissing virulent dislike of jingoistic, British militarism. Kingcote's mistaken impression of Isabel's world derives from his idealisation of her and from the fact that he does not belong to or identify with any particular social group. He has abandoned his medical studies after his father's death and now occupies a social limbo of his own making. Isabel cannot understand his taste for bookish solitude and the explanation he offers her is a revealing one:

'Free from what?'

'From sights and sounds which disgust me, from the contiguity of mean and hateful people, from suggestions which make life hideous; free to live with my fancies, and in the thoughts of men I love.' (I, 124)

Kingcote here echoes the anger and disgust expressed by Osmond Waymark at contact with what he calls "fools and brutes."⁶ When Kingcote tells Isabel that the society of refined and cultured people is the habit of her life, her reply indicates that she at least has few illusions about the life she leads:

'Refined – in a sense. Cultured? – I am not so sure of that. You would not call them cultured, the people I live amongst. I am not a clever woman, Mr. Kingcote. My set is not literary nor artistic, nor anything of that kind. I am disposed to think we should come into the category of "mean and hateful people" – though of course you wouldn't like to tell me so.' (I, 125)

Isabel has several redeeming qualities. She is good-natured and generous as we see from her charitable treatment of Mr. Meres, who had found himself in financial difficulties after the death of Mr. Clarendon. She is also self-aware and openly avows her lack of culture and limited intelligence. This clear-sighted honesty is evident when she talks to Rhoda Meres about love. When the younger woman, who loves the cynical fortune-hunter Vincent Lacour, declares her love for Isabel, the latter's reply is revealing, considered in the light of her later relationship with Kingcote:

'Dear, and that is what I cannot live without,' said Isabel. 'I must have friends who love me – simple, pure, unselfish love. I have spent my life in trying to make such friends. I haven't always succeeded, you know, just because I have my faults – oh, heaps of them! and often I'm as selfish as any one could be. But a good many do love me, I think and trust. Love has a different meaning for you, hasn't it, Rhoda? I don't think I have ever known that other kind, and now I certainly never shall. It asks too much, I think; mine is not a passionate nature.' (I, 110-11)

Thus, Isabel is aware that she has never known passionate love and she hopes that Kingcote's love for her will be strong enough to change her. She overestimates Kingcote, however, as he is

not forceful enough to claim her in the way that she desires. Kingcote emerges as a pathetic figure, unable to cope with his painful sense of the social gap between them. He is unable to act. In his relationship with Isabel, his social dislocation emerges with painful clarity and the comparison with his artist friend, Clement Gabriel, exposes the limitations of his intellectual life. When he has been barely three months in seclusion at Wood End, Kingcote writes to Gabriel,

who lives and works in London, devoting himself to his art. Kingcote is miserable and at a loss as to what to do with his life. He tells Gabriel that he had hoped to find some direction and purpose by leaving London, where he had considered himself “too closely guarded by habits, occupations, prejudices, conventional modes of thought” (I, 175). His time at Wood End has not helped him and he feels, if anything, more directionless and futile than ever. To Isabel, he compares this paralysis of his with Gabriel’s active exertion of his will in his devotion to his art:

‘That singleness of purpose – how splendid it is! He and I are opposite poles. I do not know what it is to have the same mind for two days together. My enthusiasm of to-day will be my disgust of to-morrow. I am always seeking, and never finding; I haven’t the force to pursue a search to the end. My moods are tyrannous; my moods make my whole life. Others have intellect; I have only temperament.’ (I, 128)

Kingcote has a strong affinity with Edwin Reardon of *New Grub Street* (1891), since both men have intellectual interests that are passive and neither can succeed in the commercial rat-race. Kingcote moves towards a resignation and abnegation of will and finally settles for a life as a shopkeeper in his home-town of Norwich. This fate interestingly anticipates that of the hero of Gissing’s posthumously published novel, *Will Warburton* (1905), who also finally settles down to life as a grocer. Kingcote’s unsuccessful love for Isabel seems almost an interruption in his inevitable decline towards this position of resigned passivity in which desire and ambition are gradually forgotten and the will becomes subdued. His eventual mood is one of contentment and he is no longer troubled by desires or unfocused ambitions. He writes to Clement Gabriel and begs him not to send accounts of the artist’s life in London as he dreads anything that might disturb what he calls his “placid materialism” (II, 316). When Kingcote’s sister asks him what lines he is repeating to himself as he sits reading a magazine (rather than a book) one evening after supper, he quotes in reply some telling lines from Tennyson’s *Maud*:

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‘Did I say them aloud?’ he asked. Then he quoted:
For not to desire or admire, if a man could learn it, were more
Than to walk all day like the Sultan of old in a garden of spice. (II, 315)

In the contrast between Gabriel the artist and Kingcote the shop-keeper, Gissing is making a distinction reminiscent of that made by Matthew Arnold, addressing Fausta in his poem *Resignation*:

Be passionate hopes not ill resign’d
For quiet, and a fearless mind.
And though Fate grudge to thee and me
The Poet’s rapt security,
Yet they, believe me, who await
No gifts from Chance, have conquer’d Fate.⁷

Like Kingcote, Isabel is destined not to escape the confines of her existence. By marrying Robert Asquith, she bids farewell to the passion Kingcote has briefly inspired in her and knows that she will not again experience such an emotion. After benefiting from Ada Warren’s renunciation of Clarendon’s vindictive legacy, Isabel comes to Kingcote to offer herself to him. In his rendition of this final meeting, Gissing finely captures both the limited nature of her love and the pathos of her own awareness of it. Knowing that Kingcote is incapable of forcefully

saving her from herself by making her renounce her comfortable life for the sake of a genuine love relationship, Isabel hopes instead that he may be able to adapt himself to her way of life. Accordingly, when they are both in London, she for the season and he to care for his sister, she invites him to her house in Portman Square, hoping that he will gradually come to feel at ease in such surroundings. Kingcote's extreme, almost pathological sensitivity, however, renders this impossible. While they are inspired by love, each believes that the other can be made to adjust to their separate needs, only to realise that their contrasting personalities make this impossible. Indeed, Gissing has already hinted at this inevitable failure of their love at the moment when Isabel first tells Kingcote that she loves him:

'With my soul I love you!'

'If I could but hear that for ever! Shall I hear it when this hour has become part of our memory, in days after this? Dare I think of it as music that I may hear at will?' (I, 289)

Isabel's failure to comprehend Kingcote's letters highlights the fundamental difference between

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the two lovers. They seem to her to have been addressed to someone else and she struggles to understand his fervid wording. It is obvious that Kingcote's unworldly soul-baring augurs ill for him in his dealings with Isabel:

Love did not stir in him vulgar ambitions; to dwell in the paradise of her presence was all that his soul desired; let the world go its idle way. Too soft, too tender; another would have read his outpourings with compassionate fear, dreading the future of such a love. He visioned a happiness which has no existence. Men win happiness, but not thus. (II, 47)

When Kingcote gets news of his brother-in-law's death and must return to London to care for his sister and her children, the harsh realities which he has hitherto avoided impinge on him again. His return to London is a shock to his psyche and an assault upon his senses. When he arrives at Waterloo Station and takes a cab to Camden Town, the change from Wood End is so extreme that he is at first unable to adjust:

He had lived so long in a dream; the waking was so sudden, the reality so brutal, that he must needs fall back again and close his eyes for a time, letting his ears alone instruct him. The newsboys yelling the evening papers insisted most strongly on recognition; they embodied this civilisation into which he had been dragged back [...] He wished for deafness.....

Where was Knightswell? Where was Isabel Clarendon? His heart sank..... (II, 91)

Yet, when Isabel comes to London, it becomes clear that the distance between Camden Town and Portman Square is, if anything, greater than that between it and Knightswell. Isabel takes a house for the season while Kingcote attempts to adapt to lodging-house life, which tortures his extreme sensitivity. When he realises that Isabel is living the London season to the full he falls prey to an unreasoning jealousy and despair which Isabel cannot comprehend or assuage. The account Gissing gives of Kingcote's experience of taking tea at Isabel's house confirms the novelist's comment that few men surpassed Kingcote in "ingenious refinement of self-torture":

He found himself introduced to some one, he said something, he drank tea. He was only conscious of living when at length in the street again. [...] The voices of the polite triflers about him grew to the intolerable screaming and chattering of monkeys. [...] He could not look at Isabel's face, and when she spoke to him he felt a passion almost of hatred, so fiercely did he resent the friendly indifference of her tone..... (II, 211)

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This painful estrangement bitterly bears out Kingcote's own playfully uttered words at a happier time and finely captures Gissing's acute sense of the sad transience of love:

'Life is full of tragedies. The tragedy, I have always thought, is not where two who love each other die for the sake of their love. That is glorious triumph. But where love itself dies, blown upon by the cold breath of the world, and those who loved live on with hearts made sepulchres – that is tragedy.' (II, 81-82)

Everywhere in Gissing's fiction we encounter characters who do not die for love but live on after love has died. He excels at depicting the dogged pathos of the dreadful necessity of continuation, of the quotidian endurance of pain which is the most significant characteristic of his various unclassed lovers.

Isabel and Kingcote are interestingly contrasted with Ada Warren, an unclassed character who succeeds in finding personal fulfilment and manifests her refreshingly independent spirit in spite of unpropitious circumstances. Isabel and Ada are shackled together by Clarendon's will. It poses a challenge to both, but only Ada rises to the challenge. Isabel fails to free herself and Clarendon accordingly succeeds in degrading and compromising her. At the beginning of the novel, Ada is an unwitting victim of the will and not even aware of its existence or of who she really is. At this stage, she is a rather unattractive figure, plain-looking, not very sweet-tempered and bookish:

Ada always spoke in a very direct way, with few words. Strangers attributed this partly to shyness, partly to a character lacking amenity. It was due to neither in fact, but was one of the results of her ambiguous position which made her at once reticent and heedless of conventional mannerisms. (II, 128)

She dislikes Isabel because, with a child's swift perception, she detects the latter's reluctance to welcome her when she is first brought before the Lady of Knightswell, a hungry and ill-clad child with a working-class accent. Ada has nobody to confide in and almost falls prey to the advances of Vincent Lacour but is eventually strong enough to reject him even though Lacour has awakened in her a hunger for love and affection. His mercenary behaviour illustrates Ada's anomalous position. Yet from her solitary suffering, she emerges a strong and independent woman who shows signs of blossoming into artistic expression:

She was driven to commune with herself in set speech; by degrees, to take her pen and write the words she would have uttered had any ear been bent to her. She resumed her habit of spending the mornings in the library, but no

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longer with books; either she sat in reverie, or, at her desk, filled sheet after sheet with small, nervous handwriting, her features fixed in eager interest, her whole body knit as if in exertion, in sympathy with the effort of her mind. (I, 235)

While Isabel fails to rise to the challenge posed by her dead husband's will, Ada successfully casts off its burden and we see her eventually develop into a fresh and hopeful individual who is keen to devote herself to artistic self-expression in the company of sympathetic companions. She finds such sympathy in Thomas Meres, the impoverished literary man who offers her friendship and understanding and encourages her first tentative efforts at writing. It is to him that she expresses her scornful rejection of what she calls her father's "conjuring with human lives – something basely ludicrous," in terms which indicate the strength and superiority of her character in comparison with Isabel's:

'And to consent to be the instrument of a dead man's malice!' Her scorn was passionate. 'Isn't it enough to think of that? What did he care for me, a wretched, parentless child, put out to nurse with working-people! It was baser cruelty to me than to Mrs. Clarendon. Oh, how did she consent to be rich on those terms?' (II, 306)

Ada is the only unclassed character in the novel who manages to develop towards the possibility of finding a satisfactory niche in life, a sphere of activity that will satisfy her needs and aspirations. In this respect she is closer to the artist, Clement Gabriel, than she is to either Kingcote or Isabel. With unusual perceptiveness, Isabel herself at first thinks Kingcote as a man of intellectual tastes might prove a friend for her awkward young ward rather than a lover for herself. Isabel's literary taste runs to society magazines, and the man she eventually marries, her cousin Robert Asquith, aspires to nothing more demanding than an adventure story by Captain Marryat. Ada, on the other hand, is able to tell Kingcote on his first visit to Knightswell that she has read Sir Thomas Browne. Furthermore, Gissing draws Kingcote and Ada together in an appealing comic moment when Kingcote indulges in some ironic humour at the expense of Mrs. Stratton, complimenting that British matron on her rearing of her aggressive sons, one of whom Ada has reprimanded shortly beforehand for his attempts to kill a bird with a catapult:

'Why, that's magnificent! Their lives will be a joy to them. Constitution, of course, is much; but I'm sure they have to thank you for an admirable bringing-up.'

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Ada, who sat close by, was regarding Kingcote curiously, just suppressing a smile as she caught a glimpse of Mrs. Stratton's gratified face. (I, 239)

While it is true that Kingcote finds Ada abrupt and caustic when they first meet, his impression mellows with better knowledge of her, so that he comes to reflect that: "Her forehead, taken apart with its weight of dark hair, might have been modelled for Pallas" (I, 236). This interestingly links Ada with Gissing's first, nobly intellectual heroine, Helen Norman of *Workers in the Dawn*, who is also referred to by her guardian as Pallas. In addition to a certain intellectual affinity with Kingcote, Ada will later go on to publish poems, thus transcending the limitations of his passivity and moving into the sphere of Clement Gabriel, the working artist.

As Pierre Coustillas has pointed out, *Isabel Clarendon* "has a richness of which no stock

has yet been taken" (I, xv). In particular, the novel is notable for the evidence it offers of the extent of Gissing's imaginative sympathy for his unclassed characters. In this respect, it looks forward to a number of the better-known later novels. In Kingcote's inability to cope with the struggle of life and, in Schopenhauerian terms, his rejection of the will to live, we find adumbrated the corresponding fate of Edwin Reardon in *New Grub Street*. In Isabel Clarendon's weak and transient love, we find something of Amy Reardon, who prefers to leave her husband rather than face poverty with him, and Gissing manages to make both of these weak women sympathetic to the reader by pointing up their own awareness of the baseness they display in the act of desertion. Through Kingcote, Gissing engages with a type which was to prove increasingly important to him, the man who is sensitive, intelligent, capable of passionately idealised love, but is not gifted artistically and is unable to find expression for his aspirations. He is more similar to Edwin Reardon than to Arthur Golding since the dilemma for Kingcote and Reardon is not presented in terms of the debate between the conflicting demands of art and social reform, but rather as the problem of how an artistically minded sensitive can live in a world which he finds alien to his passions and aspirations. It is their artistic sterility which is most galling to them. Renunciation and the subjugation of will are the only course open to them if they want to find some sort of peace on earth. Hence Kingcote manages to find contentment as a provincial bookseller but does so only by subduing all his emotions and desires. This renunciation of life is contrasted to the purpose and dedication to art displayed by Clement Gabriel and also in the maturing optimism of Ada Warren. Gissing's statement in "The Hope of

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Pessimism" is convincingly confirmed in this novel:

There is, in truth, only one kind of worldly optimism which justifies itself in the light of reason, and that is the optimism of the artist.⁸

His unclassed people are sometimes lucky enough to find hope in art and occasionally Gissing even allows them to be happy in love, as Piers Otway is in the late novel *The Crown of Life* (1899). The majority, however, must accept the defeats that life and circumstances thrust upon them and must try to come to terms as best they can with an often bitter and restrictive fate. Gissing's lasting compassion and much of his finest writing are reserved for such mute sufferers who can only endure.

¹Pierre Coustillas, Introduction, *Isabel Clarendon*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1969, Vol. I, pp. xv-lx (pp. xv-xvi).

²*Isabel Clarendon*, Vol. I, pp. 5-6. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text of this essay.

³Henry James, "London July 1, 1897," *Harper's Weekly*, 31 July 1897, p. 754, in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, ed. P. Coustillas and C. Partridge, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, p. 290.

⁴*The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, ed. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, Vol. II, 1991, p. 320.

⁵Introduction, p. xvi.

⁶*The Unclassed*, Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1976, p. 44.

⁷*The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922, p. 92.

⁸"The Hope of Pessimism," *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*, ed. P. Coustillas, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970, pp. 75-97 (p. 95).

The *Boston Evening Transcript's* Reception
of George Gissing's Works

Bonnie Zare, Francis Marion University
and Pierre Coustillas

When George Gissing died in December 1903, only two Boston newspapers reported his death: the *Boston Evening Record* and the *Boston Evening Transcript*. Indeed, it was the *Boston Evening Transcript* (1830-1941) that principally informed Gissing's audience of the American

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publications of his novels and thus fostered his reputation. This most popular highbrow newspaper was said to have a greater "impact on literary history than any other Boston Paper" (Kenny, p. 176). Louis M. Lyons, a historian of the *Boston Globe*, described it as reflecting "the atmosphere of old Boston" and being "archaic and intensely individualistic" (qtd. in Kenny, p. 182). According to Joseph Edgar Chamberlin's 1930 history of the *Transcript*, Latin and French often appeared in its first years of copy, thus targeting an audience of letters. Later it deliberately sought to attract the gentry with its genealogies of Boston's prominent families, and thus generally could be relied upon to shun crass commercialism.

Literary criticism appeared in the *Boston Evening Transcript* from the start and thus was illustrated to have priority for the newspaper (Chamberlin, p. 26); in fact, its first office was a frequent lounge for authors and poets (Chamberlin, p. 208). Although it had no full-time book review editor until Charles E. Hurd assumed the office in 1875, by 1922 the interest he generated allowed his successor, Edwin F. Edgett, to oversee an entire section devoted only to books. He even expanded his services to include a weekly radio broadcast of book reviews, faithfully transferred to print in the *Transcript*. Along with Hurd Gissing's work was supported by Kate Woodbridge Michaelis, and, more importantly, Edgett (1867-1946), who became the *Transcript's* literary editor shortly after graduating from Harvard. Edgett was certainly a distinguished man of letters: he wrote more than 80 articles for the Dictionary of American Biography, as well as several other books, including his own autobiography and a selection from his columns, *Slings and Arrows*. The *Boston Evening Transcript* reviews of Gissing follow in chronological order.

[The works cited above are: Chamberlin, Joseph Edgar, *The Boston Transcript: A History of its First Hundred Years*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930; and Kenny, Herbert A., *Newspaper Row: Journalism in the Pre-Television Era*, Chester, Connecticut: The Globe Pequot Press, 1987.]

Kate Woodbridge Michaelis, "Who is George Gissing? The Great English Novelist of the Cruelty of Life," 21 February 1896, p. 11

See the reprint in *George Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (1972). This treats *Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed*, *A Life's Morning*, *The Emancipated*, *New Grub Street*, *Denzil Quarrier*, *The Odd Women*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *Eve's Ransom*, and *The Paying Guest*.

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Anon., "New Books: A Story by George Gissing,"
28 February 1896, p. 6

Each one of Gissing's books that has come into our hands of late supports the first-formed judgment. He sustains his individuality in every page – a unique individuality, insomuch as it is shorn of many of the features that are commonly found in the writings of the so-called realists. Gissing is a prince in this school, yet his stories are singularly free of the baldness of utterance – the oftentimes brutal prodding we receive from others in his realm. For example, in "The Paying Guest," published lately – a little story, most unpretentious, and simply written – there is but one character worth studying; there is only one event in the entire pages that approaches towards the thrilling, yet it is never once stupid. Strange and most novel is the style of Gissing, as shown in this work. One is half-inclined to laugh on finishing the story and murmur: "How simple!" at the same time wondering why the impression is so strong, indelible and lasting. But it is there. The imprints of Louise Derrick's complex nature are forever fixed in our minds. We understand this unheroic-like heroine as did none of the nearer, conventional, under-sized figures about her; we understand her as does only Gissing himself; and why? Not because the author has dissected her make-up, bit by bit – we should have lost patience during such an operation, and have learned to hate her heartily, as did those about her, with their narrow visions, apparently seeing the bad outweigh the good; only Cobb, the blunt, the shrewd, the finally successful lover, saw the meaning of her vagaries, and he but dimly. Gissing has, by the magic handling of simplest words, by a wonderful penetration and pellucid style – a very cathode ray of literature – pierced and made transparent one of the most fascinating as well as difficult types of every-day life. [New York: Dodd, Mead & Co.]

Kate Woodbridge Michaelis, "The Latest Gissing," 30 April 1896, p. 6

The Ethiopian has changed his skin, the leopard his spots. George Gissing, historian and expounder of the middle classes, has written a book in which we find no one of lower rank than a university man, by choice and not by necessity a tutor, and "Sir" and "Lady" figure largely on his pages!

"Sleeping Fires," announced by the Appletons for February, but unexpectedly delayed until April, has appeared, and the readers of Gissing, those who belong to the division of his admirers – there are two sorts of Gissing readers – have taken it up eagerly, expecting another one of his sermons in the form of novels. The title in itself seemed to promise so much that it was natural to look for something of the same order as "The Emancipated"; or, "Toilers in the Dawn" [*sic*], but as if to show that he is versatile in addition to many other things, he has written for us a book which concerns no evil of the day, which is without a reform problem, and yet is well worth thoughtful reading.

"Sleeping Fires" might almost be called a duet, so closely does the interest centre in Lady Revill and Langley. There are three other characters, and, in a way, the handsome and lovable

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boy Louis is the motive power of the book, but he only floats across the scene and disappears, while Mrs. Tresilian affects us but through her effect on others, and the tutor is just a walking gentleman, brought in now and again for useful purposes and then sent about his business.

But though this clever book treats no topic of the hour, there is a question of vital importance touched upon in its too few pages, and there is a doctrine strongly enunciated. The question is suggested, but not dwelt upon, and readers differ as to the answer Gissing gives – does honesty pay in affairs of the heart? – and I am one of those who believe that he thinks that it does, for the happiness which comes to these two people is of a nobler and more enduring

kind, though they have to wait for it some sixteen years, than it would have been had they procured it by lying, in the days of their callow youth.

The great truth proclaimed and dwelt upon is one so robust and healthy that it merits being preached from the house-tops. That joy and happiness are duties, and that by them, repentance can best be shown.

Edmund Langley and Agnes, Lady Revill, have both sinned – the man in the all-too-common way, the woman in committing a loveless marriage; the sins have been against themselves and each other.

These sins are of the past; no tears or anguish can undo them; both sinners recognize this fact, but the knowledge affects them differently, possibly because of the difference of sex. Lady Revill would fain lament the irrevocable past in sorrow and self-abnegation; she considers that she has forfeited the right to be happy, and turns away from the joy within her grasp. Langley, roused from a life of dreamy uselessness by both sorrow and hope, declares that their regret must follow their crimes and be buried out of the sight of men.

“... Time even to repent, Agnes, though not in sackcloth and ashes. You have done ill, and so have I, but it is not to be repaired by asceticism. Break down the walls about you – not add to their height and thickness! Walk in the summer twilight, dearest, and look to the rising of many a summer sun.”

“What right have I to take the easy path?”

“Health and joy are the true repentance. All sins against the conscience – what are they but sins against the law of healthy life?”

“I have sinned so against others. And to make no atonement in my own suffering – ”

“The old false thought! Health and joy – it is what life demands of us...”

Did the book contain nothing of good but this brave and wise gospel, it were well worth the reading, but there are tender and dreamy pictures of modern Greece, seen through the mists from the days of the past, that form fit setting for the figures in the brief drama. “The Acropolis, rock and ruins all tawny gold, the work of art inseparable from that of nature, and neither seeming to have bodily existence; the gorgeous purples of Hymettus; that cloud on Pentelikon, with its melting splendors which seemed to veil the abode of gods” – these are the scenes which Langley leaves to begin his new life of healthy purpose – and to remember the “sorcery of Athens only as a delightful dream.”

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Joseph Anderson, “George Gissing As He Is: The First Capable
Novelist of the English Masses,” 13 June 1896, p. 24

See the reprint in Pierre Coustillas, “Gissing in the *Boston Evening Transcript*: His Interview by Joseph Anderson,” *Gissing Journal*, April 1996, pp. 23-29.

Anon., “New Books: A New Gissing,” 2 July 1896, p. 6

One is prone in reading a series of books by a noted and favorite author to identify one in the set as conforming more closely than the rest to the inner life of the writer and reflecting, as it were, his own personality. So it is of George Gissing’s works that “The Unclassed” reveals many, we are certain, of the sad and smarting experiences that have been Gissing’s own, and there constantly comes the confounding though pleasant thought that Waymark, the hero, and the interesting sad-eyed man in the portrait in the frontispiece are one and the same.

But to the book itself and its motives, which are sure to create much conflict of varying opinions, even among Gissing’s closest followers and sympathizers. A girl of undeniably strong character, homeless and alone in London, meets a too-frequent fate and leads an immoral life,

yet not of the most repulsive kind. In her daily walk along the Strand she encounters Waymark, a devout student of human nature, a writer. A strangely discreet intimacy is here formed, the outcome of which is that through a pure love for him, and a wish to gain his respect, the girl changes her life, not only becoming virtuous, but afterwards noble.

There is nothing mystifying in Gissing's doctrine; it is simply put forth uncontaminated with brutal wording and undiluted with drivelling sentiment. Those who stamp it as preposterous and open to assault in so strong a statement of it, must remember that its proclaimer does not speak of what he knows not. He has not viewed that extraordinary lower life of London through any peepholes of conventionalism or bigotry. Gissing is once and for all a free-thinker in the broadest sense of the word, and in the pursuance of his artisanship he neither flinches nor stumbles. Read what Waymark says of the needs of to-day's literature: "Art nowadays must be the mouthpiece of misery, for misery is the keynote of modern life."

It has been said that Gissing is lacking in consideration for women; that he does not believe in the equality of the sexes; and perhaps these critics are partly justified in their conclusions. But this position of his may be explained in part by the fact that in the classes of which he treats women's intellects are usually stunted if not depraved, and he is only truthful to the type he chooses. To Ida Starr in "the unclassed" Waymark makes this reply when she has related her sad past, ending with the words "Now I am not quite nineteen.... Nothing in meanness or vileness or wretchedness is a secret to me. Compare me with other girls of nineteen – perhaps still at school. What sort of a companion should I be for one of those, I wonder? What strange thoughts I should have if ever I talked with such a girl; how old I should feel myself beside her!" And this is the hero's answer. "Your knowledge is better in my eyes than their

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ignorance. My ideal woman is the one who, knowing the darkest secret of life, keeps yet a pure mind – as you do, Ida."

Gissing's hero has an infinite respect for such a woman as this; he even counts upon her strength as greater than his own. "He divined in her a strength of character which made her his equal; it might well be his superior.... The chances were at least as great that he might prove unworthy of her, as she would prove unworthy of him."

Is this from a cynic and relating to one of the "unclassed"?

Yet in a moment of scepticism, when disgruntled with a pinched existence, his hero's tirade on poverty and riches winds up with the mocking words, "make me a millionaire and I will purchase the passionate devotion of any free-hearted woman the world contains." But this happened in the story before Waymark's meeting with Ida, and therefore should have been quoted first.

Though Gissing never goes too far in his expression of sentiment or pathos yet the scene between the child Ida and her sick mother is a most tenderly pathetic passage and goes to show the triumph of the mother-love over all passions.

Gissing has in this book again flung down a gauntlet to religionists, and utilizes the whole power of his satire when he depicts and unfolds the emptiness of creeds.

The book is quite free from the descriptive element; no space is wasted on the superficial; too much has to be told of the living, and action is ever strong. But in the scene at Hastings, when Ida renounces her past, and symbolizes her renunciation, a most exquisite form of narrative comes into play. The exposition of tenement-house horrors, and Ida's methods of alleviating the misery of her tenants, would easily form a separate volume, which should enrich every humanitarian in the reading. But above all, the lesson and its demonstration as advanced by this most modern and clear sighted of novelists – that woman's moral standpoint is as high as man's, that it is true in her case, as in his, that the past may be retrieved, that her redemption may be as sure, and that her future may be as honorable, is of the first importance to society.

[New York: Fenno & Co.]

Arthur Mark Cummings, "George Gissing's Gloom,"
9 October 1897, p. 15

George Gissing is forty years old; and during half of those years he has been writing assiduously. He has produced ten novels, besides his miscellaneous writings. His style is idiomatic, strong, delightful. The critics are of one mind as to his power and charm. Even a journal so little given to gushing as the *Saturday Review* said, several years ago, that "Mr. Gissing's admirers include all readers of his books who have any power to appreciate literature." And yet, notwithstanding his high gifts and the commendation of the judicious, he has not achieved the conquest of the reading public. His books are known only in very limited circles. If he were to die tomorrow it would cause scarcely a ripple in the world of letters; and to such of the general public as chanced upon his obituary it would serve also as an announcement that he had ever existed.

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It is well worth while to examine the work of this unappreciated author and to inquire why he has not attracted a wider audience. Not that popularity is an essential of merit; and it may possibly seem to Gissing of no importance. Some authors prefer to talk only to the select few. I imagine that if George Meredith should find himself in active competition with E. P. Roe he would commit hara-kiri. No one expects or desires that "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel" will be clamored for at the bargain counters like "The Opening of the Chestnut Burr." Gissing may be happy enough in the smile of the critics. But the lover of good reading ought, for his own sake, to make the acquaintance of "The Odd Women" and "In the Year of Jubilee."

George Gissing was born in Yorkshire, in moderately comfortable circumstances, and educated at Owens College, Manchester. His father was an earnest, capable, high-minded man, who made some name as a botanist. At the age of twenty George Gissing came up to London, "with a few shillings in his pocket," to help furnish pabulum for that ominous, bowelless monster, the multiple printing-press. The youngster roughed it pluckily, saw a good deal of life among the lowly, found that his few shillings diminished, felt the pinchings of hunger, lodged in a cellar at a rental of two shillings a week: yet stuck doggedly to his ideals and resolves. After a while he managed to make a living by tutoring pupils; and finally recognition and moderate prosperity came slowly to him. At present he lives with his little family at Epsom, near London. It is to the years of struggle that Mr. Gissing and his readers owe most; for they gave him that minute, comprehensive knowledge of the life of the middle classes which make him emphatically the novelist of the average man and woman.

Gissing's eye is introspective. Observing facts with photographic fidelity, he still estimates these facts only as the expression or the governing environment of the soul. His stories have little of plot, and little of action. It is what his men and women are, not what they do, that interests us; and he shows us with iron mercilessness how fatally their doings are the corollaries of what they are. We like or dislike them, we blame or praise, just as we do the men and women about us. But we are ever gripped by their pitiless reality.

The sources of Gissing's power are his lucid masterly style, his observation, his sympathetic insight and – most blessed gift of the gods to man – his sense of humor. He is as shy as Miss Austen herself, and springs upon you, when you least expect it, some delicious phrase or turn of thought that lights up his sombre sky like a lightning flash across a leaden firmament. You cannot read far without feeling the power of a master. The story, once begun, is not put down until it is finished. Whether you like or dislike, whether you smile or sigh, you will not shake off the magician's spell until he chooses. His theme is always the same: the Demos, under

whatever title, the great average humanity; the blind, inarticulate beast, wallowing painfully on, it knows not wherefore, it knows not whither. Its groans are his groans, its wrongs his wrongs, its blighted and fruitless aspirations are his. He carries its sufferings in his bosom. He portrays them with savage clearness, and demands justice for them. He says to his thoughtful reader,

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sometimes sadly, sometimes cynically, sometimes angrily: Behold this monster in the abyss of time! Here he is in all his hatefulness, his ludicrousness, his pathos. What have you to say to him or concerning him? What are your social and educational and religious theories doing for him? Is he any happier, any less contemptible than when he howled in the agora and forum and bellowed in the amphitheatre? Here is seething London, fringed round with two million souls; housed in sham, stuccoed "villas," leading sham, witless lives, bound by the most sordid ideas, striving each to outdo his neighbor in lying pretentiousness. Why are they living at all? What good can spring from an endless succession of these uninspired creatures? The beasts of the field are far less ignoble. The cattle on the hills, in calm, sincere repose, live their lives with dignity and completeness. But this frenzied humanity, insincere, unsatisfied, impotent, vexed by cunning devils; this Gadarene herd rushing down the steep, what shall we say of it?

Professor James assures us authoritatively that happiness is mostly a physical matter. The old quip about the liver is scientific as well as witty. Only for liver read solar plexus. Some people are born to be happy, as some are born to have red hair. Only science has not yet found for us the peroxide that can bleach from the darker spirits their melancholy tints. Gissing finds no balm in Gilead. He is content with the dreary negative. He does not strive to pluck up the rooted sorrow; he waters and fosters it and sadly watches it grow apace. Of one thing he is certain, and that is that our ideals of social equality and modern education are absurd and mischievous. He keeps up a running fight with "education" in all his books. It does not educate; it merely inflates. It brings not wisdom and content but pretentiousness and discontent. It lifts men and women out of the sphere in which it has pleased heaven to place them; but it does not fit them for any higher sphere. The modern system of "examinations" has never been so mercilessly ridiculed as in the story of Jessica in "In the Year of Jubilee."

Then, too, Gissing has a pretty quarrel to pick with modern democratic theories. In "Thyrza" and "Demos" he shows the foolishness of trying to break up the God-ordained stratification of society. This notion that one man is as good as another; that the hand which swings the axe and controls the loom is fit to be laid on a nation's helm – Gissing will none of it. His feudalism is uncompromising, with a fine old fruity flavor. Tennyson cannot outvie him:

"Put the feet above the head and swear the brains are in the feet!"

It is all a pain and a wonder to Gissing. Perhaps a tour through the United States would do him good. Perhaps not.

Of course, no author of Gissing's proclivities could long keep his hands off the "Woman Question." We century-enders have pretty well succeeded in transforming the "eternal womanly" of Goethe into the infernal womanly, in more senses than one. Oh, the women that we have had set prancing before us on this Black Crook stage of the "woman problem" – the weak and the strong, the hysteric and the pugilistic, the woman with uncompromising rights and the woman with hideous wrongs, the learned and the simple, the morbid, the anæmic, the cheap, false and lying, the lascivious, the crazy. True, they are all in every man's experience if he has

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seen a few decades in the world, but can women be of no further use to us except on the operating table of the vivisectionist?

The unprejudiced reader is constantly protesting within himself against the injustice of imputing to society the woes which are merely the natural results of individual folly. If Denzil Quarrier comes to grief, it serves him right for being so foolish and unmanly. If Jude the Obscure acts like a flighty fool, it is he that is to blame, not the sons of Oxford. If John Storm chooses to make an ass of himself in all the relations of life, let not society nor religion be held accountable.

Gissing is true to life, but to only a part of it. There are happy hearts as well as sad ones in London suburbs. The grocer's lad whistles merrily as he carries his basket through the gate of the stucco villa. Many an honest artisan returns from his labor, enjoys his supper and dandles his baby, and listens to the fireside babble without a thought of his mournful destiny. Many a solar plexus in Camberwell is supplying to its proprietor a blithe contentment with things in general which Mr. Gissing may well envy. May we not hope that Gissing will give us some of the bright side? He is in the prime of life, with many years presumably before him. Is pessimism a necessary part of his art; or is it not rather a malign influence under which he has unconsciously fallen? The way for him to help this inarticulate humanity is assuredly not to damn it to eternal pessimism. Optimism is not only a hope, but a promise of fulfilment.

The great public is not attracted by pessimism. Its healthy, self-preserving instinct warns it to prefer the positive, however unsatisfactory, to the negative. It has enough dull grey skies, at best, without seeking them in books. E. P. Roe has good points, after all! The true success is to inspire hope. The ideal is the only real, and shall endure after what we call real has perished. Gissing will rise to his full stature when he sees and portrays life on all sides. That he is not better known is partly the fault of readers and partly his own fault. He has written ten books, but his masterpiece is yet to come. That masterpiece will mingle the sweet with the bitter; it will gild the clouds with generous bursts of sunlight.

Until that time the reader can enjoy some pleasant hours with "Demos" or "The Odd Women" or "In the Year of Jubilee." The last-named is the best of Gissing's novels thus far, and a book sure to find a wider audience than it has yet reached.

Anon., "New Books: The Last Gissing," 22 October 1898, p. 21

Mr. Gissing's new book may certainly be called "low-lived." Its characters are a young woman whose occupation in life is the sale of programmes at a theatre, a commercial gentleman, the keeper of a little china shop and her daughter, and a runaway husband who, having come into a title, shirks the humble connection he has made while he was "on the town." There is also a very mild form of the "private detective" species. There is scarcely any atmosphere as that of

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cheap cockney life, and it is this which Mr. Gissing strives to create in language, conditions and personalities. To call it unheroic would be merely a commonplace truism. It might, however, be treated as the elder novelists created it from a humorous or a cynical point of view. Dickens and Thackeray have found opportunities for wit and pathos in sordid squalor and cheap vulgarity. Captain Shandon in the Fleet and the Micawbers at Todger's amuse and delight us. Mr. Gissing merely attempts to photograph, and, even so, with an ill-focused camera, so that the disagreeable conditions are all out of proportion. It is possible that those who are familiar with the types of cheaply good-natured, free drinking, sporty people, such as the author chooses to deal with, may find pleasure in contemplating these efforts at reproduction of the speech and actions with which they are familiar. With such persons, the slangy talk, the love-making, all chaff and vulgarity, the faint snobbery of a "nobleman" in the background may have attractions. American readers must certainly turn such pages with wonder and impatience. The expectation that something, even were it something bad, is coming – that some mystery is to be developed,

some surprise sprung for the reader, keeps him in suspense for a little while – and then he perforce resigns himself to the mere inanity which prevails to the close.

Mr. Gissing had a certain weird reputation from his previous efforts in romance writing. “The Town Traveller” would certainly create none, of any kind, for an author. [New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company]

[This review was reprinted under the same title in the *Boston Weekly Transcript*, 28 October 1898, p. 5.]

Kate Woodbridge Michaelis, “Books of the Day: George Gissing,”
9 November 1898, p. 10

Last year the readers of Gissing, a constantly growing class, looked forward to a great treat. For months he had been busied with a book which he felt would prove to be his masterpiece. When “The Whirlpool” appeared it was, in many ways, a disappointment. Mr. Gissing had in it dealt with a higher class than he had previously concerned himself with, but in this new “world” he had found the same shortcomings and the great lack of ultimate content that he had gravely and seriously recognized in the lower state of things about which he had formerly written. One put down the book with a sigh, and felt it to be on a lower plane than “In the Year of Jubilee.”

But if the Gissing of 1897 was not what we had hoped for, the three books of this year have more than made amends for their predecessor. Few writers of Mr. Gissing’s power and strength, concentration and sincerity, can in little more than six months put before the public three such books as “Human Odds and Ends,” a volume of short stories; “The Town Traveller”, and “Charles Dickens, A Critical Study” – it might well be called an appreciation – each one perfect of its kind.

Perhaps of the three “The Town Traveller” is the least important. It is the most cheerful thing from Mr. Gissing’s pen; the hero, a commercial traveller, is an individual, not a type; he is

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hard to insult, impossible to repress, slow to take the world in any way unkindly. His commonplace, vulgar nature is so sweet withal that he wins friends wherever he goes and makes use of them mainly to show his unselfishness. Mrs. Clover has a pleasant future before her, and deserves it. Polly Sparkes, who is the legitimate grand-daughter of Fanny Squeers, plus youth and beauty of hair and coloring that we have an idea that famous vixen did not boast of, is selfish, mercenary, bad-tempered and small-natured; also she is not repulsive and she is interesting. The plot is trifling but serves to bring out the marked characteristics of the three principal characters.

“Human Odds and Ends,” though but a collection of twenty-nine short stories, is one of the strongest things that Mr. Gissing has yet done. That he can elaborate, can spread his butter over a very large piece of bread and have it palatable, he has already shown in his books of four and five hundred pages closely printed; but his power of condensation, a power which enables him to say and suggest in a few pages more than most writers can put into a good-sized volume, is a new manifestation of strength.

The stories differ greatly; the first, “Comrades in Arms,” is the brief tale of a man and woman. They are both quick, clever, hard-working, both lonely. The woman works for a little sister who is engaged to a man in Australia, and nearly kills herself in getting her ready to go and be married. The task at an end and the little bride gone, the woman breaks down entirely, and the man, who has not had even a sister to be interested in, comes to her aid, pays her physician, her nurse, her board, out of his not too abundant earnings, and saves her life. When she is convalescent he is allowed to see her, and the great wave of tenderness that sweeps over

him at the sight of her helplessness and womanliness is by him recognized, or mistaken, the woman declares the latter, to be love. Sorely she is tempted, for in spite of being a successful newspaper hack, she is still a woman, but she resists and refuses to be his wife. Months after they meet by accident, both well, prosperous and busy, both content with life; meet and exchange a warm hand-clasp, a cheery greeting; meet and part, and one more mistake in this world of mistakes has not been committed.

There follows the story of two men, one a justice and the other a vagabond brought before him. They had been boys together; one is now a failure, the other is a success. One is foot-free, careless, happy and penniless; the other a man of dignity, with house, lands, wife and position – above all, a wife. This wife has no sympathies with his likes and dislikes, but demands from him that which she cannot, or will not, give. Fortunately for the ne'er-do-well, she is away from home, so that the justice, who has paid the fine, is able to take him to his house, clothe, feed and shelter him. In reward, the vagabond paints for him glowing pictures of the lands he has roamed through, the life he has enjoyed. All that he had gone through the successful man has craved; at last they plan to run away together, and the arrangements all made, the soldier of fortune goes off to buy the tickets on a steamer which is to take them to a far-off land. The justice wanders about his house, filled with a strange boyish content. At last the longings of a lifetime are to be gratified, he is to tear down the restraints that have walled him in, and be free! He writes a note

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to his wife, wonders with half-malicious glee what will be her feelings when she learns of the emancipation of her slave, takes down an atlas from the shelf and sits before his desk, poring over a map, – then his head falls forward on the book and next morning his servants find him. And on the departing steamer's deck his sometime friend stands, vainly watching, muttering disconsolately, "I knew that wife of his would get hold of him!" It isn't much to tell, but it is a great deal to read.

"The Prize Lodger" is unique. This tells the tale of an eccentric man who is a model of lodgers, but who remains a painfully short time at each house, even though professing himself charmed with his surroundings. At last he falls into the hands of an astute landlady who retains this prize by threatening to turn him out. So fearful is he of being made to move against his will that he marries her, only to find that he has become, unless he takes shelter outside his own walls, a puppet in her hands. His woe is the tragic note that comes like one of Wagner's motifs in everything from the hand of Gissing, but it is not now loud enough to harrow the listener.

"A Parent's Feelings" is as bad as any one of Arthur Morrison's "Tales of Mean Streets," but the worst is reached in "The Beggar's Nurse," a sketch of three or four pages which makes the flesh crawl. A refined and educated woman who has been a nurse in a charity hospital recounts to her friend the manner in which she has grown unsympathetic, cold, finally cruel, in the midst of disease, suffering and death. When she tells how she has enjoyed, in the absence of other relief, inflicting mild tortures on the paupers that "nobody owns" it is not to be wondered at that the friend listening to the tale of moral degradation gasps out, "I have a friend whose daughter wants to take a course in the hospital – I will tell her your story!" The book closes with a tiny story of a patient, long-suffering wife, who reclaims her husband by love and silence – not of the eloquent kind – and [Gissing] says of her when her youth is over and her task accomplished, "She sits there with thin face...type of a vanishing virtue. Wife, housewife, mother, shaken by the harsh years, but strong and peaceful in her perfect womanhood. An old-fashioned figure, out of harmony with the day that rules, and to our so modern eyes, perhaps the oddest of the whole series of human odds and ends."

And now for his study of Dickens, a book that will delight the lovers of the great writer, will answer his detractors, and add to his readers as nothing else, I am sure, could do. Of Dickens, Mr. Gissing says: "A time of ugliness: ugly religion, ugly law, ugly relations between

rich and poor, ugly clothes, ugly furniture. What would Charles Dickens have made of all this had his genius been lacking in the grace of humor?" Since Dickens wrote, the world has moved forward in beauty; these last days of the century can no more be called a "time of ugliness," but of that which is still unlovely, Gissing, the spiritual son of Dickens, writes with the same fearless courage and generous contempt, his successor in all, alas, but that same saving grace of humor!

Those who criticize the critic fall foul of the chapter in which Mr. Gissing speaks of Dickens's "Women and Children," and it must be confessed that his words are bitter. But – there are women and women; the class of which Dickens wrote with biting sarcasm is the same class

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which Gissing himself attacks, they existed before the flood, they will exist, in one form or another, to the end of the world and – it may be that there are men to match them! It is not, though, in agreeing with his author that this critic excels. It is in his perfect handling of the subject, in the gentleness with which he touches, while admitting, Dickens's weak points, the generosity with which he brings forward the strong ones, the whole-souled comprehension and appreciation. And his careful and exhaustive "Study" rings so true – how proud it makes us all to read it! Of Gissing surely will someone say, many, many years let us hope, from now, as he says of Charles Dickens, "Whatever his mistakes and defects, insincerity had no place among them."

Anon., "Current Literature: Gissing's Last Novel,"
16 December 1899, p. 25

"The Crown of Life" is love, and Mr. Gissing rewards a hero who has been unusually faithful after the manner of men, with this crown, won after many years. This is the story, which is crowded with figures which interpose themselves between the destined pair, while the maiden, not knowing her own mind, and the lover, discouraged by lack of response and all sorts of accidental obstacles, are continually getting parted. She engages herself to another man, he gives way to sensual distractions in his despair, but they drift together in fateful currents. We leave them with all menaces dispersed, entering upon the summer sea, moderate youth at the prow and sober pleasure at the helm – for they have got to be quite middle-aged folk. Mr. Gissing's method is rubricated. There is a ruddy spot every now and then, for he must needs depict a human nature which is human. His types of character suggest a hundred novels. They are like the faces of friends after a long absence, strangely familiar. They are sketchy for the most part and seem to come and go to give the author opportunity rather than to fulfil a necessary part in the story. Of course the realist must always depict a sad tale. His marriages are failures, his good men are unbelievers, his clever men are knaves. There is much that is sordid and shocking. The lights of the picture are good breeding, English restraint, scientific devotion, the fine flower of worldliness. There is good talk, good manners and a touch of drink and the devil which lurk so near London society. The best portrait in the gallery is that of the rising young diplomat and man of affairs, the highly cultured, cold-blooded "imperialist" who cares not who is crushed or what principle is betrayed provided the power of England is extended. Perhaps the atmosphere of this interesting story is fairly genuine. It conveys in its very random touch that confused, divergent, seething impression which those who go beneath the surface know so well. So long as England is possessed by such a spirit as is now uppermost, there may be an appearance of harmony. But instead of being a real harmony it is only the forcible suppression of the independence which is the hopeful attribute of the English democracy. The fake unity of a war spirit implies a violent upheaval and perhaps a resultant chaos. The discords of those who struggle after the ideals of domestic well-being evolve harmony and the

perpetuity of the state. It is obvious that Mr. Gissing is a "Little Englander" and a type of patriot of the Harrison rather than the Chamberlain model. We wish he had time or a method to let us know more of some of his people, and in this sense you leave his book with the tribute of an appetite. [Frederick A. Stokes Company.]

Edgett, Edwin F., "Writers and Books," 10 July 1901, p. 13

The English papers bring news that the health of George Gissing is causing anxiety to his friends. He has made his home for some time past in Paris, and the climate of that place appears to be having a serious effect upon his lungs. Lately, however, he has been visiting H. G. Wells at Sandgate, and a slight improvement is reported as a result of that change.

Anon., "Books of the Day: A Study of Charlatanism,"
24 July 1901, p. 12

Dyce Lashmar, the hero of Mr. Gissing's latest novel, is the apotheosis of charlatanism. Indisputably, he is one of the most clearly and cleverly drawn characters in the fiction of the year, and his large-minded impostures are decidedly interesting. As "Our Friend, the Charlatan," Dyce Lashmar, the son of a poor curate, educated with many sacrifices at college, is a type of the English young man with large ideals and no practicality except sufficient to turn his attention to obtaining a living from respectable society by the exercise of his wits. Through a young woman who represents "the new woman" in England, and is private secretary to the eccentric and wealthy Lady Ogram, Lashmar becomes the Liberal – that is, Lady Ogram's – candidate for a seat in Parliament from a small borough. Here he enters upon a career of double-dealing which would fit another man for jail. With many high-sounding words he attracts Lady Ogram to the theories of a French political economist which he puts forward as his own, and to save himself trouble with his rich patron he enters into a mythical engagement to marry her private secretary. Induced at first by a real interest in the young man, until she comes to know his charlatanism, Miss Connie accepts the situation. It is a woman, of course, who is his undoing. Lady Ogram's niece comes to live with her, and the young man, although engaged, so far as the world is aware, straightway falls in love. An unexpected incident gets Lashmar, Miss Connie and the niece into a network of prevarication, which is unravelled when Lady Ogram brings them all together and dismisses the lovers. The rather surprising denouement is artistic and consistent.

Mr. Gissing, in telling this story, hits modern society some hard blows at its weak points. The main characters are remarkable for their consistency. At their first meeting Dyce makes an unfortunate reference to a "hideous paper mill," in speaking with Lady Ogram:

"'Hideous paper mill, eh?' she exclaimed, in a half-laughing note of peculiar harshness; 'I suppose you don't know that I built it?'"

Whereupon the young man takes the view that from the standpoint of picturesqueness the paper mill would better be cut out of the landscape. Lady Ogram takes up the cudgels for the paper mill, and in a few moments we find the young man remarking:

"'Mrs. Gallantry's suggestion,' he said, 'is admirable, but I rather think that in the given circumstances Lady Ogram took the wisest possible step. We have to look at these questions from the scientific point of view. Here was a community falling into wreck, cut loose from the

orderly system of things, old duties and obligations forgotten, only hungry rights insisted upon. It was a picture in little of the multitude given over to itself. Into the midst of this chaos Lady Ogram brings a directing mind, a beneficent spirit of initiative and the means, the power, of reestablishing order. The villagers see willing industry substituted for brutal or miserable indolence; they see a striking example of the principle of association, of solidarity – of perfect balance between the naturally superior and the naturally subordinate.”

Could anything be neater? As a piece of character drawing, Mr. Gissing has surpassed himself in *Dyce Lashmar*. The diversified human types presented are sketched with such skill that there is little need of plot to hold the interest of the reader from first page to last. “*Our Friend the Charlatan*” is worth studying. [New York: Henry Holt & Co.]

Edwin F. Edgett, “Writers and Books, 11 July 1903, p. 17

A London authority has given out the following list of books as those in greatest demand at West End bookshops during the spring season: George Gissing’s *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*... [Gissing’s book was listed first.]

Anon., “The Record of 1903: Literature: George Gissing, Novelist,”
29 December 1903, p. 12

The death of George Gissing at the early age of forty-six is a matter for regret. His output had been very considerable, comprising over twenty books in the last nineteen years, and seldom failing to interest a large number of readers with striking portraiture of the life of the poor workers of London. He was the counterpart of Walter Besant; instead of his optimism and his reforming suggestions Gissing gave the hard facts of life as he saw them, without any scheme in his mind for betterment. He was largely affected by Dickens in his treatment of such themes, but only in manner. He published in 1898 a rarely interesting critical essay on Dickens, and wrote the introduction to the Rochester edition of that novelist’s works. Of his own writings in the way of fiction, which was his line, “*The Nether World*,” “*New Grub Street*,” “*Denzil Quarrier*” and “*Our Friend the Charlatan*” may be mentioned as representative. Mr. Gissing fell into a decline a year ago, and went to the Pyrenees for relief. There, at St. Jean de Luz, he died yesterday of pulmonary consumption.

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Edwin F. Edgett, “Writers and Books,” 11 March 1905, p. 31

Veranilda was the last story that Mr. George Gissing wrote, but he left another which has not yet been published. It is entitled “*Will Warburton*” and is in Mr. Gissing’s characteristic style.

Edwin F. Edgett, “Writers and Books,” 21 June 1905, p. 21

George Gissing’s last novel, “*Will Warburton*” the manuscript of which was found among his papers shortly after his death, will be published in this country by E. P. Dutton and Company. It records the experiences of a young man who, thrown upon his own resources, was obliged to earn his living in the face of tremendous odds.

Anon., “George Gissing’s Last Novels,” 26 July 1905, p. 16

Although “*Will Warburton*” gives eloquent voice to Mr. Gissing’s persistent plea for the

struggling thousands of the intellectually submerged, it will obviously add nothing to the reputation of the author of “New Grub Street” and “The Unclassed.” Indeed, it bears evidence of being little more than an incomplete sketch laid aside to be completed at its author’s leisure – a leisure, alas, too soon interrupted by Gissing’s untimely death. Nevertheless, “Will Warburton,” like everything that has come from his pen, cannot be neglected for a moment by the student of modern fiction. Unfinished as it is, it is a deep study of London life and modern character, analyzed by a master-hand. The very commonplaceness of its theme is daring; its hero is a veritable hero in spite of his surroundings. A bald statement of its plot cannot be other than misrepresentative of its meaning; the minuteness of Gissing’s method is necessary to its complete understanding. It is sufficient to say that Will Warburton is involved in financial difficulties through no fault of his own, that he bravely dons a grocer’s apron in order that he may keep a mother and sister from starvation, that he long succeeds in keeping his business a secret from them, and that he eventually sticks to the grocer’s trade and wins the girl he loves. Something less sombre than the usual Gissing story of London life, “Will Warburton” may accomplish an excellent purpose in introducing a modern realist to readers who have been repelled by the strength and truth of his earlier novels.

Of “Veranilda” there is little to be said. Like “Will Warburton,” it is published posthumously, but unlike that novel, it is a tale of bygone times and ancient people. Its narrative skill is Gissing’s own, but it nevertheless gives constant evidence that its author is a stranger in a strange land. No matter how well he knew Italy and the Mediterranean, he knew London better, and admirers of the real Gissing will be right in having naught to do with “Veranilda.” It is of value only as a revelation of an undeveloped phase of its author’s talent. [New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.]

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Gissing and Virgil: a Note

Bouwe Postmus
University of Amsterdam

At the request of his brother, Gissing sent him a passage from Virgil’s *Georgics*, which Algernon wanted to use in connection with the novel he was engaged on at the time, *A Masquerader* (1892). In a note to the opening paragraph of Gissing’s accompanying letter the editors of the *Collected Letters of George Gissing* identify Virgil’s “praise of country life,” more specifically ll. 513-40, of the *Georgics*, Book II, as the passage in question.¹

As it happens there is, in the Beinecke Library of Rare Books and Manuscripts, at Yale University, an undated autograph copy of another, slightly shorter passage from the *Georgics* which precedes the one identified by the editors. Although the two passages are clearly thematically related, it would seem probable that the survival of Gissing’s autograph should allow but one conclusion, viz. that it was this translation that he sent to Algernon. Below we give both the original and Gissing’s translation.

| | |
|-----|---|
| 458 | O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, |
| | agricolas! quibus ipsa procul discordibus armis |
| 460 | fundit humo facilem victum iustissima tellus. |
| | si non ingentem foribus domus alta superbis |
| | mane salutantum totis vomit aedibus undam, |
| | nec varios inhiant pulchra testudine postes, |

465 inlusasque auro vestes Ephyreiaque aera,
 alba neque Assyrio fucatur lana veneno,
 nec casia liquidi corrumpitur usus oliui:
 at secura quies et nescia fallere vita,
 dives opum variarum, at latis otia fundis
 470 (speluncae vivique lacus et frigida tempe
 mugitusque boum mollesque sub arbore somni)
 non absunt; illis saltus ac lustra ferarum,
 et patiens operum exiguoque adsueta iuventus
 sacra deum sanctique patres; extrema per illos
 474 Iustitia excedens terris vestigia fecit.

Virgil, *Georgica*, II, 458-474

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“O happy countryfolk! blest supremely, do they but know their wealth! For them, far from the clash of arms, the kindly earth teems with free gift of fruits. There no lofty mansion pours from its proud gateway the throng of early courtiers; no portal pearl-inlaid calls for the wonder of their eyes, no gold-embroidered vestments, nor bronze of Ephyra (Corinth); not for them is the white wool stained with Assyrian purple, nor the oil’s pure flow spoilt with the bark of cassia. But peace untroubled, & a path of life that never leads astray, a life that never fails in its abundant stores; leisure amid broad domains, with shadowed nooks, & gleaming lake & sequestered valleys, the lowing of oxen & soft slumber in leafy shades – these are their riches. To them are given the sports of the woodland & the field, a youth made hardy by endurance, the pieties of religion, the honours of reverend age. When Justice passed away from the earth, among them was left the last print of her footfall.”

Virgil’s *Georgics*, II. 458-474 of Book II.

¹Cp. letter to Algernon of 26 March 1891, *Collected Letters*, vol. IV (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1993), pp. 278-79: “Herewith I send the passage of Virgil – the whole of it, with a free translation – done chiefly for my own amusement. It is noticeable that this idealization conflicts with the general tone of the *Georgics*, which is distinctly practical & rather tends to the expression of hardship.”

* * *

Book Reviews

George Gissing’s Memorandum Book: A Novelist’s Notebook, 1895-1902, edited by Bouwe Postmus, Lewiston, N.Y: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996; Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 1997.

Little by little what one may call for want of a better phrase Gissing’s private papers are becoming public property, and the moment is now approaching when all the commonplace books, note books and memorandum books which, after their passage in auction rooms, were known to be in existence, will be available in book form. In this respect as in several others, Jacob Korg was a pioneer when he published Gissing’s *Commonplace Book* (1962). The diary followed in 1978, with “Extracts from my Reading” under the title *George Gissing at Work*

(1988) in its wake, and more recently the *American Notebook* (1993). The interest of a further notebook, known as the Huntington Memorandum Book on account of its location since December 1961, had been stressed by the present writer in his bilingual edition of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1966), but this short and often cryptic document, which Gissing must often have carried in his pocket from 1895 to 1902, was allowed to lie in peace for years among the treasures held by the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Editing this notebook has posed very much the same problems as editing the *American Notebook*. Deciphering entries often made in pencil in all sorts of places, sometimes in a street or in a churchyard, was in the worst cases almost impossible, then discovering the reasons why and the circumstances under which Gissing had jotted down a word or a sentence occasionally proved even more difficult. Some topographical enquiries were made necessary by the editor's scruples and/or curiosity, with remarkable results in the case of the entries that were turned to account in *The Paying Guest* or those made at Chester in April 1896, when he was on his way to Wales. The extent of the research in reference books and in the writer's own works and other private papers, notably the diary and the scrapbook, will only be realized by those careful readers who never pass a note number without savouring the elucidation supplied in the note itself – on no fewer than 340 occasions!

It is self-evident that the status of this hitherto neglected memorandum book is altered beyond recognition by the editorial comment. Bouwe Postmus's methodical approach to his subject is often illuminating, and it is one of the merits of this book that it will be useful, if not indispensable, to Gissing's future biographers as well as to critics of his later works, with the two significant exceptions of *By the Ionian Sea* and *Veranilda*, two volumes the sources of which, unsurprisingly, are found elsewhere. Indeed Gissing can hardly be imagined to have used such a modest notebook when exploring Southern Italy or working on sixth-century Rome in London or Roman libraries. Readers anxious to know what essential events in Gissing's later life are mentioned here, from Edward Clodd's 1895 Whitsun party to the renting of the flat at no. 6, rue de Billancourt, Boulogne-Billancourt in June 1902, will find a carefully compiled list of 19 events on pp. vi-vii, with dates which invite consultation of the diary. Only a very thorough knowledge of the works could have suggested to the editor pertinent *rapprochements* between some flimsy entries and passages scattered in the fictional works of the period. Besides the

example relating to *The Paying Guest* alluded to above, the most striking is that of "waterbottles encrusted with white advt of whisky" seen in an East Anglian public house, which found their way into the private room of a Dulwich inn where Mr. Gammon and Polly Sparkes have a meal together. Conversely the correspondence between some rough notes taken in Northern Wales and several descriptive passages in *The Whirlpool* could not have been missed, since Gissing recorded his purchase of Black's *Guide to Wales* in his diary shortly before and mentioned such topographical details of the landscape as the peak of Eifl and Carn Bodvean about the same time.

The status of the Memorandum Book is most nicely defined by its relationship with *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. No editor of this book (of which no edition is currently in print) will henceforth be excusable if he or she ignores the list of 51 items briefly recorded in the Memorandum Book (Appendix I) which were put to artistic use in "An Author at Grass" and *Ryecroft*. Equally welcome is the list of 60 other items that constitute the link between the *Commonplace Book* and the same two versions of Ryecroft's meditations. The thoroughness of the editor's meticulous work deserves high praise.

Naturally enough we discover some new details about Gissing's domestic and personal

circumstances, about Edith (“she”), about his movements, the times of trains he took, the money he spent on this or that occasion, snatches of conversation with Dr. Festal in Arcachon (“You ought to have made much more progress”) or with the inmates of the Villa Souvenir. And we are glad to catch glimpses of such friends and correspondents as Edward Clodd, Louis Elson or Marie Zakrzewska, and to be offered as a premium a few interesting fragments from the *Commonplace Book* which, for some reason, were not printed in the New York Public Library edition.

As one goes through the 100 pages of small print corresponding to the 96 of the original, one is occasionally led to ask oneself questions some of which might spark off fresh consultation of printed texts or manuscripts. Inevitably the many references to the scrapbook will be sources of frustration to practically all readers, but there was no way of solving this problem except by publishing the two documents, a short one and a very long one, simultaneously, which for various reasons was impossible. The description of the original *carnet* in the opening paragraph of the introduction will – also inevitably – remind readers of the diary of another notebook mentioned by Gissing as being in his pocket on that terrible day of the summer 1897 when Edith behaved so offensively at Castle Bolton, but who knows what became

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of this doppelgänger of the document under review? Indeed 1897 is a year when Gissing did not use the present notebook at all. There is a gap between mid-1896 and May 1898 when we find him settled in Dorking, reading “some queer books about Anglo-Israelism.” A subject for a story noted in early 1896 – “the man who meets temper with temper, and triumphs” – is indeed suggestive of the Rolfes in *The Whirlpool*, but does it not also bring to mind stories like “The Honeymoon” and “The Tyrant’s Apology” which, although published before the Huntington Memorandum Book entry was made, testify to the permanence of the idea in Gissing’s subconscious during the most part of his married life with Edith Underwood? A harmless question if any occurs to one on coming across the name of that extraordinary man John Wood Shortridge – what can have justified his presence in a list of questions Gissing wished to ask his agent Pinker during his stay in England in April 1900? It seems likely that we shall never know.

Let us be content with the rich editorial matter that accompanies Gissing’s scrappy entries. Bouwe Postmus will certainly impress all his readers. There is scarcely any question raised by this memorandum book that he has not answered. A single example will suffice to suggest the nature and extent of his intuitions. At a time when he was still staying in Arcachon Gissing entered this note: “Prof – – has detected the variability of a star in the constellation of Lyra.” Without any assistance from the context, the editor went straight to Gissing’s source, the *Athenæum* for 19 April 1902, where the professor’s identity is revealed – Stanley Williams of Hove!

Why are readers given the choice between two editions of the book, one American, the other Austrian, which differ only in their bindings and the portraits of Gissing? Let readers guess. The present reviewer can only refer them to the descriptions of the volumes concerned given in the April and July 1997 numbers of this journal. — Pierre Coustillas

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, edited by D. J. Taylor, and *The Whirlpool*, edited by William Greenslade, both published by J. M. Dent, Everyman Paperbacks, 1997.

Ten years ago, when the Harvester Press passed into other hands than John Spiers’s, practically all Gissing’s books were in print, most of them available as paperbacks. Then, with the exceptions of *Demos* and *Sleeping Fires* (if *Books in Print* can be trusted), all the titles obtainable from that firm, vanished into thin air as well as the few which had been reissued

shortly before by the Hogarth Press, then on its last legs. Reconstruction generally follows demolition, and it is in that phase that we still are. The reconstruction of a list of Gissing titles, reasonably complete, to which readers who discover Gissing can turn once they have realised that they *must* absolutely read all his fiction and volumes of *belles lettres* – some twenty-five volumes – is in the making. The two new Everyman Paperbacks are stages in the process.

Neither D. J. Taylor, novelist, critic and journalist, nor William Greenslade, an academic in the West Country, are new names in Gissing studies – back numbers of this journal testify to this – and they have edited *New Grub Street* and *The Whirlpool* with an ability which does credit to them and to their publisher. It is pleasant to note that while none of the three paperback editions of *The Odd Women* currently obtainable has anything more to offer than Gissing's text and an introduction (also, in one case, a misprint-ridden bibliography), these two new volumes, besides an introduction, contain notes on the text, on the author and editor, a chronology of Gissing's life and times, textual notes, suggestions for further reading and – solely for *The Whirlpool* – a section on Gissing and his critics, as well as a chapter-by-chapter summary, for students one imagines.

Both editors, within a limited space, do full justice to the stories they discuss and, if *New Grub Street's* status as a classic need not be justified by lengthy comments, the reappraisal of *The Whirlpool* as one of Gissing's very best novels and one of the most significant English novels of the 1890s will undoubtedly be accelerated by William Greenslade's detailed analysis of its merits. Seen in context, the eminence of *The Whirlpool* is obvious enough. The editor's ground-breaking article on the novel in *Victorian Studies* (Summer 1989), modestly omitted from his bibliography, had paved the way for this reassessment. D. J. Taylor, who usefully connects *New Grub Street* with the new biographical information on the circumstances of composition revealed in Gissing's diary and correspondence, is less concerned than Greenslade with the "period piece" aspect of the literary scene as seen by the novelist than in the permanent relevance of the image he offers. If he concedes that "it would be perfectly possible, given a little ingenuity and the appropriate reference books, to trace the originals of Alfred Yule and his arch-rival Fadge back to the editors of genuine periodicals," he perceptively observes that "one of Gissing's strongest characteristics is his ability to produce stories of bygone life which, close inspection reveals, bear an uncomfortably close relationship to some of our own arrangements."

One feels that Mr. Taylor, a contributor to a number of newspapers and periodicals, might some day have more to say on the subject if, in the distant future, he ever writes some autobiographical or reminiscential volume. In another part of his introduction he places himself in the wake of George Orwell (whom he rightly views as "perhaps the twentieth-century writer who comes closest to [Gissing] in temperament") by stressing Gissing's affinities with such Russian writers as Turgenev and Tolstoy. To Taylor, among many other things, *New Grub Street* is "an exercise in resistance, and the element being resisted is caricature." A minor character like Whelpdale, who is allowed to remain human, would, he observes, have been burlesqued out of existence by a novelist like Dickens. Psychological realism he regards as one of Gissing's strong points, which he illustrates with examples taken from the relationships between Marian and Jasper, Reardon and his wife, and from the encounter between Alfred Yule and the penniless doctor met at a coffee-stall – a scene sadly misinterpreted in a booklet published thirty years ago. "Touches of this kind," which show Gissing the masochist refusing to go the facile psychological way, "give the book," D. J. Taylor writes, "a scarifying edge, and, as a novel, a curious kind of double life." Gissing is never more touching than when, as a narrator, he is perceptibly pleading against himself. "Not many novels," Taylor concludes, "have been written

with such intensity, or at such dramatic personal cost” – a judgment which links up nicely with Greenslade’s view that “*The Whirlpool* does not engage our attention simply through its sociological exactness or its naturalistic documentation,” but from beginning to end, “as a truthful psychological drama of tragic proportions.”

One criterion of editing lies in the quality of the notes. They are more abundant, and rightly so, in *The Whirlpool* than in *New Grub Street*, which contains fewer topical allusions likely to be obstacles in the reader’s way. Besides D. J. Taylor had two predecessors, William Greenslade only one. The notes to *The Whirlpool* are of considerable interest. Not only are they historical, geographical, literary, musical and linguistic, they include selected quotations from the manuscript version of the novel, held by the Huntington Library. (The MS of *New Grub Street* offers no comparable interest.) Two of them will not pass unnoticed: (1) that which identifies the concert hall, Prince’s Hall, where Alma gives her recital in Part II, Chapter 5. It disposes of the implausible assumption made by the editor of the Harvester edition that Gissing actually meant the Albert Hall; (2) the one which points to and corrects authorial errors in the

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timing of events from page 176 onwards. These slips had been known to some readers for a decade, but it was essential to record them in an English edition.

All students and readers of Gissing should be grateful to both editors as well as to the publishing director of Everyman Paperbacks, without whose genial instrumentality, none of the five Gissing titles carrying the Dent imprint would have been revived. It is to be hoped that, in the next few years, some of the working-class novels, notably *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, and *Thyrza*, all out of print in inexpensive editions, together with *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* and *By the Ionian Sea*, will gradually benefit from her positive consideration.

Pierre Coustillas

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Notes and News

Professor Paul Delany, whose Everyman edition of *In the Year of Jubilee* must be on the shelves of most readers of this journal, informs us that he has signed a contract for a new biography of Gissing with J. M. Dent. He is known as the author of two biographies, *D. H. Lawrence’s Nightmare* (1978) and *The Neo-pagans* (1987).

Only recently did we discover the existence of a pamphlet published by the Wilmslow Historical Society in September 1993, *George Gissing at Lindow Grove School, Alderley Edge, Cheshire*, by Patricia Hodson. It reads like a highly condensed version of the Enitharmon booklet first issued in 1969 and reprinted in 1971, a new, considerably enlarged edition of which, with William Gissing on a par with George, could now easily be produced. Patricia Hodson, who did not read her proofs very carefully, has enlivened her five-page text with three illustrations – the ink and watercolour drawing by Joe Clay of the Gissings’ family home, Thompson’s Yard, Wakefield; a fairly recent photograph of the former Lindow Grove School, now locally known as College Flats; and the eternally popular portrait of Gissing by Rothenstein. In 1993 the College Flats were for sale. One wonders what has become of them.

Belatedly the news also reached us that Ian J. Deary, Professor of Differential Psychology at the University of Edinburgh, turned Ryecroft’s meditations to good account in one of the Honyman-Gillespie lectures at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary last November, “Ageing and

Intelligence: Senility, Sagacity or Serenity.” His theme was changes in cognitive function as we grow older. Most of the research points to decreases in intelligence – with exceptions for certain facets – but Professor Deary addressed things that are thought to increase with age, such as wisdom and knowledge. He also tackled the idea, in a less scientific way, that people are not necessarily unhappy with lessening of their powers of computation and thought as they grow old. And to this end he cited Addison (from the *Spectator*), Hardy (from his poem “Twenty-Four and Seventy”) and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Spring XVII, “To the end I shall be reading – and forgetting...what more can mortal ask?”).

Elmar Schenkel’s article “Als das Fahrrad in die Literatur kam,” subtitled “Von Mark Twain bis Heidegger; zwischen Trieb und Antrieb: Ein Sujet macht Furore” (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 April 1997, [Weekend] Supplement “Bilder und Zeiten,” [p. 2]), should augur well for the sale of Wulfhard Stahl’s forthcoming edition of Bertz’s *Philosophie des Fahrrads*. It is a long article which shows no mean knowledge of bicycling as it appears in German, French, American, and English literature. Bertz’s book is placed in good cultural company.

Attention has been drawn previously to the *Modern Library Collector*, a bi-yearly journal edited by Alan Oestreich, 340 Warren Avenue, Cincinnati OH 45220-1135, which publishes information on the history of the Modern Library founded in 1917 by Albert Boni and Horace Liveright, and reprints old press cuttings and announcements which appeared on the series in the last eighty years. Such regular features as the articles by experts like Gordon B. Neavill and Peter Chocheles help one to place Gissing’s two titles, *Henry Ryecroft* and *New Grub Street*, in context. Their bibliographical history is extremely complex. It is likely that about 100 variants of the former title (in print from 1918 to 1942) and 50 of the latter (in print from 1926 to 1942) were issued. Hitherto unrecorded variants keep turning up in American bookstores.

A number of articles on Gissing’s correspondence as well as on his life and works have been announced by correspondents. A review by Dr. Marilyn B. Saveson of the last two volumes of the *Collected Letters* is to appear in *Victorian Periodicals Review* and an assessment of the nine volumes by the same scholar in *Studies in the Novel*. Forthcoming numbers of *Notes*

and *Queries*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature and Etudes Anglaises*, not to speak of *English Literature in Transition*, in which Professor Martha Vogeler has reviewed the first eight volumes, are also to contain reviews of the last few volumes. Review articles of the whole set will appear in the United States, the Netherlands, Italy and Japan. The next number of *Calabria Sconosciuta*, the attractively produced quarterly devoted to Southern Italian life past and present, will offer a selection of Gissing letters of Italian interest translated and introduced by Dr. Francesco Badolato, together with a letter to the editor by Wulfhard Stahl suggesting the publication of a new illustrated *critical* edition of *By the Ionian Sea* in Italian. Lastly, an article by Gwyn Neale on Gissing in Wales is to appear in a Welsh periodical, *Country Quest*, while an essay on Gissing’s humanism by Bouwe Postmus awaits publication in a Dutch journal later this year.

Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *Short Stories*, translated by Shigeru Koike, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1997. Light and dark brown papercovers with red and white dust-jacket. 289 pages. 600 Yen. ISBN 4-00-322475-2. This volume of the Iwanami Library contains Gissing's portrait by William Rothenstein, "A Victim of Circumstances," "Lou and Liz," "The Poet's Portmanteau," "The Justice and the Vagabond," "The Light on the Tower," "The Ring Finger," "Humplebee," "Christopherson," a Translator's Postscript and Acknowledgments. "Lou and Liz" and "The Ring Finger" are translated for the first time into Japanese. The publisher's address is: 2-5-5 Hitotsubashi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, 101-02 Japan.

George Gissing, *Sur les rives de la mer Ionienne*, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1997. French version of *By the Ionian Sea*, translated and edited by Hélène and Pierre Coustillas. Stiff pictorial card covers, featuring Gissing (in 1895) and the Greek temple at Metaponto. 205 pages. 110 French francs. ISBN 2-85939-529-6. The volume contains a substantial introduction on Gissing's career and his travel narrative, textual

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notes (biographical, historical and topographical), and a bibliography. The book can be ordered from the publishers: Rue du Barreau, B. P. 199, 59654 Villeneuve d'Ascq Cedex, France; or from Ros Stinton, whose address is that of the *Gissing Journal* on the inside back cover.

Bouwe Postmus (ed.), *George Gissing's Memorandum Book: A Novelist's Notebook, 1895-1902*, Salzburg: Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1997. Stiff pictorial card covers. The front cover reproduces one of the portraits of Gissing by Russell and Sons (1895); the back cover is a facsimile of two pages of the notebook. xvi + 82 pages. £12 post paid if ordered from Ros Stinton as above. ISBN 3-7052-0087-9.

George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, with an introduction by Elaine Showalter, London: Penguin Books, [1997]. Second impression. ISBN 0-14-043379-1.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Frederick Karl, *George Eliot, Voice of a Century: A Biography*, New York: Norton, 1995. Gissing and his first published novel appear on p. 77.

Daniel Born, *The Birth of Liberal Guilt in the English Novel*, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995, Chapter 4, "George Gissing: The Apologetics of Disengagement." This chapter offers a baffling combination of perceptive views and gross errors which show that its author comments on books he can hardly have read.

Jane Miller, *School for Women*, London: Virago Press, 1996. A new book by Clara Collet's grandniece. Many pages are devoted to the Collet family and about half a dozen to Gissing and his relatives.

Manfred Pfister, ed., *The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Italies of British Travellers*, An Annotated Anthology, Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1996. Contains five passages from *By*

the Ionian Sea, and a short biographical entry on Gissing.

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Bouwe Postmus, "Recenzioni," *RSV: Rivista di Studi Vittoriani*, Anno II, Fascicolo 3, January 1997, pp. 130-34. Review of Volume 8 of the *Collected Letters*.

Roberta Dehò, "Francesco Badolato, uomo di scuola e di cultura," *L'Esagono* (Settimanale di informazione della Brianza), 32nd year, no. 14, 7 April 1997, p. 18. With photograph of Dott. Badolato and half a column on "George Gissing, scrittore inglese, amante dell'Italia."

D. J. Taylor, "The Usual Bad News. – Gissing's letters: the unsurpassable record of a late Victorian mind," *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 April 1997, pp. 3-4. With a photograph of Gissing taken by Hal Way in 1901. Review of Volumes 5 to 9 of the *Collected Letters*. This major review article by one of Gissing's admirers was the leading article of no. 4,907.

Patrick Parrinder, "Notes and Reviews," *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, no. 45, April 1997, pp. 155-57. Review of John Goode's *Collected Essays*, with some allusions to Gissing.

I. C., "Travel," *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 May 1997, p. 32. Short review of *By the Ionian Sea*, published in America by Marlboro Press/Northwestern University, distributed in England by Turnaround Distribution, 27 Horsell Road, London N5 1XL. Paperback selling at £9.99. The review begins with a gross factual error about the date of Gissing's journey to Southern Italy.

Anthony Quinn, "History's most ill-advised marriage: Anthony Quinn considers the central mystery of George Gissing's life," *Daily Telegraph*, Arts & Books Section, 14 June 1997, p. A2. Review of Volume 9 of the *Collected Letters*.

Pierre Coustillas, "Kipling and Gissing," *Kipling Journal*, June 1997, pp. 41-42. Letter to the editor about Kipling's knowledge or otherwise of Gissing's work.

Frédéric Regard, ["Gissing"], in *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, by François Laroque *et al.*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996. Gissing appears on pp. 504, 506, 507-08.

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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.

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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*.

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