

THE GISSING JOURNAL

“More than most men am I dependant on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”  
– George Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*.

\*\*\*\*\*

Volume XXXVI, Number 1

January, 2000

\*\*\*\*\*

Contents

The Darwinian Influence on Gissing’s <i>In the Year of Jubilee</i> , by Christina Sjöholm	1
Gissing in Catanzaro: A Commemoration, by P. Coustillas, D. Grylls, B. Postmus	11
Allusions to Gissing in the Complete Works of George Orwell, by Peter Morton	25
“The Poet’s Portmanteau”: A Flirtation that Dares not Speak its Name, by Robert L. Selig	30
Gissing and the Crystal Palace, by Sydney Lott	34
Book Review, by Kazuo Mizokawa	38
Notes and News	40
Recent Publications	41

-- 1 --

**The Darwinian Influence on Gissing’s  
“In the Year of Jubilee”**

CHRISTINA SJÖHOLM  
Uppsala University

**Introduction**

Gissing’s interest in the implications of evolution and heredity is manifest in several of his works, but in *In the Year of Jubilee* evolutionary theories play such a crucial role that I will suggest here that the novel, inspired by George J. Romanes’ article on “Mental Differences Between Men and Women,” was consciously shaped around the Darwinian thoughts presented there.

The fact that Gissing read and made notes on Romanes’ article has been pointed out earlier in connection with the issue of women’s education in *Jubilee*,<sup>1</sup> but its influence actually

reaches much further, permeating the novel as regards themes, plot and characterization. It even sheds some light on the disturbing denouement of the novel where the reader, having witnessed Nancy Lord's hard but successful struggle for independence, looks with disbelief at how her husband, who for selfish reasons abandoned her when she was pregnant, on his return quickly disarms her into vapid submission – an ending which seems both structurally and psychologically unfounded in its abruptness.

George Romanes (1848-1894), a friend and disciple of Darwin, spent much of his life supporting and popularizing his master's theories. Not surprisingly, Romanes' statements on the gender-bound differences in mentality originate from *The Descent of Man* (1871), where Darwin devotes a chapter, "Secondary Sexual Characters of Man," to these issues. Romanes' article is tainted by the same sweeping generalizations and prejudiced "scientific" estimations of women's nature and intellectual capacity as Darwin expresses, which he combines, however, with half-hearted support of the women's movement. He acknowledges its importance and

-- 2 --

influence "not alone in the nursery and the drawing-room, but also in the study, the academy, the forum, and the senate" and predicts that it would not "be stayed until it has changed the whole aspect of civilisation."<sup>2</sup> But, unable to free himself from the judgments that had "been matter of universal recognition from the earliest times," he constantly undermines his seemingly favourable attitude to the cause of women by patronizing sneers and warnings against its exaggerations, i.e. the "enthusiasts" – the "good ladies [who] fret and fume in a kind of jealousy that the minds, like the bodies, of men are stronger than those of women" (R667) and basically considers attempts to achieve equality ineffective as long as the much discussed difference in brain-weight remains, stating that "it must take many centuries for heredity to produce the missing five ounces of the female brain" (R666). So, even if Romanes developed his own detailed version of the significance of sexual differences between men and women, he was on the whole true to his presumably misogynous master.<sup>3</sup>

It is nevertheless possible that contemporary readers regarded Romanes more as a progressive thinker than the reactionary crude biological determinist he might seem to readers to-day. If so, it could explain Gissing's attraction to his ambiguous message, alternately verifying cherished prejudice and expressing hopes for female emancipation, but still insisting on the preservation of feminine refinement and "spirituality." Moreover, Gissing's interest was not accidental or transient: as early as 1891 he ordered Romanes' *Animal Intelligence* (1881) from his library<sup>4</sup> and in 1896, more than two years after he finished *Jubilee*, he read *Life and Letters of George John Romanes*,<sup>5</sup> indicating an interest in, maybe even admiration for, the man behind the work.

The three main areas where the mentalities of men and women differ most according to Romanes, are intellect, emotion and will. These are also important issues in *Jubilee*, where the characters to a great extent are illustrations of the mental differences laid down by Romanes or used by Gissing to give an ironic twist to, or comment on, these differences. This is most evident in the protagonists, Nancy Lord and Lionel Tarrant, whose tense and complicated relationship is marked by, and developing within, the narrow boundaries prescribed for them by their biologically determined characters and gender roles. It is not implied here that Gissing fully subscribed to the views expressed in the article, but that the material was used in the experimental set-up where the consequences of biological determinism are shown to be an

-- 3 --

unyielding obstacle for women's emancipation and equality between the sexes.

## Intellect

When Romanes argues that woman's intellect is inferior to man's, he bases this statement on anatomical grounds: the missing five ounces, constituting the difference in average brain-weight of men and women and women's less robust physique.<sup>6</sup> He also maintains that women are inferior in judgment and creativity and that they are incapable of profound thought or knowledge – even a “highly cultured woman” has “read largely but superficially” (R655). Although Gissing steers clear of the kind of simple generalizations which Romanes abounds in, this turns out to be true for all the female characters in *Jubilee* in varying degrees. Nancy, having attended courses and lectures, considers herself a “cultured” woman but we are informed that “[h]er education had been chiefly concerned with names.”<sup>7</sup> Significantly enough she puts aside a book on evolution, declaring that “[s]he already knew all about Darwinism, all she needed to know” (J97). It is obvious both that Nancy suffers from lack of perseverance and determined energy, supposedly important characteristics of a male intellect, and that Gissing here leaves a clue to the nature and interpretation of her forthcoming experiences and destiny.

Another argument put forward by Romanes, that the female physique “is not sufficiently robust to stand the strain of severe study” and that the “effort and acute excitement” connected with it are detrimental to women's health (R669), is illustrated by Jessica Morgan's painstaking efforts to become a university graduate. Not lacking in perseverance or energy, but unfortunately deprived of a robust physique, she looks “over-wrought and low-spirited [...] a ghost of girlhood, a dolorous image of frustrate sex” (J16). Despite its higher level, Jessica's education is described as being superficial and patchy, consisting of “dates and definitions, vocabularies and rules syntactic, [of] thrice-boiled essence of history, ragged scraps of science, quotations at fifth hand, and all the heterogenous rubbish of a ‘crammer's shop’” (J17). In the portrait of Jessica, Gissing works out Romanes' argument in cruel detail; the pressure of “prolonged brain-action” gradually ruins the health of the overworked governess, and a mental and physical breakdown puts an end to her ambitions.

If the education of Nancy and Jessica is inadequate, that of the French sisters is described

-- 4 --

as ludicrous in its pretentiousness: “Beatrice had ‘done’ Political Economy; Fanny had ‘been through’ Inorganic Chemistry and Botany” – education as fashion and ornament with no effect whatsoever on the sisters' flimsy minds and characters (J7). But the fact that the most ridiculous of all the sham-educated characters in the novel is a man, Samuel Barmby, whose brain is “packed with the oddest jumble of incongruities” picked up from the “busy perusal of penny popularities” (J214), softens what could have been conceived as a misogynous attack on women's intellectual capacity. That this little pedant is the one who, in referring to Jessica, echoes the warning about the devastating effect of serious study on frail women, gives it an ironic twist. Though restlessly energetic, and supposedly physically stronger, Barmby is incapable of independent thought or profound knowledge. The same is true of Nancy's admirer Luckworth Crewe, a formally uneducated advertising agent, to whom Nancy feels vastly superior, both intellectually and socially. In contrast to Barmby, though, Crewe stands out as a positive character because of his straightforwardness and zest for life. Obviously, Gissing's main target of criticism here is not women's inferior intellectual capacity, but the corrupting influence of mass education and mass culture on both men and women.

In fact, the only character who stands for the opposite, i.e. the ideal of a solid, classical Oxford education, is Lionel Tarrant. Indolent as he is, he still belongs to a privileged sex and social class, and we are invited to take his intellectual superiority and profound knowledge at face value. Gissing reduces the value of this high level of culture, however, when he denies him any finer human qualities: quoting Tennyson does not necessarily imply a correspondingly high

moral stature.

Ambiguously, and obviously mistrusting his own arguments for woman's intellectual inferiority put forward so far, Romanes concludes with the hope that in the future there will be "unquestionable evidence of experimental proof, that there is no reason in the nature of things why women should not admit of culture as wide and deep and thorough as our schools and universities are able to provide" (R671). But, like so many men of the time, he draws the line for women's emancipation at the labour market, stating that a condition for a positive development of the woman's movement is that women do not "enter into any professional or otherwise foolish rivalry with men, for which as a class they are neither physically nor mentally fitted" (R671). In *Jubilee*, however, Beatrice French makes a successful career for herself as a businesswoman and leads a comfortable and independent life in a flat of her own. For safety's

-- 5 --

sake, Gissing makes her somewhat masculine in looks, manners, and eating habits and therefore also incapable of attracting the opposite sex.

### **Emotion**

Even if the sex-linked characteristics and appurtenant different spheres mentioned by Romanes are the prevalent conceptions of the time, the quasi-scientific style and the multitude of details and examples he gives lend a touch of originality to his survey. In the section on emotion he is most specific, and, not surprisingly, it is here he finds the greatest mental differences between the sexes. In this area, women's strengths and weaknesses seem to be equally balanced while there is a predominance of male imperfections, a circumstance which is manifest also in Gissing's novel, where the protagonists' emotional characteristics are proportionately distributed.

Romanes argues that woman's emotional weakness is connected with her weakness of will and her inability to control its symptoms by "the restraint of reason," and that consequently there is a tendency "to overwhelm the mental chariot in disaster" (R657). In a serious form this can result in hysteria, in a milder and more common form in "comparative childishness, ready annoyance, and a generally unreasonable temper" (R657), symptoms we find in abundance in the quarrelsome French sisters and in Jessica Morgan with her "hysteric determination" (J16). Fanny French in particular displays many "general peculiarities" such as "[c]oyness and caprice [...] personal vanity, fondness of display, and delight in the sunshine of admiration" (R657) which lead to her ruin. Not even Nancy, the female protagonist, is free from personal vanity and, in her flirtation with Crewe, she certainly basks in his submissive adoration and exhibits almost as much coyness and caprice as Fanny does with her admirer, Horace. We also feel that behind Nancy's feelings of frustration after the Jubilee night lies what Romanes condemns as a female weakness, a "desire for emotional excitement" (R657). In contrast to his views on women's inherent intellectual inferiority, Romanes now believes that the emotional weaknesses might mainly be "due to women as a class not having hitherto enjoyed the same educational advantages as men" (R658), a view which agrees with Gissing's conviction that the only cure for their "ignorance & childishness" would consist in "women [being] intellectually trained very much as men are."<sup>8</sup>

As positive female qualities Romanes mentions "affection, sympathy, devotion, self-denial, modesty; long-suffering, or patience under pain, disappointment, and adversity"

-- 6 --

(R658), all characteristics which Nancy shows or acquires in her "progress in the school of life"

(J221) and which serve as keywords in her relationship with Tarrant. There is, Romanes says, in woman's nature, strengthened by the ideals of Christianity, a readiness "to forgiveness, self-denial, and even self-abasement" (R659), and in this we may discern the clue to Nancy's subjection to her husband and to her acceptance of a marital arrangement which turns her life into that of a serf or prisoner. Here Gissing shows how the cherished traditional female virtues counteract woman's emancipation. Nancy's self-denial, not to say her self-abasement, and her husband's insistent glorification of these values put an end to her hopes of independence and self-fulfilment.

The character of Tarrant, on the other hand, is based almost entirely on the negative characteristics, which have supposedly developed as a result of the rivalry that has been part of man's struggle for supremacy. Romanes, quoting Darwin, argues that the need for competition has led "to ambition which passes too readily into selfishness," features which "seem to be his natural and unfortunate birthright," (R660)<sup>9</sup> and unfortunate indeed it is, he points out, when man "carries into his home" the qualities which have hardened his "mental hide" and made him successful in the general struggle for life: "insensibility, self-assertion and self-seeking" (R660). In Tarrant we find more of these "vices of strength" than traditional male virtues like ambition, courage and perseverance in which he is pitifully lacking. Persevering only in his determination to seduce Nancy, he soon regrets not having been more prudent in his methods of "sexual selection" – he considers Nancy beneath him both socially and intellectually: he might "as soon have contemplated taking to wife a barmaid" (J146). When Nancy soon after the secret marriage announces her pregnancy, Tarrant reveals his selfishness in a most insensitive manner when he – like any male animal after mating – abandons her and goes roaming unknown territories. Instead, it is Nancy who evinces that courage and patience under pain and adversity which might well be called perseverance. She gives birth to a son in secrecy and, faced with betrayal, gossip and the risk of exposure, she struggles to build a life for herself and her child. She enjoys her work and independence, and the resulting self-assertion makes her more attractive to Tarrant when at long last he returns to England. Her independent reserve challenges him to win her back: it "compelled a new wooing, and promised, on her part, a new surrender" (J371). Difficult as it is to understand Nancy's second surrender to Tarrant's seductive powers, it is still in

-- 7 --

accordance with Romanes' characterisation of woman: a proof of that readiness to forgive and the total devotion, which is sometimes a "clinging to husbands, parents, brothers, often without and even against reason" (R659).

Another explanation of Nancy's submission is motherhood, because, Romanes maintains, "the maternal instincts are to woman perhaps the strongest of all influences in the determination of character" (R663). Nancy recognizes the joys of being a mother, she "knew the exultation of a woman who has justified her being" (J276), but she revolts against her confined life and "Nature's law" – that motherhood should be the be-all and end-all of woman's existence. Fighting against it is futile, she feels, "she might as well revolt against being born a woman instead of a man":

Now, I have brains, and I should like to use them; but Nature says that's not so important as bringing up the little child to whom I have given life. One thought that troubles me is, that every generation of women is sacrificed to the generation that follows; and of course that's why women are so inferior to men. But then again, Nature says that women are born *only* to be sacrificed. I always come round to that. I don't like it, but I am bound to believe it." (J404-05)

Nancy reluctantly accepts the conditions of her biological role, but in her acceptance of her husband's demand for a marriage which leaves him free to lead the life of a bachelor and keeps her chained to the home and the cradle, there is also an element of the self-abasement Romanes mentions. When the novel ends on the note of Nancy's complete subjection and silent protest, it is no doubt in keeping with Romanes' theories, but disconcerting for the heroine, the reader, and, as we shall see, even for the author.

Given their biological characteristics, it follows that men and women have different attitudes to love and marriage. Nancy is faithful in her all too encompassing love, prepared to forgive dastardly behaviour and betrayal and to sacrifice her own possibilities of a meaningful life. For Tarrant, a most unwilling husband, the taste for liberty is stronger than the vacillating feelings he has for Nancy. Lacking in loyalty, faithfulness and not least in paternal instinct, he still possesses that characteristic manly mind which, according to Romanes, has "a firm tenacity of purpose and determination to overcome obstacles" (R659). In this case the obstacles are Nancy's objections to Tarrant's idea of an ideal, or at least enduring, marriage which implies separate dwellings and visits once every fortnight. By right of superior force, he asks her to give up professional work, for which "foolish rivalry" he, like Romanes, believes a woman to be

-- 8 --

unfit: "as a man, it's my duty to join in the rough-and-tumble for more or less dirty ha'pence. You, as a woman, have no such duty; nay, it's your positive duty to keep out of the beastly scrimmage" (J429). Perfectly aware of his own selfishness ("I'm a selfish fellow, and shall be so to the end" (J372)) and of Nancy's lonely suffering, Tarrant still insists on moulding his wife into a well-trained nonentity. When, on a rare visit, he tells her about the dinners he is invited to and the exciting people he meets, she bows her head in silence, and we feel the truth of Romanes' words about such a husband: "the selfishness of pleasure-seeking may still habitually leave the solitary wife to brood over her lot through the small hours of the morning" (R660). Tarrant's selfishness seems indeed monumental, aware as he is of his wife's leading a "monotonous, imprisoned life." He silences his conscience by burying his head in the sand: "you are out of my sight, and that enables me to keep you out of my mind. If I am away from home till one or two in the morning, there is no lonely wife fretting and wondering about me" (J412).

## **Will**

Will, finally, is a determining factor regarding both intellect and emotion. Romanes states that men by nature have a strong will which manifests itself in a tenacity of purpose resulting in a superior intellect and an ability to control emotions. Correspondingly, woman's weakness of will influences her emotional life, naturally in a negative way, and also her possibilities of intellectual achievements. In women's difficulties to "concentrate their attention" in close reading or thought and in the proneness to "wandering" minds we might recognize Nancy and her lame intellectual efforts. Her weaker will is also apparent when she meets Tarrant: "she felt her will subdued" (J125), a deficiency which paves the way for the seduction. Only in Tarrant's absence and supported by the stronger Beatrice, is Nancy able to hold her ground.

Also what is said to be the typically female characteristic of vacillation of will, of simply "not knowing their own minds" (R660) can sometimes be applied to Nancy (as it can to the more fickle Fanny French). Discontented with her life in her father's house, she dreams vaguely of more excitement, academic or social success, and lets herself be courted by two men; her relationships with Crewe and Tarrant are marked by her indecision of character. Gissing does not, however, make this deficiency of will an exclusively female feature: in Arthur Peachey we see a similar volitional vacillation when he decides to leave his quarrelsome wife only to be

lured back after a while before his second and final escape, one of several examples of how Gissing questions Romanes' simplistic dividing up of sex differences.

Mainly, though, strength of will is reserved for the male characters in *Jubilee*. The most evident example is, of course, Tarrant, whose controlled emotional life and ability to get his own way serve his own selfish interest. But shunning generalisation, Gissing demonstrates the variety of the human species by depicting Crewe as a likeable character. The exuberant advertising agent (a profession with unpleasant connotations for the author) displays ambition and "ready firmness of decision" (R659) in a hearty, less bullying way both in business and in matters of the heart – in comparison Tarrant stands out as an anaemic but pigheaded *bon vivant*. The female exception is the sympathetic portrait of Beatrice French which, however, underlines the prejudice of the time: when a woman is ambitious and strong-willed, and professionally successful at that, she is bound to lose in femininity. Beatrice's mannish ways and vain pining after Crewe, who addresses her as "old chap," must have made her an almost comic character at the time.

In stating that "the failings of weakness are less obnoxious than the vices of strength," Romanes indicates that to be superior in strength is not always a positive or desirable quality, an observation of which the character of Tarrant is a clear and distinct proof. Such men need to divest themselves of "the dross of a brutal ancestry" to be able to sincerely appreciate the female qualities merged into "the strength which [has] been made perfect in the weakness of womanhood" (R660-61). Here Romanes gets to the crux of the matter: the difficulty of defining elusive concepts like superior, inferior, strength and weakness, the significance of which necessarily is founded on value judgments.

He is also aware of the "difficulty to distinguish between nature and nurture" (R665), but disregards the influence on sexual character of social conventions and the patriarchal power structure. Encumbered with both, he, in spite of his seemingly favourable attitude to the women's movement, recommends that it be guided "into what seem likely to prove the most beneficial channels." Who the beneficiary will be is evident from Romanes' concluding hope that the "strong voice of social opinion will always be raised against any innovations of culture which may tend to spoil the sweetest efflorescence of evolution" (R667). Supposedly that delicate flower will need male guidance also in the future.

## Conclusion

All the typical male and female qualities listed by Romanes in his article are represented by the main characters in *Jubilee*, even if somewhat unequally distributed. Consequently, Tarrant, as the bearer of all the male vices and few, if any, of male virtues, stands out as a one-dimensional and boorish character, while Nancy is described with greater psychological subtlety. In her struggle against adversity, in her devotion and patient suffering, she is endowed with all the meritorious female qualities, while the negative ones are divided between her, the unsuccessful student Jessica, and the French sisters: the coy and capricious Fanny and the cantankerous Ada Peachey. In the course of events, Nancy also develops and outgrows her mental teething problems while Tarrant remains stagnant in his selfish pertinacity. Since their biologically determined characteristics rule their behaviour, their relationship is a love affair with Darwinian overtones. "I am your superior in force of mind and force of body" (J414), Tarrant says to Nancy, and force is the keyword, whether he moulds her into his ideal of a wife or organises his quasi-bachelor life under the semblance of a marriage.

In the subjection of his wife, Tarrant is aided by “Nature’s law” – maternity – which makes Nancy feel that a woman’s lot is to be “the slave of husband and children” and therefore feel “revolt to be silly” (J404). Nature, in the form of their inherent sex-limited characteristics and behaviour, condoned by society, also plays into his hands. If the protagonists have limited liberty of action, helplessly caught as they are in the net of biological determinism, so might Gissing have felt artistically confined in bringing the story to a satisfactory end. His discontent (“Very slovenly the last pages”<sup>10</sup>) seems to indicate that he would have preferred a different one. When he writes to Bertz that “the last volume is not of a piece with what comes before,”<sup>11</sup> he is right, because Nancy’s turnaround from independent professional woman to tamed housewife might be biologically explained but never psychologically so.

When Gissing introduces a vibrant young woman in search of self-development and fulfilment in life into the rigidly regulated world of biological determinism, he exposes the dehumanizing aspects attached to it. In his insightful and empathetic description of Nancy and his dissatisfaction with the ending, we discern Gissing’s objections to such a philosophy of life and, maybe, his own uncomfortable stance regarding what are still today important issues.

-- 11 --

<sup>1</sup>David Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>George Romanes, “Mental Differences Between Men and Women,” *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 21, May 1887, p. 666. (All subsequent references will be incorporated in the text, prefixed by R.)

<sup>3</sup>See for example Alexander Alland, Jr., *Human Nature: Darwin’s View* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1985), p. 24. Alland declares that “Darwin at his worst is Darwin on women” and gives examples from Darwin’s letters and private papers which show that “Darwin apparently had more personal experiences with, and lasting impressions of, natives in far away places than he had with women of high intellectual abilities.”

<sup>4</sup>Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), 3 June 1891, p. 248.

<sup>5</sup>*Diary*, 5 November 1896, p. 426.

<sup>6</sup>Romanes is here less circumspect than his master; Darwin actually leaves room for a natural explanation of man’s heavier brain: “His brain is absolutely larger, but whether or not proportionately to his larger body, has not, I believe, been fully ascertained” (Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 1871; London, 1874, p. 557). There is no doubt in Darwin, however, that man, due to acquired mental qualities transmitted through natural and sexual selection, is superior to woman.

<sup>7</sup>George Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894; Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1976), p. 124. (All subsequent references will be to this edition and incorporated in the text, prefixed by J.)

<sup>8</sup>Letter to Eduard Bertz, 30 December 1894, P. F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young and P. Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Vol. 5 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio U. P., 1994), p. 271.

<sup>9</sup>Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 563.

<sup>10</sup>*Diary*, 13 April 1894, p. 335.

<sup>11</sup>Letter to Bertz, 2 June 1893, *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 113.

\*\*\*

### Gissing in Catanzaro: A Commemoration

P. COUSTILLAS, D. GRYLLS, B. POSTMUS



In October 1998 the local authorities of Catanzaro, the Calabrian town where Gissing felt so happy after narrowly escaping death at Cotrone, announced their intention of organizing a small international symposium on his geographical and cultural love of the deep Italian South, the event being conceived as a prelude to the unveiling of a plaque which would associate his

-- 12 --

name with those of Coriolano Paparazzo, the hotel-keeper, Ennio Flaiano, the scenarist, and the world-famous film director, Federico Fellini. The project materialized on 23 October 1999, to the entire satisfaction of all the corporate bodies and individuals concerned. To foreign visitors Calabria seems to be the land of never-ending summer, and there is no doubt that the sunshine that presided over the ceremonies contributed to make them even more memorable. We had come from countries where autumn had set in, but on landing at Fiumicino airport, where we met prior to the transfer to Lamezia Terme, about half-way between Cosenza and Catanzaro, we began to feel that so far we had only mentally been prepared to head for the Gardens of the Hesperides.

The local press, in which Gissing and his works, especially *By the Ionian Sea*, have been mentioned numberless times in the last few decades, had announced the cultural celebrations in articles published on 17, 20 and 23 October. *Il Quotidiano* for 17 October was the first to inform its readers of the forthcoming events in terms that left nothing essential in the dark: “*Sarà celebrato sabato George Gissing, il narratore inglese che suggerì a Fellini il termine per i fotoreporter/ Nasce in città il ‘paparazzo’/ Durante la cerimonia verrà scoperta una targa all’ex Albergo Centrale.*” Portraits of Gissing and Fellini as well as an old photograph of the *albergo* taken about 1905 helped one to visualize the scene and the two main actors in the unfolding of the story. The three foreign scholars who would take part in the symposium were named, as well as “Italian experts such as Francesco Badolato and Mauro F. Minervino.” Councillor Aldo Costa, who is in charge of cultural affairs, declared that the celebrations, coupled with the large exhibition of the works of the Calabrian painter Mattia Preti, would enable the city to remain in the limelight culturally. And on the same page, in an article entitled “*Dall’oste quel nome di battaglia,*” Dr. Minervino put the Gissing-paparazzo connection in historical perspective, summing up the events from Gissing’s stay in Catanzaro to the furore with which the unpredictable international popularization of the word spread in the wake of Fellini’s film “*La dolce vita.*” On the same day, 17 October, *Il Domani della Calabria* told the story in its own way in an unsigned article illustrated with a recent photograph of the building in the Corso Mazzini on which the plaque can now be seen. Orwell’s historic statement on the permanent value of Gissing’s novels was quoted and their anti-Victorian aspect stressed with some relish. Obviously the writings of Mauro Minervino were known to the author of the article which expounded the extraordinary fate of the hotel-keeper’s surname. Only later did we discover that we were flatteringly called *tre dei maggiori studiosi europei di letteratura inglese*

-- 13 --

and did we have an opportunity to read a fuller account of Aldo Costa’s address to local journalists on the forthcoming celebrations, with a timely allusion to the Amsterdam Conference and its widely international participants. Somewhat unexpectedly, Gissing the man who unwittingly prompted Fellini to coin (“*coniare*”) the famous word *paparazzo* also inspired a member of the editorial staff of *Il Domani*, Massimo Tigani, to offer a leader about present-day Catanzaro as it might be seen and described by another Gissing, “*Un viaggio nel presente.*” A modest, probably too modest, assessment. After this double homage to Gissing, one could only have hoped that *Il Domani* would give an account of the *manifestazione* the day after the event, but he was again feted on 20 October, that is three days before it. Meanwhile, it would seem, the

writer of the article, Paola Cosentino, had refreshed her memory of *By the Ionian Sea*, and it was an emotion-laden article on Gissing in Catanzaro that she wrote under the title “*Un viaggio sulle rive dello Jonio*.” An old photograph of an ascending street in the city next to a reproduction of the cover of Mauro Minervino’s edition of the book set the tone. “Impossible to find oneself at Catanzaro without thinking of earthquakes,” the subtitle reads, while the last line of the delicately suggestive piece reflects Gissing’s melancholy departure from the city: “But from Catanzaro George Gissing departed reluctantly” (*a malincuore*). *Il Quotidiano* would not stay behind, publishing a four-column assessment of the Gissing-Paparazzo-Fellini affair a few hours before the celebrations (23 October). Again the Amsterdam Conference, with three of its eighty participants now in Catanzaro, was recalled in an article by Laura Marano who, in her listing of the ceremonies of the day, drew public notice to the photographs and other *documenti d’epoca* that would be on show in the Galleria d’Arte Centrale after the unveiling of the plaque. “Gissing’s importance,” she wrote, “lies in the approach chosen by the great novelist to the struggles of Calabria and of the whole Italian South, which in the opinion of Victorian England looked like a concentrated essence of backwardness and primitive instincts. Gissing was in a position to sense the social and anthropological aspects of Southern realities, interpreting at their best the deep changes experienced by Calabria after the post-unification years.” And there followed extracts from Minervino’s essay “*Paparazzi a Catanzaro*.”

Printed in green with brown illustrations, the official programme outlined the events that took place from 9.30 a.m. to 8 p.m. The symposium was held in the Sala Consigliare of the Town Hall, the seat of which is in the Palazzo De Nobili, within easy walking distance of the

-- 14 --

main places associated with Gissing and described in *By the Ionian Sea* as well as in his diary. The moderator was Dr. Mauro F. Minervino, author of a study of Gissing and his works, *La vita desiderata*, and translator of his travel narrative, retitled *Sulle rive dello Jonio*, who was in charge after the *saluto delle autorità*, that is Signor Sergio Abramo, Mayor of Catanzaro, and Avv. Aldo Costa, whose official function on the Council is Assessore alla Cultura del Comune di Catanzaro. Then, because Dr. Francesco Badolato could not attend for health reasons, his paper on “Gissing, Paparazzo, e La Dolce Vita di Fellini” was read by Dr. Renato Santoro, an administrator at regional level. The English part of the symposium consisted in a presentation by David Grylls of Gissing’s personality and achievements in the light of his Mediterranean passion, of a discussion by Bouwe Postmus of the various aspects of *By the Ionian Sea*, and an overview, biographical, cultural and bibliographical, of Gissing in Catanzaro by Pierre Coustillas. The simultaneous translation of the English papers was entrusted to Signora Livia Ruga, who, together with Drs. Sergio Dragone, of the Ufficio Stampa, Renato Santoro, and Giacomo Borrino of the De Nobili Library, had welcomed the visitors on their arrival from the airport at Lamezia Terme.

Dr. Badolato’s paper was a detailed exposition of the concatenation of events from Gissing’s mention of the proprietor of the Albergo Centrale, Corso Vittorio Emanuele (now Corso Mazzini), Catanzaro, in his diary and his travel book to the ever more cacophonous debate about the origin of the word *paparazzo/paparazzi* in the international press, a debate fanned in 1997 by the discussion in the media of the circumstances of Princess Diana’s death.

David Grylls gave a brief account of Gissing’s achievements, defining his importance in literary history as that of “a novelist who combined compassion with satire, sociological observation with psychological insight,” a man who “although enormously industrious, felt trapped – trapped in marriage, trapped in poverty, and trapped in the fog and philistinism of England,” a man to whom Italy, which he equated with sunshine, freedom and the solace of the classics, was a refuge and a source of ever renewed nostalgia. He reviewed those of Gissing’s works in which his love of Italy is a vital element and offered quotations from the

*Commonplace Book* and *By the Ionian Sea* which crystallise the writer's emotional response to that country. To conclude he suggested that the words Gissing pronounced on his deathbed, when his febrile mind was brimful with visions of the world he had tried to revive in *Veranilda*,

-- 15 --

perhaps meant that "he had finally entered that glorious Rome of antiquity which had been his ideal throughout life."

In his paper, which he entitled "An Exile's Homecoming," Bouwe Postmus began with a quotation from a George Moore short story collected in the year of Gissing's death, "The Way Back": "There are more beautiful things in Italy than in the rest of the world put together, and there is nothing so beautiful as Italy." He analysed at some length the sources and early expressions of *passione del Sud*, seeing Gissing's trip to Calabria as an *aboutissement* dreamt of since childhood. For such a visit, the traveller was perfectly equipped. In *By the Ionian Sea* as in some of his other books, he revealed his empathy with the poor and downtrodden, with a people who had for ages suffered conquest and slavery, and his single travel narrative logically enough "presents us with a characteristic mixture of memories of the ancient world and its literary associations and acute observations of the modern." The interest of a place is organically connected with its past, a point which Bouwe Postmus illustrated with allusions to Gissing's evocations of Catanzaro, Cotrone and Cosenza, in moments when his feeling of exile was overcome and a new sense of belonging was accomplished. It was when in the throes of death at Cotrone, through the instrumentality of fits of fever, that he experienced ecstatic happiness. In the ordinary circumstances of life in Italy, Gissing could successfully associate the poetic reconstruction of a world derived from his own knowledge of the remote Italian past with the concrete, picturesque images of the life around him. "For him a change of place or country as a rule worked wonders for his creative inspiration."

This point underpinned Pierre Coustillas's paper, which focused on the idea that the relationship between Gissing and the city of Catanzaro evinced their mutual esteem. At Cotrone a fit of fever had nearly carried him away; he now felt as though resuscitated and his enjoyment was increased beyond measure. He found much to admire in and around Catanzaro, its exceptionally beautiful situation, its public buildings and gardens, and he praised the intelligence and dignity of its inhabitants for two of whom, the vice-consul Pasquale Cricelli and the museum curator Oreste Dito, he had special consideration. The editor of a contemporary Catanzaro weekly, *La Giostra*, promptly became acquainted with Gissing's eulogy, which he deemed undeserved. Courageously and with justification, as Manfred Pfister recently observed, Gissing not only went off the beaten track, he went "against the grain of the prevalent denigration of the contemporary Italian's intellectuality." Of the city's gratitude to the

-- 16 --

enthusiastic English traveller Pierre Coustillas gave examples taken from Italian books published locally in which *By the Ionian Sea*, especially the chapters devoted to Catanzaro, is praised and quoted at great length. He concluded by acknowledging the "great good place" that Gissing fully deserves in the long tradition of foreign travel to Calabria, and to Catanzaro in particular.

Between the successive papers that were read Dr. Minervino availed himself of several opportunities of expressing his views on Gissing's book on Southern Italy, and some idea will be conveyed of the appreciation of the audience if mention is made of the applause which followed a suggestion that he should be made an honorary citizen of Catanzaro – but only the living can be vouchsafed such a distinction. Tablets and plaques are usually reserved for those figures of the past whose signal merits are recognised posthumously. The unveiling of the

plaque on the front of the former Albergo Centrale in the Corso Mazzini took place at about 5.30 p.m. The programme reproduced the inscription which all visitors will henceforth have a chance to read, and which is easily legible on the photograph below.



Courtesy Dr. Vincenzo Misiani

-- 17 --

Among the many personalities who attended the ceremony were “the King of paparazzi,” Calabrian-born Rino Barillari, and Severino Lepore, President of the Via Veneto Association, whom a photograph in *Il Quotidiano* for 24 October shows sitting side by side at a coffee-bar table before the unveiling of the plaque (a volume on Barillari and his work, *Il King dei paparazzi*, is just out). Many professional photographers, some with TV cameras, were present, and not a few local citizens who had been informed of the forthcoming event by the press and wished to be among the first to photograph the plaque. Shots of the ceremonies, symposium and unveiling, were shown on the regional TV programme on the following Tuesday and in a national programme later in the week. Once the plaque had been duly read and admired, the local authorities led the attendance to the nearby Galleria d’Arte Centrale run by Signor Franco Marta, a suite of rooms which used to be the restaurant of the *albergo* and where from 5 to 8 p.m. could be seen an attractive exhibition about “*Catanzaro ai tempi di Gissing*” (Catanzaro in Gissing’s time). Old books, photographs and postcards as well as slides offered a reconstruction of the small world that the novelist must have seen when he walked about the town in the company of the genial Don Pasquale, visiting among other places the public gardens with their fine panoramic view of the Ionian Sea and the splendid Farmacia Leone in a *palazzo* currently under restoration. In the first room a bright poster with a large portrait of Gissing aptly chosen from among the more attractive, met the eye. The legend read nostalgically: “*Da Sulle rive dello Jonio Un viaggio nella memoria*,” In the next room could be seen, among others, a portrait of Fellini, and on a table copies of *By the Ionian Sea* in several languages. On the way to Corso Mazzini, in the *centro storico*, we had abruptly found ourselves facing two posters announcing the *manifestazione* in which we were taking part. Below “Città di Catanzaro Assessorato alla

Cultura 23 Ottobre 1999” was reproduced a Russell & Sons portrait of Gissing against the vestiges of the Temple at Metaponto, followed by the programme of the celebrations. Just before reaching the Corso Mazzini, we turned for a moment into a small art gallery where some of Marcel Duchamp’s work was on show. The day ended with a visit to the exhibition devoted to the works of Mattia Preti (1613-1699), born in the nearby small town of Taverna and known as Il Cavaliere calabrese.

The three local newspapers of 24 October carried long illustrated reports on the events of the previous day. “*Scoperta la targa su Gissing,*” read the headline of *Il Quotidiano* with its five illustrations to an article by Sonia Libico. One of them shows the mayor-publisher Abramo and

-- 18 --

Barillari; on another, students who attended the symposium are seen taking notes while Bouwe Postmus is reading his paper. “*Convegno di studi a Palazzo De Nobili sulla figura del romanziere George Gissing. Quell’inglese dal sangue giallorosso*” was the caption in *La Gazzetta del Sud* above more or less similar photos featuring the *re dei paparazzi* showing his host a picture in the book about himself, and photos of the plaque still partly veiled, then fully legible. The lengthy report was supplied by Betty Calabretta. Under the title “*Nel ricordo del ‘nostro’ Gissing,*” Paola Cosentino in *Il Domani* summed up concisely and accurately the extraordinary chain of events which began with the traveller’s reading of Papparazzo’s singular notice to his guests and ended with the putting up of a plaque which neatly recounts all the cultural zigzags of the story in 102 years. The last newspaper to publish a report of the events in Gissing’s favourite Calabrian town was the weekly *Giornale di Calabria* (26 October), which pronounced the *convegno internazionale* “very successful,” and praised Mauro Minervino for his magisterial conduct of the debate. Something more than an echo of the commemoration of Gissing’s stay in Catanzaro and its unpredictable sequel will, we are told, be found later this year in a booklet in which the papers read at the symposium are to be collected. Unsurprisingly the publisher will be Abramo Editore.

Months before the commemoration of Gissing and Coriolano Papparazzo we had received from Signor Daniele Cristofaro, who recently became vice-mayor of Squillace and is in charge of cultural affairs, an invitation to visit the town. Although it now boasts a population of 3,400, and not a few are commuters, Squillace has not in the least forgotten its most celebrated son and main claim to fame, Cassiodorus, the genial monk and minister to Theodoric the Ostrogoth so vividly brought to life by Gissing near the end of *By the Ionian Sea*. Daniele Cristofaro, like his wife Graziella, who teaches French and proved a worthy interpreter when English had to be translated into French prior to being converted into intelligible Italian, is a native of Squillace known to everybody you may meet in the old as in the new town. A local historian and a book collector, as well as an admirer of Gissing, he is currently preparing a book on the successive generations of visitors to Squillace. He had come to meet us as the *convegno* was being concluded, and he drove to Catanzaro on Sunday, 24 October, followed by his wife in another car, that they might leave us all to visit Crotona on our own in one of the two cars while they carried our luggage to Squillace – where a flat was ready for us on our return from our trip to such Gissing sites as the Albergo Concordia and Capo Colonna. To the Capo we drove first,

-- 19 --

and we could feast our eyes on the beautiful spot which Gissing only saw through his field glasses, trying hard to imagine what was out of sight thanks to the descriptive recollections of his doctor, Riccardo Sculco. Visits to the mortuary chapel in which the latter is buried with some of his relatives and to that of the Lucifero family were in order, but as Norman Douglas predicted in *Old Calabria* the poor little grave of the cemetery gardener whom Gissing found so

congenial has long been removed. No less mandatory was a visit to the ex-Albergo Concordia, restyled years ago Albergo Italia. However, the visit was a pathetic one, as the three old ladies who greeted us were disappointed to be confronted with visitors who were not seeking hospitality, but merely anxious to see an *albergo* made famous by Bourget, Gissing and Douglas. Virgilio Squillace's 1997 articles commemorating Gissing's stay are still to be seen on both sides of the entrance hall on the first floor. "Finito!" exclaimed the proprietress sadly, complaining that her establishment did not attract guests. Indeed, you can easily walk past the arcades described in *By the Ionian Sea* without noticing the presence of the hotel. Efforts to obtain assistance from the Regional Council, we were told later, had been in vain. The Castello Aragonese could only be seen from the streets leading to it. Sunday in Italy is a day when tourists often have to *imagine* what they could profitably have seen inside public buildings, had they chanced to knock at the door on a week day.

Considering the distance between Crotone and Squillace, the appointment with our hosts Daniele and Graziella Cristofaro which we had fixed at 5 p.m. made it imperative that we should leave the old Greek city for the former haunts of Cassiodorus between early and mid-afternoon, which we did after we had enjoyed a delicious lunch at the Ristorante Pitagora. We arrived in time, and we knew that the Norman castle which a depressed Gissing had found uninviting after a dull, chilly journey in the rain would, unlike the Castello Aragonese in Crotone, be open. Our host has a key of his own and, among his many activities, acts as a guide. We did not have bitterly to deplore, as Gissing did, "the gloomy sky which spoiled what would else have been a magnificent view from this point of vantage – a view wide-spreading in all directions, with Sila northwards, Aspromonte to the south, and between them a long horizon of the sea." The late afternoon was splendid, and we have a photograph taken from the highest point accessible which corresponds to what Gissing supposed he could have seen. The image of Squillace itself that emerges from *By the Ionian Sea* is anything but pleasant, and it is obvious

-- 20 --

to anyone who has visited this curious town which now extends a good deal beyond its historical perimeter that Gissing failed to do it justice. The bad weather, the general air of uncleanness and poverty that met his eye wherever he went, the repulsive *albergo* which was unsure of its own identity, the "lean, black pigs" and the "gaunt, low-spirited dogs" prowling about in search of food prejudiced him against all he saw around him. But there is evidence in the report he gave his readers of his consciousness that, owing to particularly unfavourable circumstances, he was being unfair to the city that Cassiodorus, in the sixth century, described so glowingly and tenderly. Had mediæval paradise degenerated into modern purgatory? Gissing was at all times incensed by unfair dealings, and there is no doubt that at the Osteria Centrale or Albergo Nazionale he was confronted with what he called "a very ugly case of extortion." But one wishes he had stayed on and given himself a chance of revising his judgment when the sun shone again. A card of introduction (one of those Neville-Rolfe had given him in Naples) to some enlightened citizen of the town might also have worked wonders.

To present-day visitors the place is picturesque and attractive, as well as eminently civilized. The inside of the cathedral is anything but mediæval in the worst sense of the term. Daniele Cristofaro led us to the Istituto di studi su Cassiodoro e sul Medioevo in Calabria, with its remarkable library containing valuable old volumes as well as the latest publications in the "Bibliotheca Vivariensis," and its attractive lecture room, of which an 1985 *Guida illustrata* by Franco Taverniti gives a picture likely to rouse the admiration of even the most hopeful visitor. Scholars specializing in the Italian Middle Ages have a potential home here. As though instinctively guided by our most earnest desire, our host went straight to two white folio volumes which he took from the thickly populated shelves and showed us, of all the ponderous tomes collected in recent decades, a copy of Cassiodorus' *Opera Omnia* (Venice, 1729), the

very edition that Gissing read at Budleigh Salterton in the spring of 1897.

There was much more to see in and around Squillace that might be said to be of Gissing interest, but we knew we could make good use of the following morning to visit some sites mentioned by him. Still, after receiving a sumptuously produced volume by Guido Donatone, *La ceramica di Squillace* (Cava dei Tirreni: Di Mauro Editore, 1985) and a quarto glazed-paper brochure on the recovery of cultural treasures in the Gulf of Squillace, we thought the day would not be quite full if we did not have a look at the hotel where Gissing was once treated so badly, a photograph of which can be seen in the French translation of *By the Ionian Sea*. The

-- 21 --

building as we photographed it is no longer what the house he reluctantly entered and fled from in a huff was like. At no. 37 Via Damiano Assanti you have a two-storeyed house where in Gissing's time there used to be only a ground floor; nor is the entrance door what he saw in December 1897. Until recently the house was occupied by a barrister, whose plate (Studio Legale), has not yet been removed.

Next morning we visited those ruins which Gissing dismissed in a few lines when he wrote down his recollections with his diary jottings in front of him – “nothing but a mass of ancient ruins, high fragments of shattered wall,” by which he meant what still stands of S. Chiara's church and of the nearby monastery. As we went about, we had opportunities of seeing one or two artisans at work, such as Gissing could have watched with interest a hundred years ago, and could have talked to, had circumstances been more favourable and the weather less inclement. On this side and that of the main street, where two cars cannot cross without some appropriate manoeuvres, we caught glimpses of narrow cobbled alleys ascending to patches of deep blue sky. Squillace, it is clear, is worthy of a longer visit – one full day at the very least if some out-of-the-way curiosities like the Ponte del diavolo (the devil's bridge) and Cassiodorus' vivarium are not to be overlooked. The 1999 edition of the *Guida Blu* to the area is usefully informative, but the best short work on Squillace we can recommend is the 38-page oblong *Guida Illustrata* mentioned above, with its hundred-odd illustrations, lovingly written by Franco Taverniti, and suggestively entitled *Da Skilleion a Squillace* (Catanzaro, 1985). Gissing appears several times in it as a writer whose descriptive power is worthy of consideration. Taverniti's text is preceded by a *presentazione* of the then Vice-President of the Giunta Provinciale, Guido Rhodio, whom we were lucky to meet. To him as President of the Istituto Cassiodoro we owe the present of the volume about the centuries-old ceramic art in Squillace. He rightly thinks that Gissing was unfair to Squillace and that a counter-image should be published. Indeed how could the foreign traveller, however knowledgeable he was about the eventful history of the town, draw a well-balanced picture of a place in which he stayed only a few hours, with unpleasant circumstances weighing too heavily on his mind? Fortunately the chapters on Cassiodorus and La Grotta make amends for his unsympathetic, bluntly couched impressions. Professor Rhodio is the author of many books and essays on Calabria and his affection for such an *antichissima città* as Squillace would have touched Gissing himself.

-- 22 --

Taverniti's unpretentious, well-written and stimulating booklet, for which we are indebted to Signor Cristofaro, is a potent reminder that if Calabria is a land of mountains as everybody knows, it is also, as uninitiated foreigners hardly suspect, a country where printing and publishing are remarkably active, where scholars with a reputation which may well not extend far beyond their province, find publishers for their manuscripts. Dominique Fernandez made this point over thirty years ago in his book *Mère Méditerranée*, and small southern publishers sometimes go out of their way to reprint important foreign books on their part of the world in

the original language, *La Grande-Grèce* by Francois Lenormant for instance. That Gissing and his travel narrative have often been commented upon in books available from small Italian firms in the last fifty years and in some cases before Margherita Guidacci published *Sulla riva dello Jonio* is a fact of which some Italians interested in the travel books of foreign travellers in their country have long been aware. During a discussion of the subject Daniele Cristofaro spontaneously produced a handful of publications which offered as many illustrations of the phenomenon. Witness *II Ponte* for September-October 1950 which published an article entitled “*La Calabria vista da uno scrittore inglese: George Gissing in viaggio da Paola a Cosenza*” and followed it up with a translation of chapter II of *By the Ionian Sea*. Or the quarterly review *Calabria Cultura*, which in 1974 introduced a perceptive assessment of the book in a review article about “*I Viaggiatori incantati*,” among them J. H. von Riedesel, Paul-Louis Courier, Lenormant, Gissing and – unexpectedly – Marie Brandon Albini. Or again Volume VII, *Calabria*, of Luigi Parpagliolo’s *Italia*, prepared in 1953 but published as late as 1993, which contains a translation of Gissing’s chapter on Catanzaro by Nora Balzani. As we realized on receiving from the publishers, GAL Valle del Crocchio, their two recent illustrated volumes *Nei giardini del Mediterraneo*, largely the work of Mauro Minervino, there is a steady flow of such publications in which Gissing appears prominently or marginally. The fact that Gissing’s name and his book are so familiar to the reading public in the southern towns he visited is due to such work. But also to the approachability of local journalists who welcome any sign that some foreigners are actively interested in the South for cultural reasons. Largely thanks to our friend Daniele Cristofaro, we suppose, a short piece appeared in *Il Quotidiano* on 26 October, “*E sulle tracce di G. Gissing, una tappa anche [another stage] a Squillace*,” by Salvatore Taverniti, whom we had met two days before as we walked about the ancient city.

-- 23 --

The journey back to the airport of Lamezia Terme, on the shore of the Tyrrhenian Sea, gave us an opportunity to enjoy the picturesque scenery where the distance between the two seas is shortest. For various reasons none of us was in a mood comparable to that of Gissing who, on leaving Reggio, wished it were his “to wander endlessly amid the silence of the ancient world, to-day and all its sounds forgotten,” but we felt we had accomplished a mission, leaving Gissing’s name carved in marble on a Catanzaro building internationally associated with him. We were grateful to the local authorities for their generous hospitality as well as for the opportunity they had given us to strengthen the link between Gissing’s admirers and a country, especially a region of it, to which he was intellectually and emotionally so strongly attached. We had met open-minded, enthusiastic people like Daniele and Graziella Cristofaro and their friends in Squillace, with whom new research could be confidently planned. We looked back with pleasure but we also looked forward hopefully.

\* \* \*

After parting with David Grylls and Bouwe and Hanneke Postmus, Pierre and Hélène Coustillas stayed on in Calabria until 30 October. The following report about their research activities in Gissing’s footsteps should be regarded as a supplement to “Revisiting the Shores of the Ionian Sea” (October 1999, Supplement, pp. 6-43). One more visit to Crotona enabled them to fill a few gaps in their pictorial documentation. The former Albergo Concordia proved easier to photograph than it had been a year before, especially the row of windows of those dark rooms to which you gain access from the long corridor which Gissing described in Chapter VII of his book and at the far end of which he caught a glimpse of a tablecloth. The warehouses, which a slide shown at the Amsterdam Conference had revealed still to be in existence in early 1996, made themselves conspicuous on the way to the Esaro, still half stagnant, as Gissing saw it, and



to the railway station. Present-day visitors who linger on the bridge will agree that the water is as green and muddy as it was a hundred years or so ago. The tall reeds that half cancel the course of the river confirm the justness of Gissing's unfavourable comparison with the enchanting Galeso sung by Virgil and Horace (Virgilio and Orazio locally). The warehouses, though in a shabby state and mainly turned into workshops with cars in all stages of repair, still form a long line on your right as you go from the station to the Piazza Vittoria, where Gissing's *albergo* apparently awaits a third baptism which will not make its locating easier by scholars of

-- 24 --

future centuries. The big padlocks – some at least – are still where they used to be, if a bit rusty. Their “elaborate construction” (the writer's phrase) has so far stood the test of time; they will at least see the earliest years of the twenty-first century. The cathedral remained stubbornly closed so that there was no knowing what became of the inscription beneath the statue of the chief apostle “making known to the faithful that, by order of Leo XIII in 1896, an Indulgence of three hundred days is granted to whosoever kisses the bronze toe and says a prayer.” Last year it had been impossible to spot.

On another day, an excursion from Squillace into the austere beautiful Sila Piccola was a way of checking the trustworthiness of old impressions. Most certainly in the heart of this many-folded black mountain, in places well over 4,500 feet high, practically nothing has changed since Gissing travelled in a horse-drawn carriage from Paola to Cosenza except the roads, which are quite suitable for motor traffic. Travelling to Lago Arvo through Tiriolo, of which he recorded having had a splendid view from Catanzaro, is an impressive experience which gives the word Sila a sense not easily forgotten. A map increases the desire of the Gissing scholar to make his way to the Lake through Soveria Mannelli, where Rubbettino Editore have their offices. They recently published Francesco Badolato's translation of Gissing's letters from the land of the sun, that is Italy and Greece, and they have in their catalogue many volumes, big and small, which are of vital interest to the history of Southern Italy, as seen by travellers, Italian and foreign, in past centuries, for instance Friedrich Leopold von Stolberg's *Journey in Calabria* or Alexandre Dumas's account of his travels there. As noted recently the series devoted to “Le Città della Calabria,” quarto volumes from 370 to 440 pages each, is a treasure trove of information, with excellent illustrations, about the towns concerned, Cosenza, Crotona, Reggio Calabria and Catanzaro, to keep to the localities visited by Gissing. They are all edited by Fulvio Mazza and very reasonably priced for books so beautifully produced. Gissing is mentioned or quoted in those on Crotona and Catanzaro.

On the way to the next stage, Bovalino Marina, a detour through San Sostene, the home of the bright boy whom Gissing had met on the train from Squillace to Reggio, was a sociological temptation, as it seemed difficult to imagine that a youth living in such an out-of-the-way mountain village could travel daily, even only weekly, to a high school in Catanzaro. Well, time has not solved the problem, and Fedele De Luca remains unidentified. He must have lived there for a short period, and no trace of any De Luca can be found in either

-- 25 --

*municipio* or *cimitero*. In Reggio, where Dr. Vincenzo Misiani was an ideal cicerone for a short trip to Messina, which Gissing had only watched from afar, chance was more favourable, and the street named after Emilio Cuzzocrea, the soldier who fell on 21 August 1860 and is mentioned pathetically in the last chapter of *By the Ionian Sea*, could be found. What was till now a probability has become a certainty thanks to research conducted by an archivist friend of Dr. Misiani. The Roman baths on the Lungomare had been found last year and the change from Latin to Greek in the inscription on the front of the cathedral duly accounted for. The 1908

earthquake wreaked such havoc on Reggio that the traveller concerned with relics of life ten years before is all too easily discouraged.

There remained some time for a quick return to Lamezia via Cosenza, where some checking or double checking could be done. And there was enough time to make sure, thanks to a knowledgeable *cartolaio*, that the Albergo Vetere, where Gissing regretted he had not gone in preference to the notorious Due Lionetti, was pulled down years ago. As for the said “Little Lions,” now 160 Corso Telesio, the shopkeepers in the establishment opposite confirmed what a group of women had said in 1965. So no doubt about the whereabouts of the *albergo* is now allowed. The biographer’s ideal on this small point has been reached.

\* \* \*

### **Allusions to Gissing in the Complete Works of George Orwell**

PETER MORTON

The Flinders University of South Australia

It is more than a decade since the *Complete Works* (CW) of George Orwell started publication, and now the last eleven volumes have appeared.<sup>1</sup> This extraordinarily comprehensive edition, edited in minute detail by Peter Davison and others, contains the definitive texts of all of Orwell’s books in nine volumes plus, in the volumes just published, “all Orwell’s known essays, poems, plays, letters, journalism, broadcasts and diaries.” It contains, in fact, virtually every extant scrap of Orwell’s writing, as well as a series of appendices on such matters as the contents of Orwell’s library. Its crowning touch is a cumulative index so

-- 26 --

comprehensive that the entry for “Muriel (*goat*)” is followed by 15 page references and an editorial footnote.

That Orwell greatly admired Gissing and owed a large literary debt to him has long been recognised; Mark Connelly recently published a book tracing out some of the connections, though unfortunately he wrote without access to CW.<sup>2</sup> There are, to start with, the odd biographical coincidences and similarities in character and interests. Orwell was born in 1903, the year Gissing died (their lives overlapped by about six months), and both died of lung disease at just the same age, 46. Their careers lasted for not much more than twenty years, and both were prodigiously hard-working; yet both suffered pangs of guilt about their productivity. Orwell put it best. In an entry in his last literary notebook he wrote that “there has literally been not one day in which I did not feel that I was idling, that I was behind with the current job, & that my total output was miserably small. ... I have never been able to get away from this neurotic feeling that I was wasting time. ... But as soon as a book is finished, I begin, actually from the next day, worrying because the next one is not begun, & am haunted with the fear that there will never be a next one – that my impulse is exhausted for good & all” (20, p. 204). It is hardly necessary to explain why such an insecure writer should feel attracted to the creator of Edwin Reardon. Indeed, he once said half-jokingly that *New Grub Street* ought to be kept right out of the hands of any professional writer.

There are other similarities: both were great social investigators, and had the same propensity to go slumming in disguise in search of low-life material. They had the same unerring eye for the repellent physical image. Orwell’s infamous detail of the full chamber-pot under the breakfast table in his lodging-house is just the sort of thing Gissing might have included, if he had had the nerve. Both had a spare, sardonic sense of humour: Orwell

particularly appreciated Gissing's lack of the English literary vice, facetiousness: "great virtue, no sense of humour," he said in his telegraphic "Geo. Gissing" notes, printed here for the first time (19, p. 353). Finally, the two men produced the best two short studies of Charles Dickens ever written. Orwell's famous essay, written in 1939, has four allusions to Gissing's book *Charles Dickens*, which he certainly read carefully; he praised him here and elsewhere as "the best of the writers on Dickens" (12, p. 21).

It is true, of course, that the radical differences between the two are equally striking. Orwell, though Eton-educated, had no special liking for the classics, or any romantic feeling for

-- 27 --

the past; Gissing was almost mawkishly in love with antiquity. Gissing would have abominated Orwell's working assumption that "all art is propaganda," though he would surely have read *Animal Farm* with a grim chuckle, as confirming his misanthropic view of human nature and political reform. It is easy to imagine what he would have thought of Orwell's "wasting" some of his best years in making cheery wartime broadcasts to the Empire. For his part, Orwell despised Gissing's lack of political engagement and specially recommended his books for the insight they provide into the lower middle class roots of Fascism.

What Orwell most admired in Gissing's work was its determined flatness, its pervasive grayness, its dogged investigation of genteel poverty among the "ignobly decent"; and these are exactly the qualities which he sought to emulate in his own novels. The ones belonging to the 1930s, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming up for Air*, are Gissingesque to a remarkable degree, especially the second, which reads, as Jacob Korg has said, rather like a "prequel" to *New Grub Street*, with the unclassed Gordon Comstock as a version of Reardon in the easy, reckless days before he has taken the disastrous step of marrying Amy Yule.

Nor was his debt to Gissing a passing thing; the effect persisted for the rest of his life. Indeed, unlikely though it may appear, I believe the master's influence is still detectable in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It is interesting to remember that Orwell was actually working on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when he wrote his essay "George Gissing" in mid-1948. Could that be the reason why he starts off the latter on a rather unexpected note; that is, by talking guardedly about the merits of the immediately post-war world. "It is not easy to talk confidently about progress," he admits; but progress is what he sees when he looks back sixty years. "There are many reasons ... for thinking that the present age is a good deal better than the last one" – an opinion which he then substantiates by looking into the lost world of Gissing's society. For what he was doing simultaneously in his embryonic novel was (in part) reverting to and recreating that world. When Orwell goes on in his essay to describe what he sees as the quintessential Gissing flavour, we notice that it fits the ambience of Orwell's last novel with remarkable fidelity as well: "the grime, the stupidity, the ugliness, the sex-starvation, the furtive debauchery, the vulgarity, the bad manners, the censoriousness" (19, p. 347).

We can now trace Orwell's interest in Gissing in far more detail than was possible when the only printed source was the four volumes of the misleadingly-titled *Collected Essays*,

-- 28 --

*Journalism and Letters (CEJL)* published in 1968.<sup>3</sup> In terms of crude statistics, the quantity of information about the relation between the two writers has, in fact, almost doubled. In *CEJL* Gissing is mentioned in 12 distinct items, whereas in *CW* he appears in no fewer than 22, many of which have not been printed before. They augment our picture of the literary relationship rather than alter it. Among other things is printed Orwell's *first*, shorter essay, "Not Enough Money: A Sketch of George Gissing" (15, pp. 45-47) which was published in *Tribune* on 2

April 1943 and therefore predates the much more familiar “George Gissing” essay-review by five years.<sup>4</sup> The wealth of editorial commentary is also invaluable.

Unfortunately, even the *Complete Works* throws no light on exactly when Orwell first became acquainted with Gissing. Surprisingly, the name does not appear anywhere in volumes 10 and 11 of *CW*, which take Orwell from birth to the age of 36 and past the writing of all the novels mentioned above. The only clue we have is that in 1935, in *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, Orwell gives his heroine Dorothy Hare a very appropriate copy of *The Odd Women* to read as she eats her dismal, lonely Christmas dinner under a tree for the want of anywhere better to go. Rather disconcertingly, even when Orwell responded to a request in April 1940 from the editors of a guidebook to reveal some of the key influences on him as a writer, he listed Dickens, Charles Reade, Samuel Butler, Zola and Flaubert; and he particularly singled out Somerset Maugham. The name of Gissing would have fitted in quite well in such company, but Orwell did not mention him. How exactly he got from there to the point of wanting to heap extravagant praise on his predecessor – in April 1943 he called him “perhaps the best novelist England has produced,” and to quell the reader’s raised eyebrow immediately adds defiantly, “I am not speaking frivolously” (15, p. 45) – is a minor mystery which even this edition cannot elucidate.

However, what we can do now is to make a more educated guess at how much of Gissing Orwell had actually absorbed. *CW* (20, p. 291) reveals that at the time of his death Orwell owned only six works: *Charles Dickens*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *A Life’s Morning*, *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. It does not seem very much – he owned far more Conrad, Henry James and Trollope – but the list is rather misleading. For one thing, it certainly reflects the sheer unavailability of editions in the first postwar years. He never read *Born in Exile*, for instance (“which some say is his masterpiece”) because he could not find

-- 29 --

even a library copy. We do know for sure that he read *Demos*, because he summarises its plot in “Not Enough Money,” *The Whirlpool* which he reviewed, and possibly, but much less certainly *The Nether World* because he mentions it casually in “George Gissing.” In April 1946, he had someone type up a list of thirteen Gissing novels (18, p. 251), presumably with a view to trying to acquire them or as a note to himself to read them; unfortunately the editor has not included the text of this list.

Orwell’s interest in Gissing strengthened markedly in the last months of his life, when he was very ill and bedridden, and he mentions him repeatedly in his letters. The new letters printed in *CW* confirm how strong an effort he made in 1949 to find a copy of *New Grub Street* for himself in America, and how he repeatedly urged his influential friends to pull strings to get the best novels reprinted. He tried to retrieve the typescript of his Gissing essay from the journal *Politics and Letters*, which had folded before it could appear, but without success: in some of the last notes he made for his will on his books and essays, he recorded it as “LOST....Have never been able to secure return of the MS, but should be printed if recoverable” (20, p. 228). The editor supplies a full account of its recovery in 1959 and now reprints it from the original typescript, though without any significant changes to the familiar version (19, pp. 347-52).

In particular, we notice how Gissing’s life story was on his mind, for he commented that he thought a proper biography of Gissing was “a job that is crying out to be done,” mentioning that he himself had had to turn down a publisher’s offer to commission one (19, p. 400). He knew the salient facts in any event, not only from Roberts’ *Private Life of Henry Maitland* (even though he calls it “that silly [biography] in the form of a novel” [19, p. 400]) but also from the grim account of Gissing last days in Wells’ *Autobiography*. It is surely not fanciful to suppose that, as his last birthday came and went in his sanatorium, Orwell must have been comparing his predicament with Gissing’s at the same age.

<sup>1</sup>*The Complete Works of George Orwell ... edited by Peter Davison Assisted by Ian Angus and Sheila Davison, 20 vols., London: Secker & Warburg, 1986-1998. References in the text to this edition are by volume and page number.*

<sup>2</sup>Mark Connelly, *Orwell and Gissing*, New York: Peter Lang, 1997.

<sup>3</sup>*The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell ..* Edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 4 vols. London: Seeker & Warburg, 1968.

<sup>4</sup>“Not Enough Money” was reprinted in the *Gissing Newsletter*, July 1969, pp. 1-4.

\* \* \* \*

-- 30 --

**“The Poet’s Portmanteau”:  
A Flirtation that Dares not Speak its Name**

ROBERT L. SELIG  
Purdue University Calumet

In Gissing’s fine but little-discussed short story “The Poet’s Portmanteau,” a striking pattern of fake and omitted names helps to trace out the tensions between strong erotic feelings involving a man and a woman and equally strong suppressions of erotic speech. Arriving in London, a young man simply called “the poet,” whose name we never learn, carries his just-completed would-be poetic masterpiece inside a small portmanteau. He deposits it in a shabby boarding-house room that he thinks he has rented from a striking young woman – actually a tenant desperate for immediate cash – who demands prepayment and then disappears with both the money and the poetry-filled portmanteau itself. The hero cannot trace her, for she turns out to have taken this room under an assumed name. Eight years later the now-married woman, hiding under a new and very different alias, returns the poetry manuscript to its author in her own alluring person but refuses to reveal her actual name as she hurries away in a cab.

The story’s opening section provides us with one of the heroine’s two aliases – *Miss Rowe*.<sup>1</sup> In spite of a small variation in the spelling, the name echoes the common pseudonym for unknown legal defendants: *Roe*, as in *Jane* or *John Doe* versus *Richard Roe*. According to the 1982 volume 3 supplement of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Roe* used to be linked with *Doe* in England as a pseudonymous legal name sometime before 1870 (the two remain legally current in the United States). British law had applied it only to defendants in real-estate dispossession cases, in contrast to the United States, where it refers to any unnamed defendants. If by 1870 *Rowe* had already dropped out of British use in the courts, it still would have hinted at pseudonymity. In effect, by assuming this particular false name, the heroine flaunts its obvious fictitiousness, yet she also sticks in a *w* – a mockingly transparent disguise of her fakery.

The young woman in Gissing’s story requires anonymity to cloak supposedly unfeminine behavior. *Rowe* (or *Roe*) seems particularly appropriate here: behind on her week’s rent of merely eight shillings, she faces impending ejection from her dreary little room and outright starvation on the London streets – perhaps even prostitution, although neither she herself nor the

-- 31 --

story’s narrator ever so much as murmurs this disgraceful possibility. By her thievery in order to get the train fare to a poorly paying job out of town (pp. 80, 88-89), she even becomes *Roe* in the broader, American sense: a potential criminal defendant. Still more significantly, she describes herself as having been “a girl who did what is supposed to be the privilege of men –

sowed wild oats” (p. 88): a specific reference to the sexual double standard. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *to sow one’s wild oats* as spending “one’s early life in dissipation or dissolute courses,” and the *OED* elsewhere defines “dissolute” with sexually oriented synonyms: “loose, wanton..., licentious.” Given late-Victorian prudishness about sexually liberated women, it hardly seems surprising that the heroine in the story feels the need of the alias *Rowe*.

The young woman not only alludes to having taken over a typically male bohemian role of would-be creative genius – “she thought herself something of an artist, and went about offering drawings to the papers and the publishers” (p. 88) – but her talk of “wild oats” also sounds more like the promiscuousness of a male bohemian artist than that of a female hanger-on such as Henri Murger’s *Mimi*.<sup>2</sup> In spite of her euphemistic choice of words, Gissing’s young woman always has a sexually aggressive air about her. In their very first meeting, the hero finds “Miss Rowe” “handsome,” though he also feels “disturbed” by the “hard, defiant expression” on her face “rather than attracted” by it. Yet moments later as he walks off to dinner, he realizes that this woman has “strongly affected his imagination,” so that “rhythms” sing “within him to the roaring music of the street.” Returning shortly later to the boarding-house, he feels sadly “disappointed” when she fails to answer his knock and a “slatternly” landlady appears instead. If he feels a kind of exotic titillation rather than outright *attraction* towards this aggressively unconventional young woman, she herself years later in the disguised third person not only openly flatters “the poet” to his face as “very nice looking” and pleasing but also declares him the “only one man” in her entire “life” who has ever “really attracted her” (pp. 77-78, 89, 91) – again a sexual reversal, with an aggressive woman and a passive man. Yet throughout their subtly erotic second meeting, “Miss Rowe” fends off any overt sexual overtures by a proud act of will.

For this second encounter, the heroine has switched from *Miss Rowe*, an essentially blank alias, to a hoity-toity new one – *Eustace Grey* (p. 83). The sham Christian name attached to her new pseudonym has at least two venerable analogues: an eleventh-century British prince, Eustace IV and the first- or second-century patron saint of hunting – the converted Roman general who took the name Eustachius.<sup>3</sup> But *Grey* has parallels closer in time: the title character

-- 32 --

of Benjamin Disraeli’s novel *Vivian Grey* (1831), Oscar Wilde’s differently spelled *Dorian Gray* (1891)<sup>4</sup>; and from actual life and history, scores of aristocratic Greys, including the tragic Lady Jane Grey (1537-1554) and the distinguished 2nd Earl, Charles (1764-1845). In any case, when “the poet” gets a note about his long-lost poems, he immediately thinks that the *Eustace Grey* signature sounds “uncommonly like a pseudonym.” Perhaps because of *Eustace’s* effete reverberations as well as the hero’s memory of the striking young thief, he wonders if “the writer” is a “man or woman” (pp. 83-84).

The heroine’s second alias, just like the first, evades sexual issues but in very different circumstances. When “the poet” asks her to bring his long-lost manuscript to his bachelor’s cottage just outside of London, she arrives unescorted in a provocative way but flashes a wedding ring to show that she is now married in spite of her having neglected to sign her note “Mrs.” She also describes her own lurid past through the distancing lens of the third person singular – a grammatical equivalent of an alias. In fact, she pretends that her bohemian misadventures happened to “a friend” of hers – “a girl, who died” after making a loveless marriage to “a very rich man.” In other words, the fake “Miss Rowe” has perished, and the fake “Eustace Grey” has sprung to life. “Death” in marriage here turns into a transparent metaphor for the general dimming down of freedom and for sexual suppression in particular. But the hero’s “pulses” “flutter” as he looks at the heroine’s “strong, handsome face, and... form,” and he begs her not to leave him right away but to stay for more than four hours until the nine-o’clock train

arrives – time enough to break her barrier of reticence. Yet only a moment before, she had announced pointedly that after having stolen his poems, she had felt so ashamed of herself that she had sown “no more wild oats” (pp. 88, 85, 84, 91). By implication, then, she has not only settled for a sexually cold marriage but has also renounced any possible extramarital affair. If she continues to control her unchaperoned flirtation with the plainly aroused bachelor “poet,” late-Victorian social conventions now control her – a dependent wife of a wealthy husband.

In the end, the controlled and controlling heroine, alias Miss Rowe or Eustace Grey, refuses even the hero’s seemingly harmless final request: “You won’t even tell me your name?” | ‘Not even that. Goodbye, poet!’” (p. 91). Through hiding her actual name to the last, she retains a one-sided mastery of their brief flirtation. As he holds her hand for the first and only time, he

-- 33 --

still cannot call the heroine by her own first name. More importantly, he cannot use her full name to trace her later. By contrast, she has learned both his first and last name, but she keeps her distance by not using either of them. She found them out years ago from his signed manuscript that she had stolen. Yet the single time that she calls him anything but “you” to his face, she gives him the nickname “poet” – a variant of the only name applied to the hero by the story’s own narrator and the identical name – “the poet” – appearing in the title. But this particular nickname merely teases the hero; it does not serve to praise him as a lyrical peer of Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare. The protagonist himself has come to regard his stolen long poem, *The Hermit of the Tor*, as so deeply embarrassing and “horribly crude” that he closes “his eyes” and mutters “inarticulately” whenever he remembers it. These days instead, he writes briskly selling “romantic fiction,” or, as the narrator mockingly explains, “he was a poet still, but no longer uttered himself in verse” (p. 82). The ironic use of “poet” here suggests a writer of sentimental mush in either prose or poetry.

If “Miss Rowe,” “Eustace Grey,” “the poet,” and sowing “wild oats” all serve as linguistic concealments or at least evasive euphemisms in regard to the protagonists’ actions and feelings, a continual shrinking from openness of speech gives “The Poet’s Portmanteau” a particularly subtle effect of indirection. The hero’s final words raise the issue of this shrinking, yet they evade it too. “I do remember your friend’s face. And how I wish she could have spoken to me that night!” (p. 91). “The poet” knows perfectly well that his present visitor and her “friend... who died” have the same identity, but instead of saying “I wish *you* could have spoken to me,” he plays along with her tactic of verbal false reference. And, in fact, she really *did* speak to him on that long vanished night. She told him that a room was available, announced the rent, demanded prepayment, and asked when he would come back to the room – a total of thirty-seven words. But without saying so openly, he hints at his wish that she had told him all about her bohemian adventures, her sowing of “wild oats,” her desperate need for money, and perhaps even her readiness for a new sexual love in return for his chivalrous help. Yet if none of this got said at their original brief meeting, none of it gets said openly this time either. All remains disguised – the narrative equivalent of *Doe* versus *Ro[w]e* – in a fascinating game of thwarted desire within the broader context of late Victorian cultural reticence about the sexual life.

[The writing of this article was facilitated by a Research Award from Purdue University Calumet.]

-- 34 --

<sup>1</sup>George Gissing, “The Poet’s Portmanteau,” *Human Odds and Ends* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1898), p. 79; hereafter references given in the text are to this edition. The story first appeared in *The English Illustrated Magazine*, vol. 12, February 1895, pp. 3-10. Gissing wrote

the story from 5 to 11 December 1894, but he noted in his diary that it was one “that I have long had in mind.” See *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1978), p. 323; hereafter referred to in the footnotes as *Diary*.

<sup>2</sup>Henri Murger’s *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1847-49) long remained one of Gissing’s favorite fictional works. See his entry of 13 April 1890, *Diary*, p. 214, where he speaks of “reading” Murger’s book “for [the] 20th time.” A post-Murger literary analogue comes far closer to Gissing’s own twist on the sexual double standard in bohemia: in Robert Browning’s “Youth and Art” (first published in his 1864 *Dramatis Personae*) the male and the female who hang back from even flirting, *both* pursue artistic careers, just as in Gissing’s story, and the woman ends by marrying a lord, while the male protagonist achieves a merely superficial success in art.

<sup>3</sup>“Micropaedia,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “Eustace IV” and “Eustace, Saint.”

<sup>4</sup>On 23 July 1893, Gissing started to read *Dorian Gray* but does not seem ever to have finished it (see *Diary*, p. 310).

\* \* \*

### Gissing and the Crystal Palace

SYDNEY LOTT  
Eastbourne

The Crystal Palace, the Victorian equivalent to our Millennium Dome, was erected in Hyde Park to house the Great Exhibition of 1851. The project was a phenomenal success with over six million visitors between 1st May and 11th October. The Palace was designed by Joseph Paxton as a purely temporary structure but this measure of success prompted him to move the 4,500 tons of iron and 393,655 panes of glass to Sydenham in South London and rebuild it on an even more grandiose scale. Set amongst grounds and fountains that rivalled those of Versailles, it became a People’s Palace for 84 years until its tragic destruction by fire in 1936. The Crystal Palace at Sydenham was unique in that it offered, for a few pence, a whole day’s entertainment of a kind which hitherto had only been within the reach of the well-off.

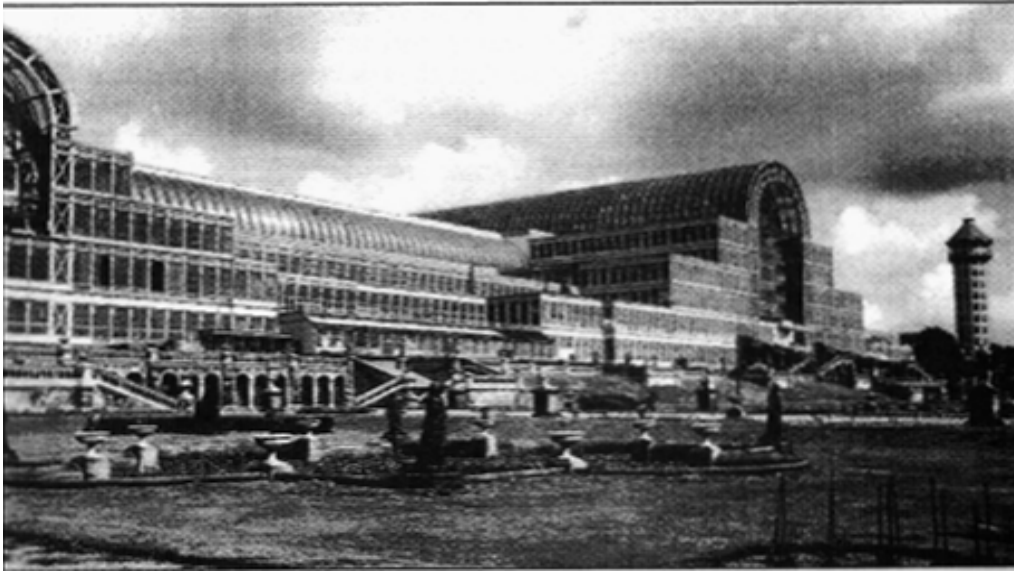
Two new railway lines were built to serve the Palace. The Brighton Company united its

-- 35 --

lines from London Bridge, Victoria and Kensington at the low-level station which was connected to the Palace by a 720 ft. long glass covered colonnade, the walls covered by creeping plants and lined with plaster statuary. The London, Chatham & Dover Railway delivered its passengers at the high-level station which was connected directly to the Palace grounds by an attractive brick vaulted tunnel. Later a pneumatic railway was built in the grounds to connect the Sydenham and Penge entrances – a distance of about 600 yards.

In the boom years until the end of the century an average of two million people found their way to the Palace each year. One of the two million in 1888 was George Gissing. His diary for 2nd April that year records – “Spent day at Crystal Palace, and brought back a lot of good notes.”<sup>1</sup> It was Easter Bank Holiday Monday and attendance on the day was 65,546, an excess of 12,000 over the previous Easter Monday. Bank holidays were established in 1871. Gissing was researching for *The Nether World* in which he devoted the whole of Chapter XII, “Io Saturnalia,” to recording the visit to the “Paliss” by Bob and Pennyloaf, together with friends and enemies, on their wedding day.





Price/Harrison postcard showing the Crystal Palace in the boom years

-- 36 --

The extensive collection of Crystal Palace papers held by the local history department of the Upper Norwood Joint Library includes press reports of events throughout the years, including the activities on Easter Monday, 1888, when Gissing made his exploratory visit. They tell of overcrowded trains running at frequent intervals bringing the singing, beer-swilling pleasure seekers to the Palace in their thousands. Not a setting which would have had a great appeal for Gissing.

Swings, horses, bicycles and all the fun of the fairground greeted the visitors, together with circus acts and – a particular favourite on that day – the toboggan slide. Gissing no doubt witnessed the race between the ex-champion bicyclist, J. Keen, and a horseman. This event drew an immense crowd round the bicycle track. The wheelman won by a few yards only and the onlookers went mad with joy. Variety entertainments included a new burlesque of Douglas Jerrold's nautical drama, "Lovely Black-ey'd Susan," and a ventriloquial performance by a Lieut. Cole. A military concert by the Scots Guards was followed by fireworks and dancing with much drinking and horseplay. Groups of girls banded together, leaping along with shrieks of hysterical laughter. All this did little to raise Gissing's spirits. He recalled that – "Nowhere could be found any amusement appealing to the mere mind, or calculated to effeminate by encouraging a love of beauty."<sup>2</sup> The Bank Holiday crowd presented a great review of the People. Gissing concluded – "Since man came into being did the world ever exhibit a sadder spectacle?"<sup>3</sup> The press reported that some visitors got a little elated towards the evening, but that there was comparatively little drunkenness observable. Gissing seems to have considered this to be an understatement and Chapter XII ends in a debacle.

Writing *The Nether World*, set in the claustrophobic world of London's underclass, gave voice to Gissing's post-Nell depression. The visit to the Crystal Palace on 2nd April probed the depth of this depression but by 8th July there appears to be a glimmer of light with the diary entry – "In morning to Mile End Waste, for a strike meeting of Bryant & May's match girls. Very few of the girls themselves present. Speeches from Mrs. Besant, Burrows, John Burns, Cunninghame Graham, Clementina Black, Stewart Headlam etc.— Gave 1/- at collection. Dinner in Holborn, with unwonted pint of stout.— Afternoon, wrote to Roberts.— Evening, into Regent's Park, where again attended the strike meeting, and again gave 1/-, rather, I'm afraid, because I was ashamed to give nothing, in my bourgeois costume."<sup>4</sup> This level of support for the

Match Girls – typical Bank Holiday visitors to the Crystal Palace – is remarkable when viewed

-- 37 --

against his financial position and the general tone of *The Nether World*.

However, remarkable as it may seem, Gissing was certainly not alone. William J. Fishman's *East End 1888, a year in a London Borough among the labouring poor* (Duckworth, 1988) reports a wave of public sympathy, particularly after Annie Besant published her "White Slavery in London" article in the *Link* on 23rd June. She drew attention to appalling wages and conditions of work for the Match Girls compared with enormous dividends paid to shareholders. On 5th July, 1,200 girls from the wood match making department marched out and 300 from the box making adjunct followed them. Nationwide support was achieved. Even traditionally affluent and Conservative Tunbridge Wells sent money to the strike fund. The *East London Advertiser* reported that local Jewish tradesmen subscribed among themselves and at a nearby public house distributed large quantities of bread, cheese and beer to the girls. Frederick Charrington granted the use of his halls in the Mile End Road and 1,300 girls assembled there to have their names placed on a register. A boycott of Bryant & May's matches was organised. Questions were asked in Parliament and Sidney Webb moved the National Liberal Club into action while the Fabians offered such heavyweight orators as Bernard Shaw and Stewart Headlam, who stomped the streets of the capital enlisting support in clubs and pubs.

Within a fortnight the London Trades Council was called in as arbitrator and the firm virtually capitulated. Sacked workers were reinstated, piecework rates reviewed, grievances to be taken straight to the Managing Directors without the intervention of foremen. Even a breakfast room was promised so that the girls would not be obliged to eat in the same room in which they worked. It soon became apparent that this act of mass solidarity by unskilled workers set off a new pattern of unionisation with effects extending well beyond the boundaries of East London. Thus, by attending the crucial meetings on 8th July Gissing witnessed an important landmark in the history of the Trades Union Movement.

Six months later in Florence, when he was researching for his next novel, *The Emancipated*, his diary records: "At 4 in afternoon walked to the Cascine. Great crowds of people. Utter absence of anything corresponding to English rowdyism, male or female. Good taste in dress; quiet colours. Young girls mostly have hair 'à la Thyrsa.' Saw a great number of beautiful faces. I notice more and more the democratic spirit of these southern people; the distinctions of the

-- 38 --

north do not exist in anything like the same trenchant way. The labouring-class girls go bareheaded, with coloured shawls on their arms; they are very fat-faced and rosy, as if their work did them good. Numbers of such go to the galleries on Sunday. No giggling, no horse-play. Much nice politeness among all."<sup>5</sup>

*The Nether World* ended Gissing's series of working class novels but it would appear that even improved crowd tolerance and the benign influence of Italy could not entirely erase his memory of the Crystal Palace roisterers.

<sup>1</sup>*London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England. The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nether World*, *The World's Classics*, O. U. P. (1992), ch. XII, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>4</sup>*Diary*, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 123.

\* \* \*

### Book Review

George Gissing: *The Unclassed*, translated by Saburo and Harumi Kuramochi. Tokyo: Koyosha Shuppan, 1998. 319 pp. Yen3,000.

A Japanese translation of *The Unclassed* was published in June last year. The translators are Saburo and Harumi Kuramochi, who published their translations of *The Odd Women* and *The Nether World* in 1988 and 1992 respectively. So *The Unclassed* is their third translation of a novel by George Gissing.

When I was offered the job of writing a review of Mr. and Mrs. Kuramochi's translation of *The Unclassed*, it came really as a surprise to me. Though knowing well I was far from qualified for the task, I decided to take the offer as a challenge and do the job to the best of my ability. As I was presumably chosen as a potential reviewer owing to my having translated *Born in Exile*, I think it advisable to confine my criticism to matters I am primarily concerned with and to write how I have reacted to Mr. and Mrs. Kuramochi's effort as a fellow translator.

It was in 1977 that I first read *The Unclassed* and I had never since had an opportunity of reopening the volume. So I had almost forgotten the story. In order to refresh my memory, I

-- 39 --

reread the novel after the lapse of twenty-two years and have read it once again, this time closely comparing it with the Japanese version. I must confess it was my first perusal of Mr. and Mrs. Kuramochi's translations. To my pleasure I found the present one fairly readable on the whole and well rendered in places. Especially, Chapter XII (Rent Day), Chapter XIII (A Man-Trap), Chapter XIV (Near and Far), Chapter XIX (In the Meantime) and Chapter XXXVII (Forbidden) seemed to me to be adequately translated. On the other hand, I regret to say that I came across, not infrequently, such inaccuracies, errors and not-sufficiently-thought-out expressions as stand in the way of a true appreciation of the novel.

I cite as an example a speech of Waymark's in Chapter VI. He told Julian Casti, with whom he had become acquainted through an advertisement, "I want to find some new form of satire; I feel capabilities that way which shall by no means rust unused." This expression has obviously a Shakespearean ring (*Hamlet* IV, 4, 39) and is becoming in a literary young man like Waymark. Mr. and Mrs. Kuramochi's translation runs thus if put into English: I feel capabilities that way so that I will do it by all means. Translating in this way amounts to losing not only a literary flavour but also a correct sense.

Another example may be cited from the last sentence of the last letter that Maud Enderby sent to Osmond Waymark (Ch. XXXVII). The phrase 'here and hereafter' means, of course, 'in this world and in the world to come.' It is rendered in Japanese as if it meant simply 'always.' Thus the Japanese version here has lost the religious tone which pious Maud would have willingly retained. Similar examples of what may be called a secular indifference to spirituality are seen here and there. Casti's desperate cry "Curse her to all eternity!" (Ch. XXI) does not mean "Curse her till she dies!" "The greater and the lesser light" (Ch. XVII) is an allusion to *Genesis* (1.16) meaning the sun and the moon respectively. "Five hundred verses of the Psalms" (Ch. X) are five hundred lines of the *Book of Psalms* and not exactly "five hundred stanzas of hymns." "A sort of hymeneal chorus" (Ch. XXVIII) is translated as if it were "a sort of hymnal chorus."

It would be tedious to go through the list of the slips and errors I happened to notice. Suffice it to say that they amount to nearly one hundred and fifty. Some of them are careless mistakes and therefore pardonable. Some of them are closely related to the description of the main characters and therefore hardly pardonable. For instance, when Egger, an unhappy schoolmaster from Switzerland, finished singing a Volkslied with the following line: "Der

-- 40 --

Mensch wenn er fortgeht, der kommt nimmermehr," Waymark said to himself "Heaven be thanked, no!" (Ch. VIII). His assent signifies his deep sense of Sophoclean pessimism (e.g. *Oedipus Coloneus*, 1225), whereas Waymark in the Japanese version said in admiration "It's simply wonderful!" Towards the end of the novel Ida imagines herself telling Waymark that she loved him as a woman loved only once, but she knew she could never thus speak to him. The author gives the reason briefly. "Her humility was too great" (Ch. XXXVI). This is characteristic of Ida. She cannot but have a low opinion of herself. But we read in the Japanese translation: "Her pride was too great." Pride means a high opinion of one's self and therefore just an antonym of humility.

Lastly something must be said about the quotation from Virgil's *Georgics* (Ch. XXXVIII). A number of Greek and Latin quotations one encounters occasionally in the writings of George Gissing are certainly daunting to his students and translators. But they sometimes may act or may have acted as a happy prologue to a life-long amateur study of the classics. I love to imagine such possibilities. So it means much to me whether these classical quotations are correctly rendered or not. I am sorry to say that Mr. and Mrs. Kuramochi's translation from the Latin has, in this respect, disappointed me. It is incorrect. In their translation there is no verb, whereas in the original 'certent' is the verb in the subjunctive form meaning "they may vie with." I wish they had referred to, at least, H. R. Fairclough's English translation in Loeb Classical Library Series, for it is sure to be easily available in any academic library. Incidentally, when I referred to the notes to the text of the Harvester edition of *The Unclassed*, I found 'turiferis' was rendered by 'tower-bearing.' This may be a mistranslation. That H. R. Fairclough's 'incense-bearing' is the correct translation will be confirmed if you look into, for instance, the first volume of *The Works of Virgil, with a Commentary by John Conington and Henry Nettleship* (Olms, 1979).

Kazuo Mizokawa, Tokyo.

\* \* \*

### Notes and News

Oxford University Press will publish their new edition of *The Odd Women*, edited by Patricia Ingham, during the present month. John Keahey's book (see our October number and its supplement), *A Sweet and Glorious Land: Revisiting the Ionian Sea*, is scheduled to appear

-- 41 --

next June. The third impression of Henry Toledano's *The Modern Library Price Guide 1917-2000*, which contains a wealth of information on the Modern Library from its foundation, is available from Books etc, 298 4th Avenue, #395, San Francisco, CA 94118-2468 (paperback \$17.95; hardback \$39.95).

In the last ten years or so, besides reviewing the *Collected Letters* in various newspapers, D. J. Taylor has alluded to current work on Gissing's life and works a number of times. His

latest well-meant allusion is a reminder that the biography of Gissing promised by the editor of the *Journal* is still unpublished, “quietly gestating” (*Guardian G2*, 23 April 1999, p. 7, under “Stars of the Nineties”). Reviewing the English edition of the biography of Tazio Secchiarioli by Diego Marmorio (London: Abrams), Gaby Wood made one of the familiar mistakes about the origin of the word *paparazzo*. The reviewer mentioned Gissing and his book sceptically, giving 1909 as publication date. An attempt to have the mistake corrected was ignored by the editor of the *Guardian*. As a rule, checking the reliability of one’s sources is not a favourite occupation among journalists (“Flashgun Warrior,” *Guardian Weekend*, 17 July 1999, pp. 10-15).

John Michell has discovered a passage on “Fate and the Apothecary,” a short story collected in the *The House of Cobwebs*, in a volume by John Betjeman, *English Cities and Small Towns*, published in 1943. One knew of Betjeman’s interest in Gissing, but in none of his many works did he seem to have mentioned him. Was it near Exeter that Gissing came across the original of Farmiloe? Edith Lister, in her anonymous review of *The House of Cobwebs* (*Gentleman’s Magazine*, June 1906) wrote that she was with Gissing in Surrey when he met the original of the apothecary.

\* \* \*

### Recent Publications

#### Volumes

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi, and *The Odd Women*, ed. Elaine Showalter, London: Penguin Books, [1999], respectively 11th and 5th impressions in the Penguin Classics. £6.99 and £7.99. ISBN 0-14-043032-6 and 0-14-043379-1.

-- 42 --

George Gissing, *The Nether World*, Oxford: O. U. P., The Oxford World’s Classics, ed. Stephen Gill, [1999]. First impression in that format. Red and white paperback. £6.99. ISBN 0-19-283767-2.

George Gissing, *Un presentimento e altri racconti vittoriani*, Catanzaro: Abramo Editore, 1999. Translation, introduction and notes by Mauro Francesco Minervino, with an essay by Virginia Woolf. Contains “An Inspiration,” “Chnistopherson,” “The Justice and the Vagabond,” “A Lodger in Maze Pond,” and “The Fate of Humphrey Snell.” Green paperback. Lire 35,000. ISBN 88 8324 061.8.

#### Articles, reviews, etc.

Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth Century British Fiction*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. Contains many passing allusions to Gissing’s early novels and devotes a few pages to *New Grub Street*.

John Gross (ed.), *The New Oxford Book of English Prose*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Passages from *New Grub Street* (“A Literary Man”) and *In the Year of Jubilee* (“An Advertising Man”) are anthologized.

Ian Ousby (ed.), *The Cambridge Guide to Fiction in English*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Entries on Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn*, *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*

and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.

Margaret Drabble (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Revised edition. See under Gissing, *New Grub Street*, New Woman and Realism.

John Mullan, "Lost Voices," *Guardian G2*, 18 June 1999, pp. 2-3. Contains a passage on Mrs. Yule's pronunciation of English. Had the author read the article by Wolfgang Kruschke, "Ein Fall für Emma," which appeared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 6 January?

W. W., "Invasie van gissingologen in P. C. Hoofthuis," *Folia* (University of Amsterdam weekly), 3 September 1999, p. 16. A short paragraph on the forthcoming Conference.

-- 43 --

Franco Rizzi, "Letteratura: Conferenza internazionale dal 9 all'11," *Il Cittadino* (Monza), 4 September 1999, p. 29. With 1895 portrait of Gissing.

Anon., "With Gissing in Italy," *Documentary Editing*, September 1999, p. 69. A short descriptive notice.

Anon., "Nasce in città il 'paparazzo,'" *Il Quotidiano* (Catanzaro), 17 October 1999, p. 14. On the forthcoming Gissing ceremony in Catanzaro, with a portrait of Gissing and a photograph of the old Albergo Centrale. On the same page appeared extracts from an article by Mauro F. Minervino, "Dall'oste quel nome di battaglia," with a portrait of Fellini.

Anon., "Alla scoperta di Gissing," *Il Domani della Calabria*, 17 October 1999, p. 14. With a photograph of the building where the Albergo Centrale used to be. On the same page appeared Massimo Tigani's leader, "Un viaggio nel presente."

Paola Cosentino, "Un viaggio sulle rive dello Jonio," *Il Domani*, 20 October 1999, p. 13. With a view of Catanzaro at the turn of the century and a reproduction of the cover of the current edition of *Sulle rive dello Ionio*.

Laura Marano, "Quel paparazzo che piacque a Fellini," *Il Quotidiano*, 23 October 1999, p. 36. On the same page appeared an article by Mauro F. Minervino.

Paola Cosentino, "Nel ricordo del 'nostro' Gissing," *Il Domani*, 24 October 1999, p. 14. With photo of the unveiling ceremony.

Sonia Libico, "Scoperta la targa su Gissing," *Il Quotidiano*, 24 October 1999, p. 16. Report of the symposium and plaque unveiling with three photographs. Also an article on the "King dei paparazzi" with two photos of him.

Betty Calabretta, "Quell'inglese dal sangue giallorosso," *Gazzetta del Sud*, 24 October 1999, p. 25. With three illustrations.

Salvatore Taverniti, "E sulle tracce di G. Gissing, una tappa anche a Squillace," *Il Domani*, 26 October 1999, p. 19.

Anon., "Quando a Catanzaro si respirava un'aria diversa," *Il Giornale di Calabria*, 26 October 1999, P. 5. With photo of the plaque being unveiled.

D. J. Taylor, "Ready steady write," *Guardian*, 29 October 1999, p. 5. Passage on Gissing and writing speed.

Dario Redoelli, "Un Gissing tutto italiano," *Il Besanese*, September-October 1999, pp. 18-19. Review of *La Terra del sole*.

Pierre Coustillas, "Gissing in ML," *Modern Library Collector*, October 1999, pp. 1 and 5. Part II of the article begun in April.

Annie Escuret, "Notes and Reviews," *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, October 1999, pp. 204-05. Short review of *With Gissing in Italy*.

Shigeru Koike, "George Gissing: *The Emancipated*," *Kyoto English Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Autumn 1999, pp. 64-66. This essay is part of a series entitled "Unknown Minor Masterpieces." Professor Koike chose *The Emancipated*, a novel still unavailable in Japanese, pointing out that among other engaging aspects is its vivid picture of British travellers in Italy, which anticipated E. M. Forster's stories *A Room with a View* and *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Like Forster Gissing depicted cases of remarkable mental development through contact with Italian culture and the *genius loci*. *The Emancipated* is a very early example of a novel that deals with what John Pemble called the Mediterranean passion.

Dennis Shrubsall, "Two Men and a Moat," *Somerset Magazine*, November 1999, pp. 26-27. About Gissing, W. H. Hudson and "The Fate of Humphrey Snell."

Keith Thomas (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Work*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Quotations from Gissing's correspondence and *The Nether World* appear on pp. v, 179, 260-61, 264 and 508-09.

Mauro Francesco Minervino, *Valle del Crocchio: Nei giardini del Mediterraneo*, Cropani and Catanzaro: GAL "Valle del Crocchio," c. 1999. Two illustrated volumes with many references to Gissing, extracts from *By the Ionian Sea*, the correspondence and the diary.

\* \* \* \* \*

### 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 most back years.

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

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

\* \* \*

### **Information for Contributors**

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

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

\* \* \*

### **Editorial Board**

Pierre Coustillas, University of Lille  
Shigeru Koike, Tokyo Christian Woman's University  
Jacob Korg, University of Washington, Seattle  
Bouwe Postmus, University of Amsterdam