

THE GISSING JOURNAL

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

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The Grocer’s Romance: Economic Transactions and Radical Individualism in “Will Warburton”

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“If I had to begin over again, I should go in for commerce [...] I would apply myself to the science and art of money-making in the only hopeful way – honest buying and selling. There’s something so satisfying about it. I envy even the little shopkeeper, who reckons up his profits every Saturday night, and sees his business growing.” *The Crown of Life*

Though Alexander Otway is far from being a mouthpiece for authorial wisdom in economic as well as in ethical matters, the piece of advice he gives his young half-brother in the early pages of *The Crown of Life* seems to capture one of the most significant and surprising aspects of Gissing’s later fiction: its attempt to give artistic representation to the lower-class economic ethos. In spite of his own scornful attitude towards the concerns and the aesthetics of the shop-keeping *bourgeoisie*, Gissing seems to have felt that the cause of radical individualism – his “decadent” loyalty to unredeemed particularity, as John Goode has taught us to brand it – could only be supported by reestablishing its vital link with the nitty-gritty of economic transactions.

This urge might have had something to do with the difficulties of self-representation

experienced by late nineteenth-century men of letters. Willing, and sometimes compelled, to make an honest living out of their literary efforts, they felt at the same time uneasy about their interaction with the market-place, caught as they were in the clutch of professional ideology with its emphasis on selfless devotion to “art” and proud disregard of gross self-advertisement and “cheap” popularity. The later Gissing, who repeatedly voiced his amazement at the gap between his reputation among the *cognoscenti* and the scanty sale of his books,¹ apparently came to feel as a hypocritical sham the “gentlemanly” pretensions of literary professionalism which he undoubtedly shared. Thus in his fiction he explored divergent ways out of the

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ideological *impasse*: while with *Ryecroft* he simulated cultured leisure and a concomitant farewell to fiction-writing, with *Will Warburton* he explored manly confrontation with the market-place within a field which was emphatically not that of genteel professionalism.

The question was, in the latter case, that of conferring representability on the petty trader, which implied granting aesthetic respectability to the idea of self-realization through business enterprise on a small scale, to “buying and selling” over the counter, and the gleeful reckoning of profits at the end of a day’s work. Such a task was, of course, well-nigh impossible for any writer active around the turn of the century, a time when the juxtaposition of aesthetic value and the market-place was generally felt as very intense, while the growing complexities of economic life seemed to herald the demise of the small entrepreneur. Thus, waged against the grain of prevailing trends in the literary and economic discourse of the time, Gissing’s solitary fight in defence of the individual was to involve a blend of regression and reconciliation, idealism and the prosaic, political *engagement* and Little England quietism. The following essay tries to unravel this crucial ideological knot, dwelling on some aspects of its historical context, and focussing on *Will Warburton* as a *terminus ad quem* capable of casting light on much that Gissing wrote around the turn of the century.

Sugar and the Empire

Will Warburton is a novel about class prejudice, self splitting and self reconciliation, urban reality and urban romance, marketing art and marketing sugar. This last theme has, let us remember, a key role in a plot where the main character’s fortunes and misfortunes are largely connected to the transformations of the sugar industry and trade. Such prominence is both structural and symbolic: even the very climax of the story (Rosamund’s discovery that Mr. Jollyman and Will Warburton are one and the same person) is brought about by Bertha’s need to buy some sugar. Sugar, that is, eventually allows the eponymous hero to join together the gentlemanly and the lower-middle class *personæ* into which he has split himself, very much as it allows the various themes of the novel to coalesce into a fairly unitary piece of fiction, directing a potentially painful story about *déclassement* and fierce struggle for survival towards a well-balanced happy ending. It was, no doubt, the pressure towards self-integration that acted as a main propellant in this narrative enterprise as well as in quite a few of Gissing’s later productions. Secret selves were very openly asking to be re-united with public ones across class

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barriers both in *The Town Traveller* and in “A Poor Gentleman”; unrealistic images of oneself were rebuked and punished in *Our Friend the Charlatan* as genteel pretensions were good-humouredly vanquished in “The Scrupulous Father”; while in *The Crown of Life* successful retotalizing *Bildung* and all-round achievement (professional, intellectual, personal) were eventually granted to young Piers Otway, whose illegitimacy turns out to be a sign of

distinction, and not a shameful fact to be hidden away.

All this, I am afraid, sounds – and to some extent *is* – “sugary” enough. And were Gissing more of a playful ironist, bent on mocking the larger public he was desperately trying to cajole into buying his books, a suspicion might be entertained that the prominence of sugar in *Will Warburton* might be a tongue-in-cheek device to cast irony on the “romance of real life” it purports to narrate. The later Gissing being what, and where, we know he was – “sick, fearful, living in the South of France,”² and painfully removed from the thick of English affairs –, the punctilious construction of his last completed plot on the fluctuations of the international sugar trade seems to have served a double purpose: that of safely mooring his “romance” to “real life,” while at the same time exploiting the self-advertising quality of a highly topical subject.

The actual writing of *Will Warburton* started in June 1902; but we know that Gissing had already made some preparatory research on “sugar” in the preceding spring,³ prompted – we may surmise – by the rich public debate precipitated, in France and in Britain, by the recent Brussels Conference. The last of a series of aborted attempts at pacification and international regulation of the sugar trade, the Conference had ended with an agreement, stipulated by the nine major European countries, to prohibit the import of bounty-fed sugar, or to penalise it by charging duties. In England, some measure against “unnaturally cheap sugar”⁴ – such as beetroot sugar produced and heavily subsidized by France and Germany – had long been advocated by the supporters of Greater Britain’s interests, alarmed at the decline of the cane-sugar industry in the West Indies and generally favourable to an aggressive economic policy of Imperial Preference and protective duties. The issue was, however, very controversial, and had been so for half a century: free traders frowned upon foreign bounties but were highly reluctant to adopt retaliatory measures, and low sugar prices had sustained large internal consumption, brisk grocery trade and the boom of the jam, marmalade, biscuit and sweet industries – a particularly flourishing sector of the British economy. The lobbies of sugar

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producers, refiners, wholesalers, retailers, and industrialists had conflicted since the abolition of duties on imports in 1849: the stipulation of the 1902 Convention, in the midst of the great Tariff controversy, was a success of the Imperial faction, and resulted in a steady rise in sugar prices in Britain, much to the irritation of shopkeepers and jam producers.⁵

Indeed Gissing seems to have gone out of his way to shape *Will Warburton*’s career on the hard facts of the late nineteenth-century sugar question as it could be perceived retrospectively from the vantage point of 1902. As we learn in the course of the book, Will had started off, in the 1870s, as a young clerk in a sugar refinery firm in St. Kitt’s, and then in London; subsequently he had entered a partnership with his employer and suffered from the decline of the cane-sugar trade. In 1886, he agrees to wind up the business and to invest in a jam factory; eventually, losing most of his capital, he ends up as a successful grocer, deftly profiting from low prices and expanding market conditions. Also, the terms of the controversy are explicitly voiced in the novel: from the West Indies refiners’ complaint about lack of Government support, which will bring about the demise of a “great industry out of mere regard for the fetish of Free Trade” (20), to the widespread concern that cheap prices might encourage overproduction, ending up in the inevitable “glut” in the market (56), from the looming foreign competition (“the Germans,” who are going to buy up the St. Kitt’s estate) to the rising fortunes of the confectionery industry: “Cheap sugar has done for the refiners, but it’s a fortune for the jam trade” (22).

The emphasis on sugar, then, and the choice of grocery as the specific testing ground for its hero’s honour and manly resilience neatly situate *Will Warburton* at the intersection of internal and external markets, so that while its focus is on very English subjects and settings, the narrative obliquely implicates the international scenario and the ideological strife over Empire,

in relation to which Gissing definitely had an axe to grind. In spite of the author's fervid anti-Empire and anti-jingo feelings, the narrator here remains remarkably non-committal on the sugar question, and his main character does very much the same. However, the success of the newly established shopkeeper – which will eventually allow him to marry the very pleasant girl he loves – tips the scales in favour of cheap sugar and anti-Tariff free traders. Also, the fact that Will's "fortunate fall" from the ranks of the conventionally well-to-do is brought about by stock-exchange speculations foolishly entered into by his partner Sherwood – who clamours for

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protective measures, likes "romance and adventure" and heartily despises "humdrum commerce" – casts a familiar slur on the Imperial faction. Finance and aggressive colonial expansionism were by that time associated as a matter of course, and risky games of chance, at the expense of trusting friends and hapless clients, had a very long and very bad record in fiction from Dickens's *Little Dorrit* to Gissing's own *The Whirlpool*. As stated by the very respectable John Jacks in *The Crown of Life*: "You may drink and be a fine fellow; but every gambler is a sneak, and possibly a criminal. We're beginning, now, to gamble for slices of the world."⁶

It ought to be specified, at this juncture, that by focussing on the domestic economy – which is shown as capable of patiently adapting to global transformation and eventually gaining thereby –, the novel quietly but unmistakably lined up with those who, at the time, disputed the overall profitability of the Empire. They looked at finance, the arms industry and parasitic sectors of the upper classes as the prime supporters and only beneficiaries of aggressive colonial policies, and generally believed that to devote energies to the thorough tilling of the native soil would be much wiser than to secure foreign markets through monopolistic measures backed by military force.⁷ At its inception, at the time of the Anti-Corn Law League, the discourse of Free Trade radicalism proved – paradoxically – apt to converge with that of conservative Little Englandism,⁸ and Gissing's own brand of anti-imperialism seems very much to be placed at one such intersection. If with the quietism of *Ryecroft* he caught, and all too easily marketed, many a popular Little England tune (celebrating home and countryside, roast beef and national butter, Shakespeare and Johnson), with *The Crown of Life* he appears to be bent on reviving the more pugnaeous tradition of middle-class radicalism.

Little read and little commented upon, this "optimistic" "anti-jingo" novel published in 1899 does indeed provide some crucial insight into the later Gissing's peculiar ideological mix as it eventually crystallised in *Will Warburton*. Jerome Otway's political activism, his fight "in the everlasting war of human emancipation," is reminiscent of Chartist battles and international socialism, as well as of radical individualism, and free-commerce millenaristic pacifism *à la* Cobden and Bright. In short, it seems to hark back to an age when the middle-class fight against aristocratic privilege had not yet given way to the process of middle-class gentrification. All this is inscribed in the story of the Otway family, which enacts an ideal continuity between the heyday of middle-class radicalism and Gissing's turn-of-the-century individualism, with its

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dislike of aggressive international politics, jingo rhetoric and all the paraphernalia of Greater-Britain interests. Jerome's two elder sons, trained for genteel professionalism, emphatically prove no good at all, while Piers – apprenticed to honest trade, and only briefly tempted away from it – turns out to be the true recipient of his father's most precious bequest: his ideals. They are somewhat larger in scope and in political implications than the mere celebration of love as "the crown of life": Piers's defence of Russia and China against British prejudice and intrusion echoes the antiCrimean-war and antitrade wars stance of the Cobdenites

in the 1850s; his mature scorn for civil service employment recalls the earlier middle-class rejection of aristocratic parasitism and cumbersome State bureaucracy; and his striving to self-realization through honest commercial enterprise, which easily obtains the elderly revolutionary's approval, is full of mid-century business ethos and self-help heroism: "I think there is no harm in telling you that I hope to make money. If I do so, it will be done, I think, honourably, as the result of hard work."⁹

However, rich as it is in political, and also psychological,¹⁰ implications, *The Crown of Life* is far from constituting the maturely persuasive piece of fiction it might have been. Its main weakness does not really stem from any ingenuous or romantic optimism, nor – all in all – from the fact that its upper-middle class setting, made of "prosperous professionals, empire builders, members of Parliament, and the like" is not so solidly familiar to Gissing as the lower strata of society.¹¹ The problem is, rather, the half-hearted way Gissing goes about his work, his loyalties being split between Liberal radicalism (with its concomitant pacifism, pride in honourable trade, scorn for petty social conventions, etc.) and the ideal of gentlemanly leisure. The latter, which – it is well known – exercised an unconquerable fascination on Gissing, was historically ingrained in the process of gentrification of the Victorian middle classes. So much so that, in the late nineteenth century, it inevitably stood for *rentier* existence, investments at home and abroad, and, ultimately, finance and Empire. In short, politically and economically, it embodied all that the novel's radicalism purported to oppose, and needless to say, it proved powerful enough to re-direct our hero's course from honourable business to an even more honourable leisurely existence, thanks to an unexpected bequest. In *Will Warburton*, too, Gissing plays with the prospect of money coming through inheritance, but he eventually manages to resist its lure. Sherwood does not get his ten thousand pounds back, and fails to restore Will to a more gentlemanly occupation, or indeed to any occupation. Good-humouredly, the plot consigns its

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hero to a future of prosperous shopkeeping. As compared with *The Crown of Life*, such a step forward towards internal ideological coherence is, indeed, striking and it surely accounts for the relative success of Gissing's last completed novel.

Grocery, romance, and real life

The choice of devoting a novel to the plight and heroism of a gentlemanly businessman reduced to shopkeeping has, thus, very much to do with the urge to pursue to its logical end that uncompromising individualistic stance which even *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* – that is, Gissing at his most quietistic – was unable to relinquish. As we know, the intractable, and proudly self-advertising "ego-ism" of Ryecroft does not yield to the fascination of those discourses which within the same text seem to promise (or threaten) its supersession by a blessed state of selflessness. In spite of much talking of "home" and "England," the condition of solitary seclusion in the countryside precludes the conjuring up the image of an organic rural community, with its *Blut und Boden* implications, while the occasional achievement of Schopenhauerian release from self, by means of music or through contemplation of beautiful nature, fails to stabilise, sabotaged as it is by a passionate reaction against "loss of individuality" such as that threatened by any regime which would demand "unmanly" subordination to whatever mystic whole.¹² Even more emphatically than Piers's mature contempt for State employment ("A clerkship at Whitehall – heaven defend us!"),¹³ Will Warburton's abhorrence of "clerk's work, or anything of that kind" (113) stands for proud independence, economic and personal: "One enormous advantage of my shopkeeping is that I'm my own master. I can't subordinate myself, won't be ruled" (324). Likewise, for young Ryecroft, the profession of the man of letters, unattached to literary coteries and unwilling to "seek favour for advancement,"

had had the distinction of “work done independently”: “I thought with horror of lives spent in an office, with an employer to obey. The glory of the career of letters was its freedom, its dignity!”¹⁴

It is true that such “freedom” of the individual *vis-à-vis* the marketplace is susceptible – as we will presently see – to heavy qualifications. But it would be a mistake to consider these pronouncements as mere products of inexperience and delusion. At least provisionally, they deserve to be taken at face value. Indeed, if we failed to recognise in them an echo of early Victorian radicalism, with its scorn for “favour,” subordination and clerical parasitism, and its

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ethos pivoting on work, little property and independence, we would miss some meaningful implications of Gissing’s later fiction. More specifically we would be bound to overlook the full significance of *Will Warburton*’s focus on the late Victorian shopkeeper, an economic subject who was, at that time, one of the most embattled, and resilient, representatives of economic individualism. This is a decisive component in the grocer’s “romance,” a term which refers not only to the happy conclusion of Will’s love story, but also to his heroic and ultimately successful individualism. The latter is definitely reminiscent of early Victorian times: in coming to the fore in *Will Warburton* it faintly evokes memories of the old Dickensian London, with its mysteries and surprises. Incidentally, also in the *The Town Traveller*, the much more explicit revisitation of Dickens’s fiction and Dickens’s London chimes with the celebration of the main character’s manly “independence” and the impeccable respectability of Mrs. Clover’s china shop. Both belong to the lower trading ranks, and both flourish in the midst of the turn-of-the-century metropolis. The romance of the town traveller and that of the late Victorian shopkeeper feed upon the last vestiges of economic individualism within a world which seems inclined to dispense with it.¹⁵

It is well known that, between the 1860s and 1914, retail trade was one of the sectors of British economy which underwent the most dramatic changes under the pressure of those tendencies to capitalization, rationalization and concentration which are the hallmark of late nineteenth-century modernity. If we are to believe historians,¹⁶ by choosing a grocer as the hero of his tale Gissing had indeed picked up one of the economic subjects who had most profited by the “coming of the mass market,” while at the same time suffering more than others from it. Free commerce, diminishing prices and the expansion of lower-middle-class and working-class custom had offered new opportunities of entrance into the trade and excellent profits; but, on the other hand, the sheer number of new groceries and the threat posed by “multiple shops” and “cooperative stores” spread anxieties and fears among “single” grocers.

History has shown that “proprietary capitalism” is not residual, that “small” can be “beautiful” and that the flexibility and adaptability of the individual shopkeeper allowed him to mimic the most appealing features of large scale retailing, while at the same time preserving a more “personal” touch in dealing with his clientele – all of which secured his survival and relative prosperity well beyond World Wars I and II.¹⁷ However, around the turn of the century, experts and commentators, as well as the shopkeepers themselves, felt that the general trend of

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economic development was on the whole to favour big business over the small enterprise,¹⁸ and no class of retailers appeared to be “so much exposed to the competition of stores, multiple shops and cooperative societies as the grocers, who at every turn must be beaten by low prices which the superior buying advantages of their rivals make possible.”¹⁹ Indeed, in the very summer of 1902, when Gissing started writing his novel, the national papers were reporting – in July – on the grocers’ vociferous campaign against the St. Helen’s Cooperative,²⁰ while on 18

August *The Times* was commenting on the problems of the “individual or single-shop grocer,” “caught between the upper and the nether mill-stone” of the market, and consequently doomed to disappear.²¹

Gissing’s grocer, struggling for survival and self-assertion in the expanding but very competitive market of the 1880s, ought then to be viewed as the representative of a small-entrepreneurial class which was bearing the brunt of economic modernity, had its own gloomy view of it, but in fact found its way through it by skilfully adapting to the new trading conditions. Of course, the later Gissing was by no means inclined to idealize the non-mediated confrontation between the individual and the market-place more than he had done in earlier works, and therefore he easily caught the sombre note of pessimism which was very prominent among shopkeepers around the turn of the century. Very much as in *The Crown of Life* or in *Ryecroft*, in *Will Warburton* the celebration of the independent tradesman’s freedom undergoes serious qualifications. Emancipation from “one master” is purchased by helpless dependence on “a whole crowd of them,” so that while the writer becomes the “slave” of editors, publishers and the multitudinous public – whom he has to please in order to secure his daily bread –,²² the grocer is at the mercy “of every kitchen wench who [comes] into the shop to spend a penny,” trembling as he does at “the thought of failing to please her, and so losing her custom” (162). “Independence, forsooth!” – as the mature Ryecroft would say: the autonomy of the “single” economic subject is as deceptive as the autonomy of the Schopenhauerian self. Like the impersonal *Wille zum Leben*, the market-place is the most exacting and merciless of masters, its only law being the “brute force of money,” the exploitation – and ultimate “negation” – of the “individual” through his desire for happiness and self-realization. Compelled to ruthless competition, he is ultimately lost, as Piers feels in the City, “amid the uproar of striving tradesmen.”²³ And truth about this universal state of bondage comes to him in the form of heart-breaking insights into the alienation, cruelty and horror of the so-called “freedom” to

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compete. Such are the “epiphanies” granted to Piers Otway,²⁴ or to Ryecroft,²⁵ or to Will Warburton himself:

The night of London, always rife with mysterious sounds, spoke dreadfully to his straining ear. He heard voices near and far, cries of pain or of misery, shouts savage or bestial; over and through all, that low, far-off rumble or roar, which never for a moment ceases, the groan, as it seemed, of suffering multitudes (160-61).

And yet, while Piers and Ryecroft are allowed to find a way out of this nightmare through providential legacies, Will Warburton does stick to his trade, and prospers – and remains a very decent human being in spite of it all.

Gissing’s last completed novel strikes, then, a fairly good balance between “real life” and “romance” – between, that is, a despondent view of the metropolitan struggle for economic survival, on the one hand, and the fairly hopeful result of the main character’s involvement in petty trade, on the other. It is useful to point out that, in so doing, *Will Warburton* relies heavily on the Darwinian discourse of the natural selection of the fittest, which was then, and is still now, eminently suitable to describe the workings of the capitalist market-place. As we know, in Gissing such discourse generally appears to be devoid of any manichean “ethical” connotation,²⁶ and is therefore apt to produce an effect of impartiality and cool realism. *Will Warburton* is no exception: the very same adaptability to the market which is responsible for the (regrettable) success of the mediocre artist accounts for the (commendable) flourishing of “Mr. Jollyman’s Grocery Stores.”

It ought to be remarked that Gissing goes indeed some length to describe his main character as a good “modern” grocer who – through his aid Allchin – proves in tune with the tastes, expectations and needs of his clientele by preserving the small shopkeeper’s “personal touch,” while at the same time adopting the same selling techniques which attracted custom to large retailers. Not only does he behave in a peculiar gentlemanly way which is much appreciated by lady buyers, and is willing to provide delivery even for the smallest purchase, but he selects an attractive name, condescends to advertise, hands out free “packets of chocolate” to celebrate the anniversary of his shop, and gives no credit (144) – which in the 1880s, when the novel is set, was surely one of the most recognisable features of new retailing. The other main novelty, introduced by multiple shops and cooperative stores, was the clear and open pricing of goods: needless to say, there appears to be no old-fashioned “haggling, higgling

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or chaffering” between Mr. Jollyman and his customers, his window being “full of price tickets, some of them very attractive to a housekeeper’s eye” (130).²⁷ It can be added that, apart from this ready adaptability to the requirements of the market-place, Gissing’s protagonist is luckily provided with some personal and circumstantial characteristics which tend to foster economic success in any line of business: as compared to Boxon, his unlucky predecessor in the Fulham Road grocery, he does not indulge in betting and boozing; as compared to a very respectable competitor recently established in the neighbourhood and soon to be “starved out,” he has not burdened himself with “five children and a wife given to drink” (159); and – last but not least – he can rely upon a small initial capital, which allows him to set up his shop properly and face occasional reversals in trade without excessive fear. As David Monod has argued, the shopkeeper’s adaptability to new market conditions is not just a “cultural” question of imaginativeness and willingness to change; it is mainly a question of the financial resources one can rely upon to enact and support innovation.²⁸

Much as we can say about Gissing’s “realistic” grip on the economic conditions of his “romance,” we should not fail to underscore, however, that there were very important aspects of the late nineteenth-century scenario that he seems to have been unwilling to pick up. For instance, though cooperative stores had been spreading since the 1860s, and multiple shops started appearing in the 1870s, in *Will Warburton’s* world of commerce and Darwinian competition there is no sign of these larger retailing firms which were felt as the main threat to the turn-of-the-century grocer. The struggle for survival, in other words, is represented as a *bellum omnium contra omnes*: the competition is among “single” shopkeepers, each fighting for himself, and neither big capitalists nor other “impersonal” economic subjects loom large over them.²⁹ Indeed, the choice of setting the novel in the late 1880s might have something to do with this. By 1902-1903, when Gissing was writing his novel, the late Victorian booming market conditions were on the wane and gloom among grocers was very intense. The 1880s, then, probably stood for a time when access to the ranks of retail trading and opportunity for success were larger. That decade was, in short, a recent but already romanticisable past – a past when, it seemed, the individual still had a chance, and the euphoric and disphoric implications of economic modernity were more evenly balanced.

More generally, the mass market being undoubtedly there, what is missing in Gissing’s novel is all those aspects of modernity which seemed to pose a threat not to this or that “single”

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grocer, but to the very essence of the autonomous retailer’s individuality. One such aspect was the branding of goods, with the taking over of weighing and packaging by producers. This was a really revolutionary feature of “modern” retailing, and – according to historians – it eventually

enabled small shopkeepers to stock a greater variety of goods and become competitive *vis-à-vis* large-scale trading units.³⁰ Nevertheless, at its inception it was generally experienced by grocers as an innovation which reduced them to mere automatic distributors of branded wares, eroded their dignity as skilled professionals and gave access to their ranks to any “Tom, Dick and Harry.”³¹

Thus, had Gissing been inclined to do so, in dealing with the grocery trade he could have put forward a Ruskin-like argument against the “de-skilling” of the artisan-shopkeeper, and the concomitant deterioration of the quality of food – roughly on the lines of what he does in *Ryecroft* as regards the decline of cooking in English country inns.³² Apart from weighing out and bagging, the grocery trade traditionally involved a number of skilled activities: “the blending of tea, the mixing of herbs and spices, the curing and cutting of bacon, the cleaning and washing of dry fruits, the cutting and millgrinding of sugar, and the roasting and grinding of coffee.”³³ Such skills were gradually lost with the advent of branded goods – with some regret on the part of long-established “elite” grocers, but much to the advantage of upstart retailers like Will Warburton himself. Of course, Will’s shopkeeping venture is represented as largely relying on Allchin’s previous experience as a grocer’s assistant. But whenever his professional inadequacy is mentioned, this has more to do with “the cunning of retail trade” (144) than with anything else.³⁴ This was another “remarkable sign of modern commercial life” which attracted notice at the time (“knowledge of a shopkeeping trade is not nowadays considered nearly so necessary as purely commercial ability”).³⁵ It is, however, no reason for regret or even comment in *Will Warburton*. Its hero is allowed to profit, as a matter of course, from the fact that no traditional apprenticeship is necessary in order to become a “modern” grocer, and prosper as such.

Class alliances: marketing sugar and marketing art

That “purely commercial ability” had become more necessary than specialistic skill was something that had necessarily attracted Gissing’s attention in his own field of business. He was both dismayed and intrigued by the fact, and he often mused on the similarities and

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dissimilarities between the man of letters and the “mere” tradesman. This was particularly true in the later years, when Gissing was enjoying a moderate income derived from the publication of his writings, relying on the services of a very capable agent, worrying about deadlines and advertising, wondering at the effects of war on the book trade, avidly perusing his publishers’ statements on his sales and the Authors’ Syndicate’s reports – and painfully churning out fiction of much inferior quality than most he had written before. Indeed, “the processes of ‘literary’ manufacture and the ups and downs of the ‘literary’ market” seemed to be much more important than “literary work” itself.³⁶

Of course, Gissing never ceased complaining about this state of affairs (“I loathe and sicken at the manifold baseness, the vulgarity unutterable, which, as a result of the new order, is blighting our literary life”).³⁷ At the same time, however, he was definitely impatient with all those who pretended that art and literature had nothing to do with “vulgar” trade,³⁸ and *Will Warburton* clearly shows that such impatience was broodingly mounting up to a strident polemical pitch. In this novel, socially respectable art professionalism is portrayed as an amply mystified trade ultimately targeting the upper ranks of society, and indeed, there seems to be more dignity in selling one’s drawings to unpretentious publishers, as Bertha does, than in successfully pandering to the vanities of the happy few. The point is forcibly made since the mouthpiece for art as genteel professionalism is the graceful but ultimately unpleasant Rosamund Elvan, whose squeamish preference for clerical work (“A poor clerk is suggestive –

it's possible to see him in a romantic light – but a shopman!" (199)) is the epitome of all that Will's heroic individualism, with his brave rejection of "bent-backed slavery on an office stool" (113), is pitted against. Her point of view is obviously that of the gentrified middle class, aping the traditional landowning classes' contempt for trade. It unequivocally stands for hampering social prejudice and self-deluded romanticism, and it is part and parcel of the ideological mystifications associated with the lucrative marketing of Norbert Franks's inferior art. Thus, the novel's ethical point is explicitly underpinned by a pronouncement in aesthetics: the weakness in Norbert's pictures is their wilful evasiveness in the face of the most unpalatable aspects of existence, whereas Will's manly acceptance of the nitty-gritty of commerce stands implicitly for a poetics of truthfulness – of brave confrontation with the hard facts of life.³⁹

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In other words, caught as he was between the idealities and the realities of the literary profession, and unwilling to cancel out the latter by the former, Gissing seems to have been badly in need of a respectable representation for his own trading self. The search for such a fictional self-image was played out in the later works, and resulted in the oxymoronic invention of the "gentlemanly grocer," whose honest trade is invoked to berate pretentious art professionalism. As I have tried to show, crucially instrumental to such an enterprise was Gissing's revival of early- and mid-Victorian bourgeois radicalism. Pride in trade, and scorn of "rents" deriving from landed or financial interests were part of the class inheritance of British shopkeepers, together with "the continuing and largely unchallenged commitment to the assumptions of liberalism"⁴⁰ which was characteristic of this social group around the turn of the century. As *Will Warburton* shows, it chimed well with Gissing's anti-jingo patriotism, and his celebration of peaceful, traditional and laborious Little England, as opposed to aggressive and exploitative "Greater" Britain.

The full political implications of Gissing's later fiction are beyond the scope of this article, and dealing properly with them would require a thorough knowledge of British lower-middle class politics and ideological formations around the turn of the century.⁴¹ What I would like to point out here – by way of conclusion – is that Gissing's "romance of real life" feeds on the fictional reactivation of those class alliances out of which radical individualism had originally sprung, and implies the concomitant disowning of the lure of gentility, which had subdued into social conformity hosts of Victorian middle-class dissenters. Again, the comparison between *The Crown of Life* and *Will Warburton* is much to the point. In the 1899 novel, coupled with the eventual achievement of cultured leisure, there are the solidly middle-class and upper-middle-class connections of the wholesale importer of wool, their intrinsic attractiveness being increased by their juxtaposition to the shabby *vie de Bohème* and the misalliances entered into by Piers's friend Olga Hannaford and his half-brother Alexander. In Gissing's last completed novel, access to the exclusive drawing rooms of the aristocracy, which in *The Crown of Life* rewards a successful and dutifully flattered Piers Otway,⁴² is granted – at the margins of the narration – to the fashionable portrait painter Franks and his hypocritical wife. What comes to the fore is the lower-middle class milieu which clusters around the suburban corner retailer, who freely talks of his problems to his landlady, entertains friendly relationships with her family, chooses the somewhat riotous Allchin as assistant and business adviser, and wins the affection

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of a pretty girl, who might aspire a bit higher, but luckily does not. The result is a "romance" of mutual help and bonhomie – a far cry indeed from the lack of gregariousness of many a Victorian shopkeeping family,⁴³ the Gissings' included, with their genteel privacy strenuously defended at the back of a chemist's shop.

If the mature Gissing – after all, very much the product of his upbringing – was still apt to express a Peak-like resentment at his exclusion from the “world of refinement,”⁴⁴ his very last completed novel seems then to be inclined otherwise. The predicament of his hero-grocer somehow reflects that of the fiction writer *vis-à-vis* the literary market-place, and the happy ending of his “romance of real life” seems to foreshadow a degree of reconciliation with the economics of democratic modernity. After all, before the time of free trade and cheap sugar had set in, the grocer too used to be “a purveyor of luxuries to the rich.”⁴⁵ The mass market, however, had turned him into a more democratic professional, “catering vigorously for all classes” and un-glamorously, but honestly, thriving thereby.

¹See for a good instance of Gissing’s attitude, the letter to Clara Collet, 22 October 1899: “I am irritated by the absurd contrast between the reputation I have among literary people pretty much everywhere & the paltry sale of my books (if publishers are to be trusted.) [...] It seems extraordinary that the editor of a new periodical (Gorst) should write again & again, entreating an article, – and even offering exceptional terms for it, – whilst my books continue to have no sale at all. The case is utterly abnormal, & I suppose it is partly due to the indifference with which I have always regarded the means of self-advertisement.” *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, eds. P. F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young, P. Coustillas (Athens: Ohio U. P., 1990-1997), vol. VII, p. 387. Gissing’s case was not, of course, so excentric as he supposed: Pierre Bourdieu has taught us to recognise in the predicament of impecunious lower-middle class writers aspiring, like Gissing or Conrad, to write quality fiction, the very same aporetic dynamics which orchestrate the rise and consolidation of the modern “champ littéraire.” See, above all, P. Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l’art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

²Colin Partridge, Introduction to *Will Warburton: A Romance of Real Life* (1905) (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981), p. xx. All quotations from the novel are from this edition.

³In his letter to James Pinker, dated 10 April 1902, he asked his agent to send him “a copy of a trade-journal called *Sugar*, which appears once a month, I am told” (*Collected Letters*, vol. VIII, p. 371).

⁴In 1898 Joseph Chamberlain had publicly complained that “some British colonies have been deplorably injured” by the imports of “abnormally cheap sugar.” Chamberlain’s words are

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quoted in H. Cox, “The Correspondence on Sugar Bounties,” *Economic Journal*, vol. VIII, 1898, p. 240.

⁵In order to reconstruct the debate on sugar around the year 1900, I have relied upon the authoritative *Economic Journal*, in whose pages the developments of this very controversial question were closely monitored. Articles on the subject started appearing in December 1897 with H. Cox, “West Indian Sugar,” pp. 599-605, followed by the already quoted “Correspondence on Sugar Bounties” (June 1898), and predictably peaked in the aftermath of the Brussels Conference with the anonymous notice in “Current Topics” (March 1902, pp. 143-44), E. Castelot, “The Brussels Sugar Conference” (June 1902, pp. 217-20), H. Cox, “Sugar Industry in the West Indies” (September 1902, pp. 420-21), H. Cox, “The Brussels Sugar Convention” (June 1903, pp. 262-63), G. Martineau, “The Brussels Sugar Convention” (March 1904, pp. 34-46), E. Castelot, “High Prices of Sugar” (March 1905, pp. 104-07). The academic economist being, for a theoretical *parti pris*, in favour of Free Trade, the *Journal*’s position is initially very much against any protective or retaliatory measures, and is repeatedly voiced by Harold Cox. The other commentators seem to have felt that something had to be done to establish “fair conditions” of trade and avoid gluts in the sugar market. The higher prices for the

British consumers were eventually regarded as a painful but necessary reversion to a more “natural” state of affairs.

⁶*The Crown of Life* (1899) (New York: AMS Press, 1969), p. 198. Useful surveys on finance and bankruptcy in Victorian and late Victorian fiction are provided by J. R. Reed, “A Friend to Mammon: Speculation in Victorian Literature,” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 27 (Winter 1984) and B. Weiss, *The Hell of the English: Bankruptcy and the Victorian Novel* (London and Cranbury, N. J.: Associated University Presses, 1986). On gambling, see J. Jeffrey Franklin, “The Victorian Discourse of Gambling: Speculations on *Middlemarch* and *The Duke’s Children*,” *ELH*, vol. 61 (1994).

⁷The main spokesman of this faction at the end of the century was of course J. A. Hobson, particularly in his well-known *Imperialism: A Study* (1902). Hobson himself uses the agricultural metaphor in synthesising his point of view: “A people limited in number and energy and in the land they occupy have the choice of improving to the utmost the political and economic management of their own land [...]; or they may proceed, like the slovenly farmer, to spread their power and energy over the whole earth, tempted by the speculative value or the quick profits of some new markets, or else by mere greed of territorial acquisition [...]. It must be clearly understood that this is essentially a choice of alternatives; a full simultaneous application of intensive and extensive cultivation is impossible” (rev. ed., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938, p. 92). Among the main critics of imperialism was also Herbert Spencer, who was well known to Gissing and whose radical individualism was surely much to his taste.

⁸On this convergence of Free Trade Radicalism and the Little England opposition to the Empire, see K. Knorr, *British Colonial Theories, 1870-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1944), pp. 375, 412. Also, on the uneasy relationship between Liberalism and

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Imperialism, see B. Semmel, *The Liberal Ideal and the Demons of Empire: Theories of Imperialism from Adam Smith to Lenin* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1993): on “The Radical Liberals,” pp. 53-55; on “Later Liberal Sociologists” (Spencer and Hobson), pp. 103-31.

⁹*The Crown of Life*, pp. 79-80.

¹⁰As to the psychological implications of the novel, I will confine myself to noting how Jerome Otway brought into Gissing’s fiction, in 1899, a hitherto unknown parental specimen: a father whose unruly sexual impulses and concomitant political radicalism can be contemplated with equanimity. His sexual intemperance is portrayed as a regrettable weakness, mildly punished by the presence of a third henpecking wife, but it is definitely not a capital sin, since it is precisely from the most irregular of Jerome’s loves that the hero of the story springs forth. This “father figure” is – I believe – crucial in the attempt at reconciliation of self with self that the novel is trying to work out. I have tried to discuss the oedipal dynamics superintending much of Gissing’s fiction in my *Figure del risentimento. Aspetti della costruzione del soggetto nella narrativa inglese ai margini della “decadenza”* (Pisa: ETS, 1997), ch. II.

¹¹As surmised by the author of an unfriendly unsigned review in the pages of *Literature*, 11 Nov. 1899, pp. 470-71, included in P. Coustillas and C. Partridge (eds.), *Gissing: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 357-58.

¹²One of the most striking expressions of Gissing’s attitude is the famous tirade against military drilling at school, and the horror experienced at being reduced to a number, when “[t]he loss of individuality seemed to me sheer disgrace.” *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903) (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1987), p. 41.

¹³*The Crown of Life*, p. 167.

¹⁴*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, p. 22.

¹⁵It is interesting to notice that, at that time, the tendency to emphasise the “romance” of

petty trading professions was shared also by non-fiction writers. While describing the recent transformations of commerce and commercial travelling in his pompously titled *The Ambassadors of Commerce* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1885), A. P. Allen underscored “a certain halo of romance” that “from time immemorial” had “hung round the commercial traveller” (p. 163). Likewise, J. Aubrey Rees devoted a bulky two-volume work to *The Grocery Trade: Its History and Romance* (London: Duckworth, 1910).

¹⁶See W. Hamish Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market 1850-1914* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981); J. B. Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain 1850-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1954), pp. 126-80; but the particular location of the grocer *vis-à-vis* the mass market was already apparent to H. W. Macrosty, *The Trust Movement in British Industry: A Study of Business Organization* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907), pp. 256 ff.

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¹⁷For a discussion of this theoretical point see, particularly, D. Monod, *Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing 1890-1939* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

¹⁸The orthodox neoclassic view on the matter was expressed by Alfred Marshall in his highly influential *Principles of Economics* (1890). See, for instance, the sweeping pronouncement made on page 282 (9th variorum edition, London: Macmillan, 1961) and starting thus: “There are a great many advantages which a large factory, or indeed a large business of almost any kind, nearly always has over a small one. A large business buys in great quantities and therefore cheaply; it pays low freights and saves on carriage in many ways [...]. It often sells in large quantities, and this saves itself trouble; and yet at the same time it gets a good price [...].”

¹⁹H. W. Macrosty, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

²⁰G. Crossick, “Shopkeepers and the State in Britain, 1870-1914,” in G. Crossick and H. G. Haupt (eds.), *Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth Century Europe* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 249.

²¹Quoted in J. B. Jefferys, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

²²*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, p. 22.

²³*The Crown of Life*, pp. 180, 183.

²⁴“Here [...] the din of highway and byway was a voice of blustering conquest, bidding the weaker to stand aside or be crushed. Here no man was a human being, but each merely a portion of an inconceivably complicated mechanism” (*ibid.*, p. 180).

²⁵“Oh, you heavy-laden, who at this hour sit down to the cursed travail of the pen [...] Year after year the number of you is multiplied; you crowd the doors of publishers and editors, hustling, grappling, exchanging maledictions. [...] And oh, the black despair that awaits those downtrodden in the fray” (*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, p. 39).

²⁶The “*amoral* perspective” of Gissing’s “orthodox Darwinism” is persuasively argued in F. Cleto, “The Biological Drama: Darwinian Ethics in George Gissing’s Fiction,” *Gissing Journal*, vol. XXVIII (1992), Nos. 3 and 4, pp. 1-13, 11-21.

²⁷According to Jefferys, “the most important change in the technique of selling was [...] the acceptance of clear and open pricing of the goods on sale as the standard commercial practice” (*op. cit.*, p. 37).

²⁸D. Monod, *op. cit.*, pp. 100 ff.

²⁹In the novel, the only hint at any such formidable competitor is given in the negative, when it is noticed that the newly established grocer in the neighbourhood is “happily no great capitalist” (p. 153).

³⁰J. B. Jefferys, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

³¹The plight of the grocers was obviously shared by other artisan shopkeepers, such as chemists and tobacconists. As to the latter, a very interesting discussion of their reactions to the coming of the mass market is given by M. Hilton, "Retailing History as Economic and Cultural History: Strategies of Survival by Specialist Tobacconists in the Mass Market," in N. Alexander

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and G. Akehurst (eds.), *The Emergence of Modern Retailing* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 115-37.

³²*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, p. 78.

³³J. B. Jefferys, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

³⁴The only serious mishap in Will's trade occurs when he, against Allchin's advice, makes "a considerable purchase of goods from a bankrupt stock," only to find out that the quality of the goods purchased is very bad (174).

³⁵W. B. Robertson (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Retail Trading* (London: Harmsworth Business Library, 1911), vol. 1, p. 13.

³⁶*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, pp. 130-31.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 131.

³⁸As appears in his letter to E. Halpérine-Kaminsky, 28 June 1898, prompted by Kaminsky's own translation into French of Tolstoi's *What is Art?*. While granting that *ideally* art should not be a trade, and that the modern mass market was not conducive to the production of good literature, Gissing shows some impatience at those who pretended not to know that "art *must* be a means of support" – which was surely true "nowadays" and might even have been true "in the times of Homer" (*Letters*, vol. VII, pp. 165-66).

³⁹"He was a man behind the counter; he saw face to face the people who supported him. With this exception had not things been just the same when he sat in the counting-house at the sugar refinery? It was an unpleasant truth, which appearances had formerly veiled from him" (153).

⁴⁰G. Crossick, "Shopkeepers and the State in Britain 1870-1914," in G. Crossick and H. G. Haupt (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁴¹A viable starting point seems to be the work on the subject done, or coordinated, by Geoffrey Crossick, to which I am indebted for the writing of this article more than any passing reference in the footnotes can acknowledge. See G. Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), and G. Crossick and H. G. Haupt (eds.), *op. cit.*

⁴²*The Crown of Life*, p. 132: "the season was beginning, and at his modest lodgings arrived cards, notes, bidding to ceremonies greater and less; one or two of these summonses bore names which might have stirred envy in the sons of fashion."

⁴³Cf. G. Crossick, "The Petite Bourgeoisie in the Nineteenth Century: The Urban and Liberal Case," in G. Crossick and H. G. Haupt (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 72 ff.

⁴⁴See his letter to Clara Collet, 3 January 1898: "These Lambarts (the M^cCarthy's' friends) are nice people. They swarm with aristocratic acquaintances of the great Catholic world. Just a little bitterness in associating with them. How can I help thinking that my brains ought to have given me a place in this world of refinement long, long ago?" (*Letters*, vol. 7, p. 29).

⁴⁵J. B. Jefferys, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

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The Coming Man and the Will to Power in “Born in Exile”

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Born in Exile is a transitional novel in Gissing’s career. Moreover, it is a testimonial to his virtuosity as a novelist. Since his return from America in 1877 until he completed the writing of *New Grub Street* prior to Christmas 1890 Gissing had lived and set all of his novels in London with the exception of *A Life’s Morning* and a part of *The Emancipated*. Then in January 1891 he moved to Exeter, where that spring he wrote *Born in Exile* and set the main part of the narrative. It is unlike anything Gissing had hitherto written. In his other novels it is his practice to describe a myriad of viewpoints, much like Dickens on whom he partly modelled himself, in order to represent a broader range of society.

However, in *Born in Exile*, which is by far Gissing’s most ambitious, most complex, and most serious novel, all that happens of importance takes place in the inner life of one character. For this reason is the novel remarkable, in the sense that it foreshadows the modernist novel through its representation of the problematic processes of the mind and articulation of a rebellious nature. *Born in Exile*, as Grylls writes in his introduction to the Everyman edition, “anticipated Freud and aligns with Nietzsche in its exploration of subconscious states and subversion of orthodox judgement” (xii). In addition it provides a fascinating account of the contemporary reaction to “the theory of evolution” and its religious implications. Hence, *Born in Exile*, more than any other of Gissing’s works, establishes his place in the European tradition of the novel, rather than in the English. For Godwin Peak is more akin to Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s Raskolnikov than to Thomas Hardy’s Jude, to Jens Peter Jacobsen’s Niels Lyhne than to George Eliot’s Dr. Lydgate.

Gissing scholars are generally in agreement that he came to Friedrich Nietzsche’s works through the recommendation of his German friend, Eduard Bertz. It is possible that Gissing first read Nietzsche in German sometime between 1879 and 1883 when Bertz for the most part lived in London. Yet it is more likely that, though having heard of him from Bertz, he did not read Nietzsche until after Bertz returned to Germany in 1884. From his home in Prussia, to a great extent for the rest of Gissing’s life, Bertz played an active role in informing him of contemporary trends in European thought, as well as introducing him to emerging writers of the

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day. Gissing, as Jacob Korg writes, “always read widely in several languages, and his friend Bertz had stimulated in him an interest in foreign writers that ultimately made him better acquainted with continental literature than any of his contemporaries among the novelists” (1965, 75-76).

There is accordingly some justification in assuming that Gissing’s interest in Nietzsche was kindled later rather than earlier. This would place Gissing’s curiosity about Nietzsche towards the end of the 1880s when the Nietzsche cult began to manifest itself. Patrick Bridgwater in fact identifies Georg Brandes’s “lectures on Nietzsche in Copenhagen in 1888” as the origin of the cult. Yet Knut Hamsun also played an active role around this time in proclaiming Nietzsche’s genius, particularly in his outspoken attacks against the contemporary generation of Scandinavian writers and also in an indirect way in his early novels, *Hunger* (1890), and *Mysteries* (1892). Incidentally, Hamsun’s *Hunger* makes an intriguing contrast with Gissing’s *New Grub Street*, as does Hamsun’s representation of Johann Nagel, the arch dissembler in *Mysteries*, with Gissing’s characterization of Godwin Peak, the conscious charlatan, in *Born in Exile*.

It seems, in retrospect, fitting that Nietzsche’s philosophy became the successor to

Schopenhauer's in popularity: Schopenhauer was dead when Darwin's "theory of evolution" began to gain wide acceptance, whereas Nietzsche was still a young man. Nietzsche, naturally enough, would have been able to incorporate Darwin's theory into his own developing philosophy, and, more importantly, derive support from its implications as a platform for his own controversial ideas. Nietzsche's nihilism is, one suspects, a synthesis of his own spiritual doubts and science's refutation of the Bible's authority. In any case, the cause of Nietzsche's popularity at this time has much to do with the fact that his philosophy complements social darwinism insofar as it champions the strong as opposed to the weak, and denies the existence of God. It is this latter aspect – his nihilism – together with his morality that attracted Gissing to Nietzsche. For prior to writing *Born in Exile* Gissing had read Turgenev's "'Väter u. Söhne' for the sixth or seventh time," in which Turgenev represents a fundamentally good nihilist (Coustillas, 1978, 211). Clearly, alert to the dynamic and dangerous implications of the affinity between social darwinism and Nietzschean morality in its bearing on the will to power, Gissing used Turgenev's Bazarov partly as a model for his own anti-hero, Godwin Peak. Yet Gissing wanted to go further than Turgenev by addressing the dangerous implications of moral nihilism

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in the service of the will to power. Consequently, a very important question in *Born in Exile* is: is Godwin Peak a good man or a bad man?

The bedrock upon which Nietzsche's philosophy stands is his nihilism. Nietzsche writes, "The greatest recent event – that 'God is dead,' that belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable – is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe" (Nietzsche, 1977, 208-09). A child of post-Darwinian Europe, and from a scientific background – his father was a chemist – Godwin Peak would have been a witness to this so-called "greatest recent event." Peak's rebellious spirit as a teenager is partly due to his religious scepticism, for "he hated the name of religion" with fierce passion (31). However, Peak's defiant nature has its main source in his resentment of all authority, of all human infrastructures. Above all, he refuses to recognise the human order that places him, on the basis of class distinction, among the lowest of human ranks.

Peak is a downtrodden character because his father's "economic speculations" have left the family with "no very bright prospects" (22). The heir to poor circumstances, Peak only has one advantage in life – his brilliant intellectual ability. On first meeting him, Martin Warricombe perceptively remarks, "Overweighted with brains [...] and by no means so with money, I fear" (14). Peak suffers intense mental anguish from this want of money. This feeling is aggravated when he is compelled to appeal to Lady Whitelaw for permission to become a student at the Royal School of Mines in London, using there the last year of the three-year scholarship granted him by her husband at Kingsmill:

He was not of the men who can benefit by patronage, and be simply grateful for it. His position was a false one: to be begging with awkward show of thankfulness for a benefaction which in his heart he detested [...] this woman represented the superiority of mere brute wealth, against which his soul rebelled. (76)

At the heart of Peak's bitterness about his subjection to "brute wealth" is his innate conviction that his social position is "a false one." Like Gissing's earlier downtrodden characters Peak sees himself as excluded from his proper place in society through lack of means. But while some of these earlier characters, such as Waymark and Reardon, profess a dislike for the lower classes, none loathes them to the extent that Peak does. Peak is actually a snob, as he despises the poor classes. At age eighteen, sounding like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, he tells his younger brother:

I hate low, uneducated people! I hate them worse than the filthiest vermin!
[...] They ought to be swept off the face of the earth! [...] All the grown-up

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creatures, who can't speak proper English [...] I'd transport them to the Falkland Islands [...] and let them die off as soon as possible. The children should be sent to school and purified, if possible; if not, they too should be got rid of. (29-30)

For a young man, Peak has views that have an unusually fanatic and ominous tone about them. Certainly, from a late twentieth-century perspective these views and their tenor seem remarkably prescient and, for that reason, chilling. These racist opinions patently align with some of Zarathustra's proposed expedients for the preparation of the coming of "the superman" (Nietzsche, 238). Zarathustra cries, "What is the ape to man? A laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. And just so shall man be to the superman" (238). Zarathustra then goes on to prescribe a way to "overcome man" (243), just as Peak prescribes a way to eradicate the lower classes. At this point Peak is very close to Zarathustra.

But ten years on Peak has toned down his class prejudice; nevertheless he still finds contact with the lower classes insufferable. For example, when he is compelled to dwell amongst them for the first six years of his time in London in poor lodging-houses, he finds them repugnant: "To a man of Godwin's idiosyncrasy the London poor were of necessity abominable, and it anguished him to be forced to live among them" (101). Yet, like Waymark's and Reardon's before him, it is Peak's plight, from force of circumstance, to live apart from his natural peers. Even though well-educated and determined to succeed in life, once he is thrown back on his own resources when he arrives in London, Peak is "obliged to practise extreme economy," which means he cannot "take refuge among self-respecting people" (101). In short, Peak becomes a bitter social outcast because he is "born in exile" and constrained to live in lonely exile from what he sees as his rightful place in society.

The fundamental difference between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche is that while the former exhorts the denial of the will to live, the latter extols the will to power. How this aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy and the above distinction relates to Godwin Peak is supremely significant, insofar as it intimates to what extent and in which ways he differs from Gissing's earlier versions of downtrodden intellectuals. A relevant summary of Nietzsche's position with regard to the meaning of life is the following statement:

The struggle for existence is only an exception, a temporary restriction of the will of life; the struggle, great and small, everywhere turns on ascendancy,

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on growth and extension, in accordance with the will to power, which is precisely the will of life. (230)

This essentially gives the clue to Peak's own outlook on life. Herein is the difference between Peak and his forebears in Gissing's works. For, although bitter about his "struggle for existence" like Casti and Reardon before him, Peak is unlike them in that, firstly, he sees his plight as "a temporary restriction" to his will, and secondly, he nonetheless refuses to resign himself to his fate.

Relative to this, moreover, is the fact that Peak regards himself as exiled from an intellectual elite: “He instantly felt [...] he must be an aristocrat of nature’s own making – one of the few highly favoured beings who, in despite of circumstance, are pinnacled above mankind” (30). Thus Peak’s elitist view of himself is wholly inconsistent with his nihilism – with his repudiation of authority and social structures. Or is it? Anton Weber elaborates, “Godwin’s unbridled self-importance did not acknowledge any kind of subordination, unless a subordination among the hierarchy of the intelligent, which he alone respected with true venerable awe” (1932, 134, my translation). To conclude that Peak is inconsistent in his views becomes problematic, as with much about him, if one considers his reverence for nature, and especially for nature’s gifts. For Peak believes himself endowed by nature with the intellect of a superman. At all events, what fires his will to power is this inflated conception of himself:

Godwin’s self-confidence had nothing in common with the conceit which rests on imaginary strength. Power there was in him; of that he could not but be conscious: its true direction he had not yet learned. (105)

It is because Peak lacks a sense of “direction” that he wastes ten years in London without really making any progress. This would suggest that he was indecisive, except that he later shows himself otherwise. In truth Peak’s failure to prosper in London is due to an intrinsic ambivalence about which way to achieve his life’s aim. Although viewing marriage to a “refined woman” as the stepping stone to success, and although seeking a match of this sort, Peak at the same time attempts somewhat half-heartedly to make a name for himself as a scientist (113).

His friend, Earwaker, like himself a scholarship student from a poor background, by contrast, quickly seizes the main chance. Early in his youth Earwaker experiences similar hardships and social disadvantages to Peak’s, but being by nature artistic and placid he does not

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allow himself to be embittered with life. Hereafter Earwaker leads a life of Schopenhauerian resignation. Repressing his base instincts, he devotes himself to a life of monastic order. So, when Peak asks him if he despises women, he replies, “On the whole, I’m afraid so” (111). Earwaker attaches importance only to the artistic life, and pursues with journalistic acumen a career as a man of letters. Only in artistic contemplation does he find solace for his passions, as he tells Peak, “My wives live in literature [...] Impossible women, but exquisite. They shall suffice to me” (114). Detached from the mainstream of life, his heart ruled by his head, Earwaker has the calm temperament of Waymark and the practical sense of Milvain. As the narrator writes, “Earwaker was naturally marked for survival among the fittest” (p. 86). Consequently he represents an interesting contrast to Peak.

Prior to his holiday in Devon, Peak tells Earwaker, “My one supreme desire is to marry a perfectly refined woman. Put it in the correct terms: I am a plebeian, and I aim at marrying a lady” (113). This is an important avowal for it represents a recognition of his failure after ten years in London, and of the self-interested nature of his ambition. Perceiving in such stark terms his exiled status and the reality of what is required of him if he is to claim his rightful place in society in many ways prepares him for the devious part he will later assume.

In effect, what Peak sees as a necessary evil, that is to woo a woman for money and position, is tantamount to asserting, as Nietzsche does, that “No one is accountable for his deeds, no one for his nature” (72). That Peak has consciously become “the determiner of” his own “values” (Nietzsche, 107) by the time he encounters the Warricombes in Exeter is indicated by how unhesitatingly and smoothly he steps into the role of a dissembler, as the following conversation between him and Buckland illustrates:

‘I am to understand that you have become strictly orthodox in matters of religious faith?’

‘The proof is,’ replied Godwin, ‘that I hope before long to take Orders.’
(143)

Although an atheist and scorner of all religions, here Peaks shows himself to be the consummate pretender to religious convictions, as in due course he shows himself in his courtship of Buckland’s sister, Sidwell. Yet one would think from his disgust with himself afterwards at the part he has played that he has not become “the conscious hypocrite” (138). Indeed he completely dissociates himself from the deception, convinced that “his conscious self had had no part in all this comedy” (146). As a result he ascribes his actions to “downright

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somnambulism” (146). In Nietzschean terms, however, at this decisive moment in his life Peak’s morality is in the service of his consciously motivated will to power. For one thing, what betrays him is that when this moment arrives Peak does not play his part half-heartedly, but for all he is worth. Moreover, when deceiving the Warricombes, especially the puritan father, he does not simultaneously analyse or criticise himself. This only occurs later and can be attributed to an inverted moral outrage which is actually inconsistent with his nihilism. Again, at the time of his initial deception, the compelling proof of his conscious awareness is his attempt to justify his part to himself: “Let the society which compelled to such an expedient bear the burden of his shame” (138). This plainly admits of consciousness of the ignoble role he is playing. Therefore, although Peak is not an unconscious hypocrite, he is nevertheless possessed by an overwhelming desire for power and position.

Clearly, later he has reconciled himself to his scheme, for he removes to Exeter and severs all connections with his former life and friends in London. He is now readily able to endure the thought, diluted “by a consideration of the circumstances,” that “what he proposed to himself was a life of deliberate baseness” (175-76). In other words, Peak is now “his own criterion of moral right and wrong” (147). His morality is ultimately justified by reason of his elitism. According to Peak, thus, what redeems his moral code is that he is a “superman,” one of the intellectual elite. This corresponds precisely with Nietzsche’s conception of the morality of the superman. He writes, “the most evil is necessary for the superman’s best [...] Such a morality is self-glorification [...] The noble human being honours in himself the man of power” (242 and 107). Finally, since social darwinism teaches a similar natural hierarchy of the strong and of the intelligent, Peak looks no further than to this to justify his superman morality.

For all his “self-glorification,” however, Peak has an Achilles heel: his conscience. Despite applying his own moral code to his hypocritical undertaking, a product of his age, Peak judges his behaviour by the strict moral standard of late Victorian society. In reality Peak is an inconsistent nihilist because at heart he believes in the moral virtues, though, paradoxically, he despises himself for doing so. On this theme Nietzsche writes, “The bad conscience is an illness” (119). To Nietzsche, “the bad conscience” is a symptom that undermines the will to power because it is a form of human weakness. Since Nietzsche deplures weakness, he naturally sees “the bad conscience” as a threat to the superman. Clearly, once Peak commits himself to

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carrying out his deception by attempting to win Sidwell’s hand in marriage under the guise of a trainee priest, his will to power is in conflict with his conscience. As a result, whilst cultivating her father’s friendship, Peak feels it “a hateful thing to practise such deception on one who

probably yearned for spiritual support” (205). Martin Warricombe is a Christian of the old school, who clings to his faith by consciously remaining in ignorance of all post-Darwinian theories. Afraid that the spiritual edifice upon which his faith depends will be revealed as a myth, he sees in Peak and his feigned “apologetic theology” confirmation of the credibility of Christianity (162). A sad figure, in many respects Warricombe *père* is as much a hypocrite as Peak, for though he refuses to admit it, even to himself, he is consumed with religious doubts. It is because Peak perceives this in Warricombe that his conscience plagues him all the more.

Even though he is constantly on guard against sudden discovery of his duplicity throughout his association with the Warricombes, Peak is at times in thrall to a contradictory inner compulsion to betray himself. This is observable during his visit to the Moorhouses at Budleigh Salterton in a scene which strongly anticipates Freudian theory and the modernist novel:

The ironic temptation was terribly strong in him just now. One is occasionally possessed by a desire to shout in the midst of a silent assembly; an impulse of the same kind kept urging him to utter words which would irretrievably ruin his prospects. (252)

In Nietzschean terms this is Peak’s conscience striving for supremacy over his will to power. For, at bottom, Peak’s is an ambivalent, a dual nature. There is an innate dichotomy between his conscious and his unconscious self, so that the more he plays the charlatan, the more he despises himself. Hence the more torn he is between the desire for power and the desire for the salving of his conscience, the less Peak is master of his fate. This explains the unconscious urgings of his better self to unthrone his wilful self.

Even though Peak’s conscience subverts his will to power, it is really class prejudice and class hypocrisy that prevents him from his achieving his aims. At no time throughout his association with the Warricombes is he allowed to forget his social inferiority to them. For instance, during the last social occasion with them before their departure for London, Peak is “humiliated by self-comparison with social superiors, and again reminded that in this circle he had a place merely on sufferance” (260). His humiliation stems from frustration, since he more

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than anyone realises, as Nietzsche puts it, that “every morality is a piece of tyranny against ‘nature’” (105). In other words Peak is fully aware to what extent the strict conventions of late Victorian society have made him into the man he is – have shaped his destiny.

Despite his antipathy for Peak, Buckland, meanwhile, is a member of the privileged classes who is still able to understand Peak’s viewpoint. As he tells himself after denouncing Peak to his face, “In Peak’s case all appearances are against him – just because he is of low birth, has no means, and wants desperately to get into society” (307). Even so, it is Buckland who from the start hounds Peak with his cynical suspicions of his charlatanism. At the same time Buckland’s own motive for wanting to discover the truth about Peak seems suspect. For when he finally unmasks Peak, his feeling of class superiority comes to the fore. As the narrator writes, “Buckland’s class prejudice asserted itself with brutal vigour now that it had moral indignation for an ally” (304). However Buckland fails to understand that it is the tyranny of class prejudice such as his, coupled with a socially restrictive moral code, which creates individuals like Peak. After all, what Gissing is emphasising about Peak’s plight, is that had he been born into the middle class he would not have had to resort to deception to be acceptable as a would-be suitor to the daughter of a bourgeois family. The proof of this is the ironic comparison between Peak’s fate and Bruno Chilvers’s. From a scientific background, like Peak, Chilvers is the archetypal hypocrite with his broad churchism and attempts to win favour by

professing views which reconcile religious dogma with modern scientific revelations. For all that, among his own class he is recognized for the charlatan he is: "His brother clergymen held him in slight esteem. In a private talk with Martin Warricombe, Mr. Lilywhite did not hesitate to call him a 'mountebank'" (375).

As it is, Chilvers's middle-class origins give him the licence to assume the role of a "mountebank" without fear of reproof. For he is never once subject to the kind of suspicion that every word, every deed of Peak's arouses. Instead he and his vice are tolerated. This means that the morality which closes its eyes to Chilvers's masquerade, but judges Peak's, is inspired by class prejudice. This is in effect class hypocrisy: Chilvers is allowed "to make a good marriage" (375); Peak is not. Therefore, whereas Peak by necessity is at war with the world and with himself, Chilvers has a smooth path through life laid before him. As Charles Swan writes, "Chilvers is a type of modern man, but one who is entirely at home in the world – the model of inauthentic man" (1984, 180). Peak, conversely, is never at home in the world, and ends his life

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in ignominious exile – the model of the coming man; that is, of the rebellious outsider.

In recent times the critical response to *Born in Exile* has been positive and highly appreciative. Nevertheless the trend in biographical criticism continues. For instance, John Halperin writes in his biography of Gissing, "*Born in Exile* is one of Gissing's most sustained pieces of fictional autobiography" (1982, 159). Later he qualifies this by asserting that, "a man who will do anything – assume any disguise, adopt any hypocrisy – to make such a marriage, Peak is a shamefaced caricature of Gissing himself and his own amorous aspirations" (161). These are ludicrous assertions reflecting a too literal approach to the text. It seems that Halperin has constructed his argument on the basis of some tenuous correlations between the university episode at the beginning of *Born in Exile* and Gissing's own college experience. Though Halperin supports his argument throughout by making some ingeniously elaborate connections, in reality his wholesale appropriation and literal reading of chunks of dialogue and of Gissing's character analyses is, for one thing, too simplistic, and, for another, too dependent on assuming that Peak *is* Gissing. Such criticism, "in which certain characters become doubles of Gissing himself and are then seen to mouth unproblematically his own opinions," Constance D. Harsh has recently derided as "the narrowest sort of biographical criticism" (1994, 854). Clearly, in the context of Gissing studies and the promotion of his works this kind of criticism has been harmful and inhibiting. There seems to be no confidence about it, but surely it would be a far better thing simply to let the novels stand by themselves as a testimony to their power and historical significance. At any rate, with regard to *Born in Exile*, L. R. Leavis is right to say that "an autobiographical interpretation is surely out of place" (1983, 224).

A new direction in Gissing's treatment of the plight of the downtrodden intellectual, *Born in Exile* is above all a psychological novel. It exemplifies Gissing's marvellous ability to describe the subtle and tortuous processes of the mind under the sway of conflicting emotions. Truly, the characterization of Godwin Peak is masterful in its delineation of his psychology. At once an atheist and a nihilist, a supreme egoist and an incomparable racist, Peak is a complex character. Like Nietzsche's Zarathustra he scorns average mankind and flies in the face of fate, believing himself accountable to no one. As Jacob Korg writes, placing *Born in Exile* firmly in the tradition of the European novel where it certainly belongs, "Such characters as Peak, Raskolnikov, and Bazarov may be regarded as striking anticipatory personifications of

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Nietzsche's doctrine that man is free to make his own morality" (Coustillas, 1968, 138). Importantly, Peak differs from characters such as Waymark, Kingcote, and Reardon, in that he

sees himself as a superman who belongs to an intellectual elite. Unlike them, he can never find solace in resignation to his fate, since he believes that he has the will-power to overcome all of life's obstacles. His philosophy is in essentials, then, the philosophy of the superman. He only fails to attain his life's goal because he has a bad conscience. Thus, in view of the complexity of Peak's nature, it is impossible to decide whether he is a good or a bad man. One can only say, paradoxically, about such an ambivalent character, that he is neither evil enough, nor good enough, to make a victory of life.

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On a Sunday seventy-eight years ago (October 1921), W. H. Hudson wrote to Morley Roberts: "Gissing's *Demos* is on the films at the Coronet to-morrow." Then on the 18th: "Just what I thought myself when I saw it yesterday – G. G. would have been mad at the way his story is treated – its jerkiness. The only good thing is the end where he is killed by the mob."

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Book Review

Bouwe Postmus, *An Exile's Cunning: Some Private Papers of George Gissing*. Wormerveer, The Netherlands: Stichting Uitgeverij Noord-Holland, 1999. vii + 372 pp. Fl. 75.

Bouwe Postmus has now collected into one volume his three previously published editions of Gissing documents: *George Gissing's American Notebook* (1993), *George Gissing's Memorandum Book* (1996), and *The Poetry of George Gissing* (1995). A useful new preface sums up the development of Gissing scholarship from the early 1960s to the present, and knowledgeable introductions head up each of the three major sets of documents. It is indeed a great tribute to George Gissing that such informed scholarship as is found here has been applied to what might well have been considered trifling scraps of ideas and youthful or ephemeral poems. After reading this volume, one is impressed by the genius and the dedication to hard work that were evident in Gissing from as early as age eleven.

The title *An Exile's Cunning* needs some explication. First of all, the word "exile" is

doubly, even triply appropriate. Gissing was literally an exile from society during his imprisonment in Manchester and the month following it (July-August 1876); then he became an exile from his homeland during his year in America (Sept. 1876-Sept. 1877); and finally, as the title of his novel *Born in Exile* uses the term, Gissing felt most of his life like an exile from the intellectual and cultural class to which he should have belonged, with his education, interests, and natural abilities. The word “exile” is perfect in the title *An Exile’s Cunning*, especially since the *American Notebook* and at least a dozen of Gissing’s poems were written during the years of literal exile.

But the word “cunning” in the title must be understood in a sense which is now all but obsolete. “Cunning” is here used to denote “knowledge,” “learning,” “art,” or “subtlety.” Gissing would have been offended and wronged by the present-day connotations of “wiliness” or “artifice.” Most of the *Private Papers* reveal learning and knowledge, and many of the poems reveal subtlety and art. Thus, through the phrase “an exile’s cunning” Dr. Postmus suggests that exile must have helped increase the knowledge and enhance the art of George Gissing.

George Gissing’s American Notebook contains notes and memoranda jotted down in 1877 and early 1878 (overlapping slightly into the young exile’s first months back in England). Typical entries include lists of possible names to use in his stories (Carrie, Ermina, Widdowson,

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Lillywhite, and Freemantle are some of the examples which Postmus identifies in later novels and stories). There are also many ideas for plots, of which one typically lurid example is this: “Man marries wife and leaves her. Gets rich, and returns with a mistress. Wife regains influence, but mistress murders him for his money, which he has left her by will.” (Happily, this plot was not actually used.) Other entries are quotations from favorite authors – Milton, Balzac, George Sand, Matthew Arnold. Most of George Eliot’s poem “Oh May I Join the Choir Invisible” and a line from Swinburne, “The pure spirit of man, which men call God,” are here.

The *American Notebook* also has lists of books the young Gissing wanted to read, such as Balzac’s *Histoire des Treize* and George Sand’s *Indiana*. Jem White’s *Original Letters Etc. of Sir John Falstaff*, Edward Ward’s *The Secret History of Clubs*, and Brewer’s new *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* are mentioned. There are eight titles of books on London streets. And names of periodicals are scattered through the pages, including *The Independent*, *The Galaxy*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *The National Weekly*, and *The Examiner*.

We see from the notes that Gissing was reading works in German, French, Italian, Greek, and Latin, as well as English, during the year of exile. There are pages of interesting Greek words and epithets in the *Notebook* and a lengthy discussion of Homer’s work – could Homer write, Gissing asks, or was his poetry all oral? Did he compose other epics of which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are remnants?

Gissing’s sense of humor is frequently apparent in the *American Notebook*, not only in some names (Chatt, Diplock, Swiney, Fleshpot, Hulks, Crassweller, Yapp, Tripe, Spinks, Tidy), but also in anecdotes and details he ran across in America: “May 31st/ 77. ‘Marvelous dramatic novelty’ announced at Booth’s Theatre, N.Y. Romeo and Juliet, Juliet by 7 different ladies. Bah!” He relished Artemus Ward: “‘Rolling stone gathers no moss.’ No, says Art Ward, but it gets polished.” He chortled over the English clergymen opposed to the opening of libraries on Sundays who “said (unintentionally) ‘We do not desire to invade the time set apart for the pulpit. We only want half of Sunday for intellectual improvement.’” He also noted that “Someone at French Academy said: ‘Musset s’absente trop.’ Another replied: ‘Il s’absinthe trop.’” A factual error in this section of the book has nothing to do with Gissing. Note 182 on page 58 states that Newnham College (Cambridge), founded in 1871, was the first university college for women in England. As a matter of fact, Girton College (also Cambridge), founded in 1869, was the first.

George Gissing's Memorandum Book, known more often by scholars as the "Huntington Memorandum Book," was used by Gissing from 1895 to 1902 for the same sorts of entries as the *American Notebook* twenty years earlier. Again we find quotations, anecdotes, and names and plots for potential stories. This document also includes revealing entries of a purely personal and practical nature, such as lists of expenses, appointments, and articles to purchase or to take on a trip; records of his weight; train schedules – from most of which information Dr. Postmus develops new insights about Gissing's travels, possessions, and health. There are descriptions of houses, towns, landscapes, and "English virtues" (common sense, pride, honesty, hatred of meanness). There are lists of people to whom presentation copies of his novels should be sent (Ibsen, Tolstoy, Hudson, Meredith). There is a list of words seemingly the same in English and French (e.g. *déception/deception*) but with different meanings. Three of the most intriguing pages of this "Huntington Memorandum" are apparently notes for the completed but destroyed *Among the Prophets*, a novel which dealt with hypocrisies in contemporary religions. Some sample notes:

Victoria lineal successor of David.

Irish tradition that Jeremiah went to Ireland from Egypt, bringing one of King Zedekiah's daughters. Hence royal line of Britain.

End of present dispensation is near. Millen. will come when nations join to reinstate Jews in Palestine. The "seven times" of Jewish dispersion draw to an end.

Her pleasure in grand language of prophets. A fine woman astray.

The Poetry of George Gissing is divided into two sections – first the "Verses by G. R. Gissing 1869 to [1882]," which come from the manuscript notebook of that title held in Yale's Beinecke Library of Rare Books and MSS. Dr. Postmus assumes that Gissing preserved in that notebook only the poems "that by his own standards he judged to be a success." The second group consists of "Scattered Verses: Early and Late" from various other sources.

Some of the poems in the total collection of 57 are un-memorable juvenilia, but none is badly written. All show the author's precocious facility (from age 11 on) with language and meter. They also show a broad familiarity with the English poets. I notice possible influences of Dryden (in "Harper! Strike thy harp"), Byron (in "Ravenna" and the "Winter" sonnets), Wordsworth (in "Wast Water," "The Refugee," "On a Dead Primrose"), Tennyson (in "The Last Sigh of the Moor"), and Keats (in the "Sonnet on completing the Perusal of the *Æneid*" and

"Ode to Truth"). In rhyme and meter "The Candy Store" (written in Waltham, January 1877) sounds like Poe, with whose work Gissing might well have recently become acquainted.

Stopping short and upward gazing
I beheld a sight amazing,
Past description, blinding, dazing,
I shall ne'er forget it more;
For there all close at hand I
Saw a beauteous figure stand, I
Saw a someone putting candy
In the window of a store!

Most of the poetry is serious, including the Romantic views of nature and the translations of classical poetry. The despondent love poems inspired by the impending separation from Nell fill an important biographical gap, as Dr. Postmus points out. Two of the poems I like are "The Theatre" (1870), depicting a crowd scene suggestive of crowds in future stories, and the amusing "Humble Aspirations of G. G. Novelist" (1889), on Dr. Gillman, who so famously took care of the poet Coleridge in his later years. It opens thus:

Oh, could I encounter a Gillman,
Who would board me and lodge me for aye,
With what intellectual skill, man,
My life should be frittered away!

Gissing's poems are followed by extensive notes on the individual poems and a full bibliography of sources used in writing the introduction and notes for the poetry.

The contents of *An Exile's Cunning* would be difficult to fully appreciate were it not for the notes supplied by Bouwe Postmus. Not only is the expected background information thoroughly researched and provided, but what might be called the "foreground information" is given also. By this I mean that the editor has whenever possible identified where in Gissing's future work the various names, plots, and details of the two notebooks were ultimately used. He relates the poems to Gissing's life and occasionally also to the future works. In addition, he ties the notebook references and the poems to Gissing's previously published *Commonplace Book* (1962) and *Diary* (1978) whenever he can. Two very interesting appendices follow the "Huntington Memorandum Book." One shows the links between specific entries in the "Memorandum Book" and the later "Author at Grass" and its book-form version, *The Private*

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Papers of Henry Ryecroft, while the second appendix does the same thing for the *Commonplace Book* and the two versions of the semi-autobiographical work. One can see at a glance that the "Huntington Memorandum Book" had almost as much influence as the *Commonplace Book* upon the writing of the later works.

Appropriately included in this volume are photographs of the "Huntington Memorandum Book"; the house where Gissing lodged in Waltham, Mass., in 1877; the *S. S. Spain*, on which Gissing returned to England; the Liverpool dock where he landed in 1877; and two of George Gissing himself.

All in all, Dr. Postmus has done a great service to the memory of George Gissing by making accessible and by clarifying the significance of two of Gissing's enigmatic notebooks and all of his poetry. Scholarly libraries and all students of Gissing will want to own this meticulously edited book.

Marilyn B. Saveson, Otterbein College, Westerville, Ohio

George Gissing, *Die überzähligen Frauen*, aus dem Englischen von Karina Of, mit einem Nachwort von Wulfhard Stahl, Frankfurt am Main und Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1999.

The Victorian ideal of middle-class womanhood, as depicted in the writings of Sarah Ellis, Coventry Patmore's long poem *The Angel in the House* (1855-56), and works by many other novelists, poets and social thinkers, strictly confined the role of women to the home and family. Women were either denigrated as whores or raised to the status of angelic, virtuous and asexual beings whose task it was to provide moral and ethical guidance to their husbands, who were

exposed to the harsh outside world characterised by religious doubt and materialism. Marriage and motherhood were regarded as the apotheosis of womanly fulfilment. By reproducing and reinforcing bourgeois values and norms as well as attitudes of thinking and behaviour, this conception of women's position and role in society buttressed the existing political, social and economic structures as well as the dominant ideology. In the last third of the nineteenth century, the hegemonic ideal of bourgeois Victorian womanhood, with its concomitant patriarchal, social and moral norms and structures, was called into question, not only by new scientific disciplines such as psychology, but also by social critics and writers. Female sexuality and the situation of women in society became the subject of controversial debates in radical, liberal and conservative circles. To many advocates of the status quo, the New Woman epitomized what

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they interpreted as tendencies of social, cultural and moral decline.

The attempt to redefine gender identities and gender roles in rapidly changing social and cultural circumstances was both reflected and promoted by renowned novelists, among them George Gissing. *The Odd Women* (1893) is his most important contribution to the debate on the question of female emancipation in the early stage of the women's movement. In this novel, which George Orwell in a somewhat exaggerated manner regarded as one of the best novels written in English, Gissing challenges the institution of patriarchal marriage, the traditional roles ascribed to women as being their natural destiny, and the separation between domestic life as the preserve of women and the public sphere as the domain of men. He problematizes the relationship between class affiliation and feminism, and foregrounds the tension between intellectual, theoretical dispositions and emotional, sexual desires. Gissing illuminates the theme of love and marriage from different perspectives, and represents divergent, even opposing ways of relating to the patriarchal structures and mentalities of Victorian society by women who, in their search of self-realization, tackle economic, social and sexual constraints imposed upon them by hostile surroundings. I do not intend to enter the debate on whether Gissing was a feminist, a non-feminist or even a misogynist. I agree with Margaret Walters who, in her introduction to the Virago edition of the novel, maintains that he neither romanticises nor denigrates women. The fact that all attempts at establishing satisfying relationships with men (romantic love, conventional marriage for reasons of economic security, free union) fail in the end, so that the reader is not offered the solution of a soothing happy end, appears to be only too realistic – then as now one might want to add.

Since its first publication Gissing's novel has not lost its topicality, and the numerous reprints of paperback editions in the last three decades testify to this. Given its obvious popularity among the reading public, it is all the more surprising that the novel is anything but a favourite on university syllabuses and reading lists. This applies to England and to an even greater extent to Germany. English Departments at German universities have not been affected by the boom in Gissing studies since the sixties, in the course of which his work has been rediscovered, republished and reassessed. In Germany, Gissing is still widely ignored and underrated both in research and in teaching. Literary-historical reference books and encyclopedias describe him as a sombre naturalist writer, stress the influence Schopenhauer's

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pessimist philosophy exerted on him, and praise his realistic descriptions of the social milieu of the lower and middle classes in late Victorian England. As a rule, *Demos* is mentioned in passing as a representative illustration of his social criticism and the style of his early novels, and then *New Grub Street* is acknowledged as an outstanding exploration of artistic integrity and the status of literature as a commodity in an age of mass consumption. Of course, it means

carrying coals to Newcastle to claim in this journal that such sweeping statements do not do justice to Gissing's complex and extensive work.

One reason for the almost total neglect of Gissing by the German literary-minded public is that, until recently, only two of his novels were translated into German: *Demos* (1892) and *New Grub Street* (1986). In 1997 the small firm of ars vivendi published a translation of *The Odd Women* by Karina Of, which in 1999 was republished by the Insel Verlag, a very prestigious publishing house with a reputation for producing attractive and yet reasonably priced editions of classical texts of world literature. Of's congenial translation deserves unconditional praise for having made available to a wide reading audience one of the most topical of Gissing's novels, which, in the treatment of its central theme, is closer to D. H. Lawrence than to its Victorian predecessors. The Insel edition is supplemented by a short afterword by Wulfhard Stahl which provides the general (not the academic) reader with some biographical detail, and places the novel in its contemporary context. In the interest of the German reading public I can only hope that Of's translations of *By the Ionian Sea* and *Born in Exile*, projects she is currently engaged on, will soon be appearing.

Raimund Schäffner, Heidelberg

George Gissing, *La terra del sole: Lettere dall'Italia e dalla Grecia (1888-1898)*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 1999.

La terra del sole, edited and translated by Francesco Badolato with an introduction and brief biographical note, makes all of Gissing letters from Italy and Greece available to Italian readers for the first time in a single edition.

The source for the extrapolation of these letters, as Badolato gratefully acknowledges, is the distinguished and critically acclaimed *Collected Letters of George Gissing*, edited by Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas in nine volumes. This attractively presented paperback by Rubbettino Editore, a publishing company based in Calabria, reproduces not only

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the letters which span the period of Gissing's travels in Italy and Greece, but also offers a number of Gissing's own sketches taken from his *Diary*, now in the Berg Collection, four evocative watercolours by Maria Dimitriadou, two photographs from Pierre Coustillas's personal collection and reproductions of two paintings by Leo de Littrow which originally appeared in the first edition of *By the Ionian Sea*. There is also a name and places index for easy reference.

On a personal note, this reviewer feels obliged to comment that reading the letters from Italy in Italian is a pleasurable experience since one has the impression that Gissing's fervid assimilation of things Italian, especially with regard to daily life in cities like Naples and Rome, was such that he would have appreciated this rendering of his letters in a language that he loved.

In his Introduction, Francesco Badolato draws attention to the fact that Gissing's journeying is a form of pilgrimage to the places that have fired his imagination since he was a schoolboy reading the classics for the first time, but also very justly identifies Gissing's quality as an "untiring observer" of the omnipresent elements of stunning landscape and art existing side by side with the evident misery and poverty of modern life, all of which counterpoints the "ancient splendour" of the past civilizations which fascinate him. There is no simple relationship between a fixed sense of the past and present, for Gissing is perturbed by his awareness of time and change, witnessing as he does the modern transformations of Rome and Athens and the "sventramento" (literally meaning disembowelment) of the urban landscape of Naples in the name of modernity. For Badolato, Gissing's realism here has a personal application, not in

eliminating the author's feelings, but in liberating them and permitting him to study and represent the Italians or the Greeks as would a historian of custom and social questions, and it should be added that he is not averse to doing so warts and all.

This sense of Gissing being alive to all forms of stimulation is particularly acute in his comments to his sister-in-law Catherine (writing from Naples in November 1888) on the experience of travelling and the way in which he feels that he is acquiring a greater capacity for the appreciation of beauty in nature, something which is consistently evident in these letters. He also declares that, after being obliged to communicate in Italian for days at a time, he has a new-found sense of the beauty of the English language and of the value of the Greeks and the Romans, and announces his intention of rereading all literature upon his return to England, this

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because everything has somehow changed for him. The letters also give strong evidence of Gissing's solitude and his need to communicate with other people. There are several lengthy letters to his brother and sisters and to Eduard Bertz in which crops up a sense both of his isolation as a lone traveller in foreign places and of his strong desire to communicate and give expression to his experiences. As Francesco Badolato points out, these letters are rich in emotion and love and admiration for Italy and Greece, two countries which were striving to liberate themselves from isolation after long years of slavery and domination, yet he also notes Gissing's expression to Bertz of his sadness at the thought that the remaining beauties of the classical world would not be able to escape the inexorable erosion of time and man's inability to marry past and present harmoniously.

Michael Cronin, University of Calabria

Kay Kufeke, *Himmel und Hölle in Neapel. Mentalität und diskursive Praxis deutscher Neapelreisender um 1800*. Köln: SH-Verlag (Italien in der Moderne, Band 5), 1999. 379 pp., 11 illustrations. DM 68. ISBN 3-89498-064-8.

What do we see and experience when we travel? How do we see what we see? What kind of reality, i.e. the reality "at home," is the driving force behind our activities, observations, perceptions abroad? What are our hopes and dreams, our prejudices, and preconceptions? What do we expect of an unknown environment? Does all this render new experiences possible, or, in the last analysis, is travelling, quite apart from its having become a commodity, only a re-affirmation of what we already (believe we) know?

Questions like these are the background of a new voluminous and richly detailed study on Naples as described in travel narratives, or rather reports, by German authors. Kay Kufeke closely analyses thirty-two books published between 1789 and 1821. "Heaven and hell in Naples" – could a more appropriate title have been found for a research drawing on Jacques Le Goff and his "school" of history of mentality? Heaven: that is what travellers saw, and wanted to see, in Europe's third biggest town, in its history, its culture, its "paradisiacal" surroundings, *la Campania*; hell: that is what they often enough had to cope with in everyday life, e.g. when being harassed by *lazzaroni* and other "poor devils."

The book contains an elaborate bibliography and is a prime-rate source-book not only for art historians or sociologists, but also for all Italophiles who are well aware of the dialectics of

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modern travelling. Although dealing with texts partly published a century before Gissing followed his "intellectual desire" and set out to discover "the imaginative delight of [his]

boyhood,” experiencing and enjoying the beauties of “[his] land of romance,” Kufeke’s study is highly recommended to readers of the *Gissing Journal* if only for its approach to the subject and the spirit it is written in.

Wulfhard Stahl, Bern

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Notes and News

Correspondents in various countries keep discovering unaccountably or unfairly ignored work about or more or less significant passages on Gissing in old publications. The oldest reference that reached us recently concerns a book by A. G. Kranendonk on English literature since 1880, published in Amsterdam in 1924, in which Gissing’s work is analysed on pp. 14-17. More impressive is a German dissertation by Konrad Gross entitled “Die Gestalt des Intellektuellen im spätviktorianischen Roman,” and submitted for a PhD in the University of Cologne in 1970. It is a study of the influence of natural science and biblical criticism on Hardy, Gissing, Butler and Wells, fifty pages of which are devoted to Gissing’s work, mainly *Born in Exile*. An Italian contribution dating back to 1995 also escaped our notice: “‘Northerners in Sunlight’: gli esuli di George Gissing,” in *Per una topografia dell’altrove*, edited by Maria Teresa Chialant and Eleonora Rao (Naples: Liguori Editore; pp. 429-43). From Japan, Professor Fumio Hojoh reports that *Hihyou Nyuumon*, an anthology of essays for high-school students published by Chikuma Shobou, had also been overlooked. First published in 1987, it had reached its fourteenth impression by 1999, offering its readers on pp. 24-26 a reprint of Spring XIX of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* in Hirai Masao’s translation. The revival of this significant essay against conscription is a worthy enterprise. Less satisfactory are entries in two well-known literary dictionaries, one French (*Le Nouveau Dictionnaire des auteurs*, Laffont & Bompiani, 1994), the other German (*Der Literatur Brockhaus*, B. I. – Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995). Although these reference works have been updated, they are still riddled with factual errors.

To all readers who have access to the Internet the site which Deborah McDonald recently

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created with a view to fostering interest in Gissing’s friend Clara Collet can be warmly recommended. Please have a look at <http://www.claracollet.co.uk/> and contact Mrs. McDonald at her e-mail address <dmcDonald@claracollet.co.uk>. This site is connected with the two Gissing sites we have previously mentioned, those of Peter Morton and Mitsuharu Matsuoka, both praised on the B.B.C. Education WebGuide:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/plsql/education/webguide/pkg_main.p_search

Of the first, The George Gissing Website, we read: “This magnificent site provides an excellent introduction to Gissing, including a detailed biography, a superb critical survey of his work, a guide to the history of Gissing studies (including work-in-progress) along with some suggested further reading and a detailed annotated guide to resources available online.” And of the second: “This excellent site’s most valuable resource is its massive collection of online texts, comprising almost all of George Gissing’s works, but these are also supplemented by some portrait galleries, an adequate chronology, adverts for the Gissing Trust and Journal, and links to other useful resources.” Mr. Matsuoka needs further assistance if he is to produce a highly desirable CD-ROM. The misprints that have inevitably crept into his transcriptions must be

corrected. Offers of help can be sent to his email address <matsuoka@lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp>

Brahma Chaudhuri, the editor of Litir Database (University of Alberta), asks us to announce Victorian Database Online. Website: <www.victoriandatabase.com>. It is a major bibliographical resource with approximately 100,000 entries on books, articles and dissertation abstracts concerning the Victorian age published from 1945 to 1999. But how many on Gissing? Are the four reviews of *With Gissing in Italy* by Jacob Korg, Al Vogeler, Paul Mattheisen and John Keahey on Amazon.com included?

To anyone wishing to visit Calabria in Gissing's footsteps without leaving his or her armchair, we can recommend two quarto volumes published by Rubbettino Editore, the Soveria Mannelli publisher who brought out *La terra del sole*, reviewed in this issue. *Catanzaro: Storia, Cultura, Economia* (1994), edited by Fulvio Mazza, honours Gissing and Lenormant and mentions such figures as Oreste Dito, Falcone Lucifero and a number of Paparazzos. *Crotone: Storia, Cultura, Economia* (1992), also edited by Fulvio Mazza, commemorates Gissing and Dr. Sculco, quoting at length from *By the Ionian Sea*. So did an article in the April-June 1990

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number of *Calabria Sconosciuta*, "Un inglese a Paola," by Rosario Manes, which Italian bibliographical observers familiar with Gissing's work had failed to notice. The latest number of this profusely illustrated quarterly (October-December 1999) has much to offer to students of Gissing's Italian interests: photographs of the Reggio cathedral as he saw it before the 1908 earthquake, and as it was, entirely rebuilt, in the 1930s (pp. 22-23); an article by Bruno Polimeni on "Il brigante Musolino," about whom Ouida corresponded with Gissing (pp. 57-59); another by Domenico Minuto on those descendants from the Greeks whom Gissing could see and hear of in Catanzaro, *i Greci*; and a study by Francesco Misitani of Johann Heinrich Bartels' *Briefe über Kalabrien und Sizilien* (Göttingen, 1787), a sort of ur-version of *By the Ionian Sea*.

Our thanks to William Levy of Amsterdam, who contributes in a colourful style to little-known journals and focuses his attention on *New Grub Street* and its quasi-legendary characters Harold Biffen and Jasper Milvain. His lightning-quick forays into Gissing territory will be found in *American Book Review* for December 1993-January 1994 (review of Dennis Cooper's novel *Frisk*, p. 13) and *Exquisite Corpse* ("Hanging out with Zalman Shneour," no. 56, 1996, p. 26). Levy saluted Gissing in his own way in his four-page New Year's greetings, observing that while he was attending the Amsterdam conference last September, "the hope of pessimism was manifest in a perfect Gissing moment when a glad-handing literary oaf spilled hot coffee all over [his] second favourite necktie."

The September 1999 number of *Keynotes*, the newsletter of the Eighteen Nineties Society, contains a suggestive article about the "Book of Gosse," which leads us to wonder whether Gissing's name appears in the entry for 3 July 1896, as it should. In the same number we find that Margaret Stetz has published a new edition of George Paston's [i.e. Emily Morse Symonds'] little-known novel, *A Writer of Books*, a sort of "distaff version" of *New Grub Street*. "The book," Matthew Sturgis writes, "is rich in period detail and contains many striking characters, including the memorable Bess Heywood, a beautiful lesbian actress who carries on a relentless vendetta against men" (Academy Chicago Publishers, 1999; price \$15.00 paperback).

Ayaka Okada completed her M.A. dissertation, "'Seize the Day' or 'Abandon the Day'?"

The *Fin de Siècle* Novels of George Gissing” (University of Leicester) last September. It is a well-documented study of *Born in Exile*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *Sleeping Fires*, *The Whirlpool*, *The Crown of Life* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Christine Huguet read a paper on “George Gissing et la nouvelle Bible” [that is, the press] on 21 January at the 23rd colloquium of the French Society for Victorian and Edwardian Studies. An English version is in preparation.

Quite by chance we found a short time ago that a call was being made for papers on “George Gissing and the issue of class” to be read at a special session of the MLA 2000 convention in Washington, D.C. next December. Anyone interested should write to Christine DeVine, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of English, H.C. White Hall, 600 N. Park Street, Madison, WI 53706-1475. Fax: 608 233-5947. E-mail <devine@facstaff.wisc.edu>. Whether this proposal for a special Gissing session is approved will be made known some time this month.

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Recent Publications

Volume

George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, edited with an introduction and notes by Patricia Ingham, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. A new title in the Oxford World’s Classics. The cover illustration shows a detail from “The Two Sisters,” by August Andreas Jerndorff (1846-1906). xxxii + 386 pages + 13 of advertisements. Contents: introduction, textual note, bibliography, chronology, text, explanatory notes, map. £6.99 or \$13.95. ISBN 0-19-283312-X.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Michaëlle Elaine Persell, “Literature, English,” *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Vol. 57, no. 9, March 1997, p. 3950A. Abstract of dissertation on “George Gissing and the Dickensian Inheritance.”

J. M. I. Klaver, *Geology and Religious Sentiment: The Effects of Geological Discoveries on English Society and Literature between 1829 and 1859* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). Passages on *Born in Exile*.

T. H. Howard-Hill, *British Book Trade: Dissertations to 1980*, Signal Mountain, Tennessee: Summertown, 1998. Lists five dissertations on Gissing.

Martha S. Vogeler, “Reviews,” *Choice*, Vol. 37, no. 4, December 1999. Review of *With Gissing in Italy*.

Anthony Petyt, “From Farms to Stage and Surgery: The Wood Family of Crigglestone and West Bretton,” in *Aspects of Wakefield 2: Discovering Local History*, ed. Kate Taylor,

Barnsley: Wharncliffe Publishing, 1999, pp. 106-17. With photos of Gissing and Dr. William Wood.

Ayaka Komiya, "Burden of Time: *Fin de Siècle Bildungsromane* by Gissing and Hardy," *Colloquia* (Keio University), Vol. 20 (1999), pp. 241-49.

Roxane Jurta, "'Not-so-new' Sue: The Myth of *Jude the Obscure* as a New Woman Novel," *Journal of the Eighteen Nineties Society*, no. 26 (1999), pp. 13-21. Contains a comparison between *Jude* and *The Odd Women*.

Pierre Coustillas, new Gissing entry in the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, Vol 4: 1800-1900*, 3rd edition, ed. Joanne Shattock, Cambridge University Press, 1999, columns 1535-52,

Peter J. Kitson *et al* (eds.), *The Year's Work in English Studies*, Vol. 77 (1996), Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. Gissing studies are analysed on pp. 551-52.

Anthony Quinn, "Relaxed in Rome," *Times Literary Supplement*, 21 January 2000, p. 34. Review of *With Gissing in Italy*. With photo of B. B. Dunne in Rome, 1898.

Robert Hanks, "Paperbacks," *Independent on Sunday*, 30 January 2000, Culture Section, p. 12. Review of *The Odd Women* in the Oxford World's Classics.

Teresa Liguori, "Progetto di ricerca linguistica, storica, nautica: Itinerari nella Crotona di Gissing," *Noi Magazine* (Supplement to the *Gazzetta del Sud*), 2 March 2000, p. 7.

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Information for Contributors

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

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

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