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“More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”
Commonplace Book

George Gissing on Music: Italian Impressions

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The late-Victorian novelist George Gissing (1857-1903)--best known to-day for *New Grub Street* (1891), *The Odd Women* (1893), and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903)--made three extended trips to Italy: October 1888-February 1889; December 1889-February 1890; and September 1897-April 1898.¹ And though music was far from the top of his sightseeing priorities--rather, it was Gissing's love of classical antiquity that lured him there--his numerous letters and diary entries, as well as his travelogue, *By the Ionian Sea* (1901), shed light on both the music that he heard and his reactions to it as he toured the country from one end to the other.² What follows, then, first chronicles Gissing's reactions to what he heard--mainly in his own words (quoted often, but by no means exhaustively, and at times at some length)--with only an occasional pause to set his comments into a wider context, and then, far more briefly, tries to assess what they tell us about both certain aspects of music in late nineteenth-century Italy and, even more so, Gissing himself as writer and man.

The first trip: 30 October 1888-26 February 1889

Armed with copies of Goethe's *Italienische Reise* and a German-language Baedeker,³ Gissing arrived at Naples early on 30 October and settled in at the pensione Casa di Luca in Vico Brancaccio.⁴ The sojourn, which fulfilled a desire to visit Italy that reached back to Gissing's teenage years, was made financially possible by the £150 paid him for the copyright of *The Nether World* (published in Spring 1889),⁵

and after about a month at Naples would wend its way northward through Rome, Florence, and Bologna, and come to a close at Venice.

Gissing had hardly unpacked when, on 2 November, he jotted down his first impressions of Naples:

Let me see if I can put down some of the points which seem most characteristic of Naples to one who has just arrived. The amount of buying and selling, especially in poor streets; the fanciful harness of horses; the multitudes of donkeys; the hard and excellent paving, squares placed diamond-wise; the enormous houses, vast doorways, great rooms, thick walls; the madonna faces among the lower classes; the elegant appearance of officers; the abundance of clerics in the street and their leisurely walk,—including monks of mediaeval appearance; the gradoni; the soft note of the street-organs; the saints with lamps before them; the long musical cry of sellers going about the streets at night. (*Diary*, p. 61)⁶

And one day later, 3 November, having visited Pozzuoli, Gissing noted: “Glorious little town Pozzuoli [...] I sat and smoked a pipe, and looked at the ships, and over towards Baja. One of the soft Italian organs played the while. I felt happy [...]” (*Diary*, p. 62). Thus what struck Gissing immediately in terms of music was the seemingly ever-present sound of the street organs, something to which he would return repeatedly, not only during this trip but during the subsequent ones as well.

For the rest of the month, Gissing was relatively quiet about music. On 13 November he mentions having visited the tombs at the Campo Santo, where “On the front of a great building, large enough to be a church, was written ‘Sigismondo Thalberg’”; it was the only name that he recognised (*Diary*, p. 70).⁷ And on 29 November, he was “particularly amused” by a “lad, lithe and good looking [...] he played some airs on a little wooden whistle” (*Diary*, p. 81).

1 December found Gissing at Rome, where he soon made his way to the Pincio. There “a good band was playing,” he wrote to Eduard Bertz on 6 December (*Letters*, vol. 3, p. 314), while some days later (17 December), he told his sister Margaret that the band played several times a week (*Letters*, vol. 3, p. 322). But the letter of 17 December is most interesting for its comparison of Naples and Rome, with Rome faring much the worse in terms of its street music: “there is absolutely *no* picturesqueness in the common life of the people. Rome is very silent. Never a street organ--not one” (*Letters*, vol. 3, p. 318).⁸

Things became livelier with the onset of Christmas. His diary for 23 December mentions a visit “To Vespers at Trinità de’ Monti, and only wish I had been before. Exquisite singing by the nuns; a solo and a

duet that enraptured me” (*Diary*, p. 106). Christmas Eve was spent in part at San Giovanni in Laterano:

heard a choral service--Vespers--at 3 o'clock. It was held in the Cappella del Coro; and a procession of priests went thence, first to the Altar of the Sacrament, then to the high altar, performing many genuflections etc. at each. Some good singing, but the whole affair impressed me as paltry. A swarm of curious foreigners pressing about the entrance of the chapel, and hemming in the procession; the thing became a mere exhibition. No worshipping congregation. The offices of the Rom. Cath. Church seem to be performed for the entertainment of the clerics alone (*Diary*, p. 107),

while Christmas Day saw Gissing at both St. Peter's and Santa Maria Maggiore. He looked back at his experiences in a letter of 31 December (by which time he was in Florence) to Ellen:

On Christmas Day I spent many hours, first in S. Peter's, then in the great Church of S. Maria Maggiore. In S. Peter's the services were incessant, all day long [...] But you must not imagine anything like services in a Protestant church. In the body of the church nothing at all took place; only the numerous chapels, all round it, were occupied. And, even in the chapels, little if any accommodation is offered to the people; there are scarcely ever any seats; one always feels that the masses &c are being performed merely for the amusement of the ecclesiastics. And then the crowd of foreigners, with guide-books in hand, always takes away from the solemnity of the proceedings.--The services with music are held in the Choir-Chapel. There I heard a Pontifical Mass, at 11 in the morning; the music was very fine indeed.--But the Vespers at S. Maria Maggiore were better, for there the choir occupies its proper place at the end of the nave, & the whole vast church is filled with music. (*Letters*, vol. 3, p. 330)⁹

He added to this account in his diary entry on Christmas Day itself:

in St. Peter's, where I remained from 9.30 to 12, hearing service after service in the Cappella del Coro. Masses were going on in nearly all the chapels [...] The singing was spoiled for me by the sight of a male soprano,--a disgusting spectacle. And then the fact of a service being held in a chapel which is only a fragment of the church takes away from the impressiveness. It seems that there is no organ in the central part of St. Peter's [...] Walked across to S. Maria Maggiore [...] again the music was spoiled for me by those male sopranos [...] All day the vessel containing the Culla (bits of wood of the Manger) had been exposed on the high altar [...] At five o'clock a great procession was formed, and this was carried down the nave, with singing. (*Diary*, pp. 107-08)

Gissing, then, had his prejudices: male sopranos and foreign tourists, the latter--particularly the English--being a constant source of annoy-

ance. Gissing, after all, had come to think of himself as being little less than a native Neapolitan.¹⁰

As noted above, Gissing was in Florence by 31 December; and in the same letter in which he described to his sister the music at St. Peter's and Santa Maria Maggiore, he now drew a comparison between Naples and Florence:

Everywhere [at Naples] music, singing, laughing, shouting, quarrelling. I cannot tell you how I miss those Neapolitan organs. Here [Florence], as in Rome, never a note of music; in that respect it is very disappointing [...] How well I can hear the tune that was played by the organs the very first night that I walked about the streets of Naples! How warm it was! (*Letters*, vol. 3, p. 334)

From this Gissing drew a sweeping generalisation. As he put it to Bertz on 20 January:

It seems that the Italians are not so musical as they used to be. It is very rarely that one hears music in the streets, & very poor whenever there is any. In Naples, it is true, the street-organs were numberless, but since leaving Naples *I have not heard one*. I regret this, bitterly. My whole life is brightened by a little music, however poor. (*Letters*, vol. 4, p. 21)

But there was music in Florence. Already on 31 December he noted that he had heard "a male soprano singing to a guitar" in the Piazza del Duomo (*Diary*, p. 114). On 5 January, there was "blowing of horns by boys about the streets" in celebration of "Befana" (Epiphany) on the following day (*Diary*, p. 117), and on 6 January itself: "In the evening found a lively place, Cornelio's Caffè, a little way west of the Baptistry. Swarming with people, and a band playing dance music" (*Diary*, p. 118).

In all, though, Gissing was disappointed with Florence, and not only for what he perceived as a lack of music. Simply put, Florence missed something far more important: traces of antiquity. As he wrote to his brother Algernon on 2 January: "Christian art has not the unspeakable charm that I find in the pagan relics & memories. Florence is the city of the Renaissance, but after all the Renaissance was only a shadow of the great times" (*Letters*, vol. 4, p. 3).

On 29 January, Gissing left Florence and travelled to Bologna; there he was immediately caught up in the city's lively spirit:

Here again heard street-organs, for first time since leaving Naples [...] Spent evening at the Caffè Commercio, Via Ugo Bassi, where some really good playing went on. Crowds of people; livelier even than Cornelio's at Florence. The town

decidedly noisy. All night long--for I could not sleep--I heard singing and shouting in the streets. (*Diary*, p. 126)

And a few days later, he reiterated his positive impression of Bologna in a letter to his sister Ellen (written at Venice on 5 February): "Bologna is a wonderful old town [...] Excellent music in many of the Caffès,--& indeed a few organs in the streets" (*Letters*, vol. 4, p. 35).

But Venice beckoned, and on 30 January Gissing set out for that city, staying at the Palazzo Swift on the Grand Canal. It was there that Gissing experienced what may well have been the musical highlight of the tour: "The singers on the gondola come at 8 every evening. The woman's voice is glorious. To-night they sang 'Addio a Napoli' and 'Santa Lucia,'" he noted in his diary on 1 February (*Diary*, p. 128).¹¹ He then described the scene in greater detail a few days later in a letter to Ellen (5, 7 and 8 February):

Now I am waiting for something. I look away past S. Maria [della Salute] & presently see a gondola with four red lamps coming silently hitherwards. It draws near to our side, & moors itself just in front of a large hotel, two houses distant. I listen intently. There is a soft touching of violins, & the deep rich note of a violin cello; then suddenly begins a prelude of music, & in a minute is followed by an outburst of singing voices, a chorus, & their song is the "Addio a Napoli." When the song is finished, there is clapping of hands from the windows of the houses. But stop, for now I am listening still more earnestly. Again a soft prelude, then one voice only begins to sing, a woman's voice, exquisitely rich & true.--This is "street" music, but such a voice I have never heard anywhere but in great concert halls, never.

The concert lasts for half an hour,--it seems only a few minutes; then, in reply to applause & remonstrances, a voice from the boat laughingly calls out "Basta per stasera!"--Enough for this evening!--& the four red lamps--the gondola itself invisible--float away towards the Adriatic.

[...] The gondola with the music comes every evening at the same time, rejoicing me as I listen. (*Letters*, vol. 4, pp. 34-35, 39)¹²

We should pause over "Santa Lucia" and "Addio a Napoli" (which Gissing also refers to as "Addio, bella Napoli"), for they function almost like leitmotives during Gissing's Italian sojourns.¹³ "Santa Lucia," published in 1850, was, as Gissing himself attests, known from one end of Italy to the other. Indeed, it would gain international currency, and became especially popular in Sweden, where it is still sung each year in celebration of the saint's feast. As for "Addio a Napoli"--this must have been the song that begins as in ex. 1 overleaf.

Nc'è sim_mo_a_là_pär_zen_za, io me_ne_va_co_ad_di_o,

Na_po_le_bel_lo_mio, non_te_ve_drag_gio_chitù.

Quan_to_nc'è_de_chitù_ca_ro_din_to_de_te_se_nzer_ra,

Ad_di_o,

pa_ra_vi_so_nter_ra, Na_po_le_mio, ah,

no_pa_ra_vi_so_nter_ra, Na_po_le_mio, si'tu, tu.

Ex.1: 'Addio a Napoli' (also known as 'Addio, bella Napoli')

For the rest of his time at Venice, Gissing's observations on music consist mainly of short entries in his diary about the bands that played in Piazza San Marco: 2 February-- "From 2 to 5 a large and good military band played in the Piazza. I walked about, listening to it [...] Strolled down to the Riva, and found a group of boatmen singing a sort of catch--a part song without words. Fine voices" (*Diary*, pp. 128-29);¹⁴ 8 February-- "The band in the Piazza plays several afternoons a week. Unfortunately there are no concerts at the Caffès of an evening" (*Diary*, p. 131); 22 February-- "I counted the band playing in the Piazza to-day; there were 55 of them, with conductor. On certain days another and smaller band plays" (*Diary*, p. 139). Four days later, on 26 February, Gissing boarded a train for Milan, spent the night there, and crossed the border into Switzerland on 27 February, his first Italian sojourn at an end.

What is striking, I think, is the music about which Gissing saw fit to comment. It was music in the streets (at Venice on the canals), squares, cafés, and churches that caught Gissing's ear in Italy. Not once did this erudite champion of high culture attend an opera (at least he mentions none); not once did he report on a concert of chamber music. It is as if "art" music, which he certainly appreciated (see below), did not exist. And as we shall see, the same pattern would more or less be repeated during the second and third trips as well.

The second trip: 14 November and 19 December 1889-20 February 1890

Gissing preceded his second tour of Italy with a month-long sojourn in Greece. On the way there, however, his ship called at Genoa on 14 November, and now Gissing did take the opportunity to attend the opera. He left a record of the evening:

went to the Teatro Paganini. Saw an opera, made out of "Adrienne Lecouvreur." A large theatre, with six tiers of seats above pit, and no baignoires; sat in the Platèa--and paid fr. 1.50. Opera indifferent, but fairly successful with public. After a duo in the first act, much applauded, the female singer disappeared and returned dragging a young man in morning attire--seemed to be about 20--the composer. This was repeated many times during the opera, the shy and awkwardly-bowing young fellow appearing in the middle of scenes, without any regard to artistic effect. The overture to Act III was *bissé*, and, because the curtain had already risen, the actors--some thirty--had to stand twiddling their thumbs whilst the overture was repeated,--highly ridiculous.--Up above the

proscenium was a mechanical arrangement for showing the time,--changed each 5 minutes. (*Diary*, p. 172)

But whose *Adriana Lecouvreur* did Gissing hear? It was not, after all, the famous one by Francesco Cilea, which had its première only in 1902. Rather, it must have been that by Ettore Perosio, which had enjoyed its own first performance at the same Teatro Paganini just a few months earlier, in January 1889.¹⁵ Gissing's little "review" is valuable as a record of his thoughts about opera, which, like so much else about the man, were ambivalent. On the one hand, he could revel in a glorious voice, as attested by his idolisation of Adelina Patti and his dismay over the merely "tolerable" singing at a London performance of *Lohengrin*;¹⁶ on the other, his description of the evening at Genoa makes it clear that for him opera was something more than a concert on stage. If anything, he may well have leaned toward the literary-dramatic element in opera, as witness the reference to Perosio's work being "made out of" *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, the drama by Eugene Scribe and Ernest Legouvé (1849) from which all the *Lecouvreur* operas were fashioned, or his advice, given a few years earlier, to his sisters Margaret and Ellen that they should read--obviously with reference to the libretto only--through *Lohengrin*.¹⁷

After a month in Greece, Gissing landed at Brindisi on 19 December, and headed for Naples, where once again he stayed at Frau Häberle's Casa di Luca. Within days, there are entries in the diary about the *zampognieri*, both at Naples, where they "are all about the town" and play "very curious tunes" and at Posillipo, where they are "active everywhere" (22 and 23 December, respectively; *Diary*, p. 194);¹⁸ in addition, there is a note on some good singing that he heard in the church situated on Piazza Plebiscito (25 December; *Diary*, p. 195).¹⁹

On 29 December, however, he recorded an event that left him in despair:

I see in the newspaper an incredible announcement that the Questura has forbidden street-organs (Pianini) in Naples. And indeed I hear none. Alas! Alas! [...] Rejoiced to hear some poor fellows singing "Santa Lucia," and "Addio, bella Napoli!" in front of an hotel.-- Naples without music! (*Diary*, p. 196)

And perhaps to relieve the despair--or perhaps because of it--he continued somewhat jokingly in the very same entry: "In room next to me two Germans, who sing together very vilely. To-night they are chanting: 'Röslein, Röslein, Röslein roth, Röslein auf der 'eiden.' I didn't know before that Germans dropped their h's" (*Diary*, pp. 196-97). But

even the vile “chanting” of the Germans could not get the banished street organs off his mind; and on 8 January 1890, he wrote to Eduard Bertz:

[...] alas, alas! An incredible thing has happened. The idiotic municipal authorities have actually (from Christmas-day) forbidden the street-organs in Naples! I speak seriously when I say that this greatly diminishes my pleasure here, & afflicts me deeply [...] Thank heaven, some blackguards come to play & sing in front of the great hotels; I hear every night “Santa Lucia,” & “Addio, bella Napoli.”--But I miss the organs sadly. Naples, the old Naples, is vanishing day by day; I notice the process even in a year’s time. (*Letters*, vol. 4, pp. 183-84)

In fact the authorities had banned street organs in the city. As the newspaper *Roma* had reported on 20 December: “The questura has recently prohibited the sound of street organs on the streets of the city, consenting to them only in the villages and the suburbs.”²⁰ To this the *Corriere di Napoli* added that, even in those locations, street organs would be tolerated only between the hours of 8.00am. and 9.00pm.²¹

Clearly, Gissing was more than just saddened: he was incensed. And having seen his frequent references to street organs during both this trip and the preceding one, we should consider the wider context of his concern. Already in what had served as a combination letter-birthday card to his sister Ellen on 3 April 1880, he expresses his fondness for the instrument:

How do you get on with your music? That is a very essential point in a girl’s education. I would give a thousand pounds--if I had it--to be able to play the piano,--nay, even on a penny-whistle. Do you know, I have frequently contemplated getting a barrel-organ man to play in my room for so much an hour? But perhaps the other people in the house would object. (*Letters*, vol. 1, p. 257)

And in a moving passage from chapter 26 of the “Summer” section of his last completed work, the half autobiographical-half fictional *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903), he places the street organ in the heady company of a Chopin nocturne in what may be read as a confession-like expression of his love of music. It is worth quoting at length:

Of late I have been wishing for music. An odd chance gratified my desire.

I had to go into Exeter yesterday. I got there about sunset, transacted my business, and turned to walk home again through the warm twilight. In Southernhay, as I was passing a house of which the ground-floor windows stood open, there sounded the notes of a piano--chords touched by a skilful hand. I checked

my step, hoping, and in a minute or two the musician began to play that nocturne of Chopin which I love best--I don't know how to name it. My heart leaped. There I stood in the thickening dusk, the glorious sounds floating about me; and I trembled with very ecstasy of enjoyment [...]

It is well for me that I cannot hear music when I will; assuredly I should not have such intense pleasure as comes to me now and then by haphazard [...] It happened at times--not in my barest days, but in those of decent poverty--that someone in the house where I lodged played the piano--and how it rejoiced me when this came to pass! I say "played the piano--a phrase that covers much. For my own part, I was very tolerant; anything that could by the largest interpretation be called music, I welcomed and was thankful for; even "five-finger exercises" I found, at moments, better than nothing. For it was when I was labouring at my desk that the notes of the instrument were grateful and helpful to me. Some men, I believe, would have been driven frantic under the circumstances; to me, anything like a musical sound always came as a godsend; it tuned my thoughts; it made the words flow. Even the street organs put me in a happy mood; I owe many a page to them--written when I should else have been sunk in bilious gloom.

More than once, too, when I was walking London streets by night, penniless and miserable, music from an open window has stayed my step, even as yesterday. Very well can I remember such a moment in Eaton Square one night when I was going back to Chelsea, tired, hungry, racked by frustrate passions. I had tramped miles and miles, in the hope of wearying myself so that I could sleep and forget. Then came the piano notes--I saw that there was festival in the house--and for an hour or so I revelled as none of the bidden guests could possibly be doing. And when I reached my poor lodgings, I was no longer envious nor mad with desires, but as I fell asleep I thanked the unknown mortal who had played for me and given me peace.²²

A Chopin nocturne, five-finger exercises, and the music of the street organ: for Gissing they are all to be cherished. All of them can be beautiful; all can touch the heart. And Gissing, we should bear in mind, was not aesthetically naïve.

But the street organ had more than just a musical-aesthetic meaning for Gissing: it had political ramifications as well. This is expressed most clearly in *Thyrza* (1887), in which Gilbert Grail (note the initials: GG, as in George Gissing)--the self-educated, sympathetic hero of the novel who, though able to envision a life beyond the slums, cannot attain it--walks through the streets and alleys of Lambeth:

He turned towards Lambeth Walk. The market of Christmas Eve was flaring and clamorous; the odours of burning naphtha and fried fish were pungent on the

wind. He walked a short distance among the crowd, then found the noise oppressive and turned into a by-way. As he did so, a street organ began to play in front of a public-house close by. Grail drew near; there were children forming a dance, and he stood to watch them.

Do you know that music of the obscure ways, to which children dance? Not if you have only heard it ground to your ears' affliction beneath your windows in the square. To hear it aright you must stand in the darkness of such a by-street as this, and for the moment be at one with those who dwell around, in the bleary-eyed houses, in the dim burrows of poverty, in the unmapped haunts of the semi-human. Then you will know the significance of that vulgar clanging of melody; a pathos of which you did not dream will touch you, and therein the secret of hidden London will be half revealed.²³

Similarly, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) draws attention to the instrument's beneficent social role, as Arthur Golding remembers the "heaven-sent organ-grinder's strains," while "miserably clad children [avail] themselves of the Italian's [the organ-grinder's] good offices to enjoy a dance on the pavement."²⁴ For Gissing, the street organ was, in effect, the very "voice" of London's working poor.²⁵

Finally, we may situate Gissing's sympathy for the street organ and "grinders" who played them--mainly Italian immigrants, whether in London or other northern European cities--in two other contexts: (1) among intellectuals of his time, Gissing stood in a distinct minority, finding a lonely voice of agreement--and probably a source of influence--in this respect in the writings of the celebrated London clergyman Hugh Reginald Haweis (1838-1901), whose books on music he had read, and whose work on campanology he surely respected,²⁶ and (2) it was not only upon the municipal authorities of Naples that Gissing would have hung the label "idiotic," for during the twenty years or so that surrounded 1900, street organs and organ-grinders were subject to regulatory legislation in many a European municipality, and Gissing would have been equally saddened by events in London, Paris, and Berlin, all of which clamped down on the simple music in which he took so much delight.²⁷

For the rest of his time in Naples, Gissing's references have an air of the haphazard about them. He mentions that he likes a song by Paolo Tosti called "Malia" (Witchcraft), and that it is extremely popular,²⁸ and that he had bought a collection of Neapolitan songs entitled *L'Eco del Vesuvio*, which he intended to give to his sister Ellen.²⁹ On 15 January, he reports that he ate in a restaurant called Mazzo di Fiori, where there is "always music [...] Two men, one with

guitar, other mandoline; one sings. At night a little girl singing” (*Diary*, p. 203); and on 7 February, he noted the presence at Casa di Luca of three German singers who were then on tour in Italy: “one of them a great fellow of six feet at least, oldish, and with bass voice; he is called Fricke, and I hear he was once a famous singer on the German stage” (*Diary*, p. 207). Finally, in addition to his disappointment in connection with the ban on street organs, he also regretted that he could not attend the opera; as he put it in a letter to Margaret on 22 January: “I should like to hear an opera at the San Carlo, one of the finest theatres in Europe; but the prices are very high, & I am afraid of catching a cold. The performances begin at 8.30, & often end at 1 a.m.” (*Letters*, vol. 4, p. 187). Lack of money and preoccupation with his health: they would plague Gissing throughout his adult life.³⁰

On Thursday morning, 20 February, Gissing boarded a ship called the *Orient* and set sail for England. It would be seven-and-a-half years before he returned to Italy.

The third trip: 23 September 1897-13 April 1898

Gissing had two main objectives during his third and final Italian sojourn: he wished to write his critical study of Dickens and tour Calabria in order to view the ruins of Magna Græcia. The first of these he accomplished in Siena, where he settled in for about six weeks and completed *Charles Dickens: a Critical Study*, which he published in 1898 upon his return to England; as for the tour of Calabria: this eventually resulted in *By the Ionian Sea: Notes of a Ramble in Southern Italy*, a combination “public diary” and travel guide, which he published in 1901.

In Siena, Gissing really did little more than work on the Dickens study,³¹ and no sooner had he finished it, than he headed south, arriving at Naples on 10 November. He was immediately struck by the absence of street organs, and an entry in the diary on 14 November notes that “Naples seems less lively, even less noisy. The ceaseless street-organs used to be (to me) enjoyable, with their soft notes; now an organ is rarely heard. Before long, I suppose, music will cease in the trattorie” (*Diary*, p. 454).

Gissing echoed his disappointment in *By the Ionian Sea*:

When I first knew Naples one was never, literally never, out of hearing of a hand-organ; and these organs, which in general had a peculiarly dulcet note, played the brightest of melodies; trivial, vulgar if you will, but none the less melodious, and dear to Naples. Now the sound of street music is rare, and I

understand that some police provision long since interfered with the soft-tongued instruments. I miss them; for, in the matter of music, it is with me as with Sir Thomas Browne. For Italy the change is significant enough; in a few more years spontaneous melody will be as rare at Naples or Venice as on the banks of the Thames.³²

“Happily,” he continues, “the musicians errant still strum their mandoline as you dine.”

Gissing now set out on his “ramble” through Calabria; and though the notes about music are few, they show that he kept his ears ever open. In Taranto, on 19 November, he was impressed with the evening *ritirata* of the marines: “A pretty march played about the streets” (*Diary*, p. 458). A few days later he had arrived at Cotrone. Deathly ill and staying in what must have been a pigsty of a hotel, Gissing vented his wrath against both the proprietors and the inhabitants of Cotrone: “little short of savages, filthy in person and in habits, utterly uncouth in their demeanour” (*Ionian Sea*, p. 75).³³ In the end, though, he finds their better side; and as always, there is a saving grace--their music:

One day came a street organ, accompanied by singing, and how glad I was! The first note of music, this, that I had heard at Cotrone. The instrument played only two or three airs, and one of them became a great favourite with the populace; very soon, numerous voices joined with that of the singer, and all this and the following day the melody sounded, near or far. It had the true characteristics of southern song; rising tremolos, and cadences that swept upon a wail of passion; high falsetto notes, and deep tum-tum of infinite melancholy. Scorned by the musician, yet how expressive of a people’s temper, how suggestive of its history! At the moment when this strain broke upon my ear, I was thinking ill of Cotrone and its inhabitants; in the first pause of the music I reproached myself bitterly for narrowness and ingratitude. All the faults of the Italian people are whelmed in forgiveness as soon as their music sounds under the Italian sky. [...] Moved by these voices singing over the dust of Croton, I asked pardon for all my foolish irritation [...] Listen to a Calabrian peasant singing as he follows his oxen along the furrow, or as he shakes the branches of his olive tree. That wailing voice [...] comes from the heart of Italy herself. (*Ionian Sea*, pp. 81-82)

A note in the diary for 2 December sums up Gissing’s feelings concisely: “An organ, with singing, out in the Piazza. I forgive these people everything as soon as they make music” (*Diary*, p. 465).

Finally, there are brief references to music in the diary from Catanzaro and Reggio Calabria on 8 and 12 December, respectively. At Catanzaro, Gissing went to the Church of the Immacolata, at which “there was a great crowd, as to-day is the festa of the Immacolata--as

much thought of here [...] as Christmas. A lively orchestra, of string music, playing loudly in a gallery of the church" (*Diary*, p. 467); at Reggio, in the afternoon: "music in public gardens. Military band played. Beethoven--Andante Cantabile; Haydn, quartetto; Rigoletto Atto 1°; Rubinstein, Toreador, and Marcia d'Artiglieria" (*Diary*, p. 472).

By Christmas, Gissing was in Rome, where he would wind up his third Italian sojourn. There he spent much time with two friends, one new, one old: Brian Borù Dunne, a young American whom he had met while in Siena (and to whom he generally refers as O'Dunne), and fellow-writer H. G. Wells. With Wells Gissing went to the opera on two occasions: 9 April (now 1898)--*Lohengrin* at the Teatro Costanza, where, he complained, his box was too near the stage; and 10 April--*Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* at the Teatro Nazionale, where the singers were bad and the audience rowdy (*Diary*, p. 489).

The musical events attended with Dunne were somewhat more "low brow." On 12 January, Gissing and Dunne spent an evening at the Orpheo, a "café chantant." Dunne describes the evening in greater detail than does Gissing:

The "Cafés Chantants" certainly amused me--as I had never been to such places. Only once could I get Gissing into one, but we had a marvelous evening. A girl called "Stella"--of course pretty and full bosomed--sang and danced and created a furor. She was given a dozen encores and then the orchestra leader decided that enough was enough. To repeated cries, particularly from an upper box to the right of the stage, that Stella reappear, there was silence. Screams of "Fuori la Stella" were uttered by half a dozen slightly drunken young men. Still Stella failed to shine. Finally the uproar became so great [that] Stella appeared and was showered with cigarettes, walnuts, peanuts, carnations, cigars, marbles, spitballs and what not. The orchestra leader gave a signal and the curtain was rung down and the crowd dispersed.

I thought the orchestra delightful and I loved their gay tunes, but Gissing remarked: "These musicians are working for seven francs a week" [...] He thought the Italians' reception of Stella highly amusing.³⁴

Gissing fills things out: "Very poor. An encore of a singer being refused, the audience made a row, refused to hear the singers still on the programme, and just went away. Oddly Italian, this. English folk would never relinquish part of their money's worth in this way" (*Diary*, p. 480). Four days later Gissing and Dunne went to another variety show. This time Gissing's judgment was to the point: "Stupid" (*Diary*, p. 480).³⁵

Finally, thanks to Dunne's good connections, Gissing was able to attend special Masses at St. Peter's on 7 and 13 February, the former in honour of the twentieth anniversary of the death of Pius IX, the latter to celebrate the same anniversary of the then-current papacy of Leo XIII. About the Requiem Mass for Pius IX, celebrated in the Sistine Chapel, Gissing noted that there was "much fine singing" (*Diary*, p. 482); at the Mass for Leo XIII, Gissing was impressed by the brass band situated in the loggia above the great doorway (*Diary*, p. 483).³⁶

On 13 April, Gissing left Italy by way of the Brenner Pass. It would be his last trip to the country that he loved above all others.

Whether we think Gissing has told us a great deal about music in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century is somewhat like the question about whether the glass is half full or half empty. For those who might have wished for a highly cultured foreigner's evaluation of Italy's contemporary art-music scene--reports, say, on the repertory heard at recitals or more than just a few comments about the opera--Gissing's glass may well be dry. Had Gissing no interest in such, or did he simply not have the time (or the money) to attend many such events?³⁷ Yet even had he had all three, could he have given us a truly informed report? Probably not; for though he appreciated--and was more than passingly acquainted with--the standard repertory of the concert hall, he did not pretend to be a music critic.³⁸

On the other hand, Gissing paints an informative and sympathetic picture of "everyday" music in the streets and on the canals, in the *trattorie*, cafés, and public gardens, as he does also of the music for a feast day in a small church at Catanzaro, as well as that for grander occasions in the great churches of Rome. Moreover, he tells us that "Santa Lucia" and "Addio a Napoli" were everywhere, sung from one end of the country to the other, while Tosti's "Malìa" was all the rage during the winter of 1889-90. He also informs us about the character of the audiences at the Genoa opera house, while his friend Dunne does the same for a Roman *café chantant*. In this respect, Gissing's glass comes near to overflowing.

In the end, though, Gissing is most informative about himself. To those who know him mainly from such socio-critical novels as *New Grub Street* and *The Odd Women* or the erudite *Born in Exile* (1892), or have charted the generally "rightward" course of his politics--from his call for social reform in the early *Workers in the Dawn* to the scathing and terse "I am no friend of the people" in the late *Ryecroft* (p. 47)³⁹ or the blatantly élitist attitude expressed in a letter to

Gabrielle Fleury on 30 August 1898⁴⁰--Gissing's endearment for the music of those trapped in the "dim burrows of poverty" (see above) may come as something of a surprise. Yet this is precisely what it should not be, for Gissing was a man racked by contradictions,⁴¹ and these extended to his views on music, both in and of itself and as regards its role in society.

The contradictions cut a number of ways. For instance, though Gissing attended concerts or the opera when and where he could, he grew to disdain the communal aspects of such venues. As he put it in *Ryecroft*:

Of course there is the discomfort of [the] concert-hall [...] My pleasure in the finest music would be greatly spoilt by having to sit amid a crowd, with some idiot audible on right hand or left [...] The truth is, I do not much enjoy anything nowadays which I cannot enjoy *alone*. It sounds morose; I imagine the comment of good people if they overheard such a confession. Ought I, in truth, to be ashamed of it? (p. 102)⁴²

The pleasures gained from music, then, were highly personal, not among those that he wished to share.

Gissing is also ambivalent about "incidental" music, that is, the musical "wallpaper" that sounds around us in the course of our regular, everyday affairs. On the one hand, he repeatedly expresses his delight in such music--street organs, musicians beneath his window, and bands in the *piazze*--during the course of his Italian sojourns, as he does his sorrow when the streets were not filled with song. And as he tells us in *Ryecroft*, he enjoyed listening to a piano--even if it was only "tinkling"--while working at his desk (see above).⁴³ Yet two entries in his *Diary* show a very different Gissing:

3 April 1891--The people downstairs have--alas!--got in a piano to-day, and vigorous strumming has begun. I trust to their weakness of mind soon to tire of it. (p. 243)

21 November 1894--Still pestered by the blackguard drum and fife band. They play to-night *in the garden* of the house opposite, and defy me from private ground, the people of the house encouraging them. I went again to the police station, but found there is no help. (p. 354)

Finally, and most germane to our discussion, there is Gissing's ambivalence towards the experience and enjoyment of music: intellect vs. emotions, mind vs. heart. He leans firmly toward the idea that music is something learned in a letter of 9 October 1885 to his sister Ellen:

I miss music grievously. No doubt, as you say, Beethoven leads; in my brutal ignorance I can only gather opinions second hand, but it is clear that Beethoven ranks with Michael Angelo & Shakespeare. And, like them, I expect he requires vast study to be thoroughly enjoyed. One ignorant of music can never hope even to get pleasure from his greatest work, or at all events not the true pleasure designed. (*Letters*, vol. 2, p. 353)

Yet he sings a different tune in a letter to his sister Margaret on 26 May 1887:

last night I went to Drury Lane & heard "Lohengrin,"--the first opera of Wagner's that I have heard performed [...] it is a wonderful thing to fill D. L. theatre, from gallery to pit, with people who shout themselves hoarse after each act of "Lohengrin." But this matter of appreciation in music is very mysterious. It seems to have nothing to do with intellectual power. Asses are quite capable, I see, of enjoying the highest music. And indeed we know how low the mental average is among people musically given. Even composers are for the most part without brains for anything but music. So that it is clearly something apart from what we call intellect. (*Letters*, vol. 3, p. 117)

This is a startling admission for Gissing, a crack in the intellectual-*élitist* armour from behind which he tended to view--and often harshly judge--the world about him. It is an admission that not everything, least of all music, was a "matter [...] entirely intellectual," with which phrase he had earlier justified his abhorrence of the lower classes.⁴⁴ Indeed, perhaps he most clearly stated the contradictions that shot through his views on society, music, and the relationships between them in an epigrammatic entry in his "Memorandum Book": "Dislike of the people. Yet my odd delight in their music."⁴⁵

Armed, as it were, with this artificial distinction between the common people, on the one hand, and their music, on the other, Gissing could give himself up to the "popular," everyday music that he heard in Italy. He could, anticipating their sentimental treatment in *Ryecroft*, appreciate the street organs entirely on their own terms, without, as he had in *Workers in the Dawn* and *Thyrza*, using them as sociopolitical props. He could judge the voice of the singer of "Addio a Napoli" on the Grand Canal the equal of anything that he had ever heard in the great concert halls. And he could forgive the "savage" Calabrians "everything as soon as they [made] music."

In all, though Gissing's attitudes toward the masses of the poor and uneducated were, in the end, ambivalent and inconsistent, about one aspect of their lives he never wavered--his appreciation of their music. In a way, Gissing saw music as a--perhaps even the--leveller of society,

the one activity that could unite a populace across social, political, economic, and--most important for Gissing--intellectual boundaries and “express a people’s temper,” as he wrote in *By the Ionian Sea*. And nowhere did he himself express this attitude more clearly and with greater passion than in his impressions of musical Italy.

Postscript

Gissing would no doubt have been amused at--perhaps even honoured by--the notion that an article about him would one day appear in *The Musical Times*, since he was well acquainted with the journal. A note in his *Diary* for 11 June 1896 reads: “Went to town, and read *Musical Times* at the Museum” (p. 412). Moreover, his brother William, who played the violin, even considered contributing an essay to the journal; as he wrote to George on 3 April 1880: “As regards the general subject of teaching music, when I feel pretty well up in the matter, I should much like to write a short paper & try & get it in the ‘Musical Times’ or other periodical” (*Letters*, vol. 1, p. 258). Unfortunately, this was not to be; Will died two weeks later, on 16 April (at age 21), from the same lung ailment that would long plague (and eventually kill) his brother.

[I should like to thank Dr. Bouwe Postmus of the University of Amsterdam for reading, commenting on, and improving an early draft of this article. My thanks also to Professor Alfredo Tarallo of Naples for tracking down references for me in that city, to Dr. Peter Morton of Flinders University for generously answering questions about the Gissing family, and to Mr. Mark Howell, a doctoral candidate in music at The Graduate Center of The City University of New York, for his kind help.]

¹The two “standard” biographies of Gissing are Jacob Korg: *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980; originally published, University of Washington Press, 1963); John Halperin: *Gissing: A Life in Books* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982); see also Robert L. Selig: *George Gissing* (Boston: Twayne, English Authors Series, 346, 1983); Adrian Poole: *Gissing in Context* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1975); Gillian Tindall: *George Gissing: The Born Exile* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974).

²The letters are edited in *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, nine volumes, eds. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1990-97) --hereafter *Letters*; the diary appears as *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: the Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1978)--henceforth *Diary*; subsequent references to both

sources appear in the text. On *By the Ionian Sea*, see below and note 32. Gissing sometimes refers to the same musical event in more than one of these “sources”; and I have occasionally given multiple references when it seemed worthwhile to do so.

³See *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 291. His Baedeker was eight years old, dating from 1880 (*Diary*, p. 83). For his third trip, 1897-98, Gissing added John Murray’s *A Handbook for Travellers in Southern Italy and Sicily*, presumably the ninth and final edition of 1891 (it was originally published in 1853); see *Letters*, vol. 7, p. 19.

⁴Situated between the Castel Sant’Elmo and the Via dei Mille, the pensione, which Gissing identified in a postcard to his mother on 31 October (*Letters*, vol. 3, p. 282), was owned by one Frau “Häberle” (more properly, Häberlin), whom Gissing portrayed in his next novel, *The Emancipated* (1890), as Frau Gluck, a descendant of the “great composer,” presumably Christoph Willibald; see the edition by P. Coustillas (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1977), chapter 3, pp. 35-36. Gissing began to plan *The Emancipated* while wrapping up his first Italian sojourn at Venice (see below), and while not strictly autobiographical, the first part of the novel draws upon his experiences in Italy.

⁵Published by Smith, Elder & Co., this was the fifth and final novel in a series that explored the life of London’s working classes, the first four being *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), *The Unclassed* (1884), *Demos* (1886), and *Thyrza* (1887). On Gissing’s political ambivalence toward the working class, see, in addition to the items cited in note 1, P. J. Keating: *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), and the discussion below.

⁶On 9 November, Gissing repeated these impressions in letters to both his sister Ellen and his friend Eduard Bertz; in both, however, he omitted the reference to the street organs; see *Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 284-90 and 291-95. In general, the entries in the diary have a greater sense of immediacy than do the letters that convey the same impressions, these usually written after a few days of reflection.

⁷Just prior to leaving for Italy, Gissing had spent some time in Paris, where, on 12 October, he noted in his diary that he had visited Chopin’s grave at Père La Chaise ten days earlier (*Diary*, p. 50).

⁸He had already noted as much in his diary on 11 December: “There are no street organs in Rome, and, by the bye, there were none in Paris. I regret it. In Naples the monotony of tunes was astonishing, but I preferred that to none” (*Diary*, p. 93).

⁹In St. Peter’s, the Cappella del Coro is approximately half-way down the left side of the nave.

¹⁰See Korg: *George Gissing*, pp. 148-49. A few days later, on 3 January, he complained about the English tourists in a letter to Eduard Bertz: “Impossible to describe the vulgarity of most of these people. Many of them are absolute shop-boys & work-girls. How in heaven’s name do they get enough money to come here?” (*Letters*, vol. 4, p. 8). On Gissing’s attitudes toward the working class, see below.

¹¹Perhaps it was the same singer who had elicited the following entry the previous day, Gissing’s first in Venice: “Then home to unpack, and delighted by a vocal concert

on a gondola moored in front of a house near by. Delightful female voice” (*Diary*, p. 126).

¹²We learn from a letter of 13 February to Bertz that the female singer is a soprano (*Letters*, vol. 4, p. 43).

¹³Gissing seems to have been haunted by the latter song even after returning to England. In his so-called “Memorandum Book,” which he began in 1895, that is, between the second and third trips to Italy, Gissing jotted down: “Organ playing ‘Addio bella Napoli.’-- As a child he was at Naples.” It seems, then, that the song had become something of a musical symbol of the two trips to Italy. For the entry in the “Memorandum Book,” see Bouwe Postmus, ed.: *George Gissing’s Memorandum Book: a Novelist’s Notebook, 1895-1902* (Lewiston, NY, and Salzburg: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p. 10. For further information about the two songs, see Ettore De Mura: *Enciclopedia della canzone napoletana*, three volumes (Naples: Torchio, 1969), 1, pp. 47-48, 223, 460-62; 3, pp. 100, 207, 303; Max Vajro: *Fascino delle canzoni napoletane: saggio storico, testi, aneddoti, iconografia* (Naples: Alberto Marotta, 1962), pp. 118-20; Vittorio Paliotti: *La canzone napoletana ieri e oggi* (Milan: Ricordi, 1962), pp. 19-21; Laura Alexandrine Smith: *The Music of the Waters* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1888), pp. 177, 179-80.

¹⁴On the predilection of the Venetian gondoliers for singing both “complicated contrapuntal pieces, such as we should call madrigals” and ensembles from the operatic repertory, see the description in J. A. Symonds: “A Gondolier’s Wedding,” in *Cornhill Magazine* 45 (1882), p. 81 (quoted in part in Smith: *The Music of the Waters*, pp. 186-87).

¹⁵See Patrick O’Connor: “Perosio, Ettore,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1992), vol. 3, pp. 968-69; in addition there are two earlier settings of *Lecouvreur* by Tomaso Benvenuti (1857) and Edoardo Vera (1859); see *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol. 1, p. 411, and 4, p. 927. There are also two post-Cilea settings: Giacomo Setaccioli (1907) and Alexander V. Alexandrov (1920); see C. N. Smith, “Scribe, (Augustin) Eugene,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), vol. 17, p. 89.

¹⁶See his letter of 26 May 1887, to his brother Algernon: “I have been to a concert at the Albert Hall, where Patti has sung [...] I would have stood at the gallery door two days & nights to hear those six songs she sang! It is a glorious memory for a lifetime [...] Last night I [...] heard “Lohengrin,” the first opera of Wagner that I have attended. Unfortunately, the singers, though tolerable, were not first class, & my ear is too exacting” (*Letters*, vol. 3, p. 120).

¹⁷In a letter of 10 April 1885: “Doubtless you will use your leisure to read a good deal. I hope you & Nelly [Ellen] will carefully go through Lohengrin”; he goes on to tell them: “read up the little book on the Ring of the Nibelung. You understand, of course, the system of “motives” on which these operas are written; each situation having an appropriate musical ‘phrase’ devoted to it” (*Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 298-99). And though, at the end of May 1887, Gissing had yet to hear *Tannhäuser* (see the letter cited in note 16), he had read through the libretto (as he had Wagner’s essay on Beethoven); see *Let-*

ters, vol. 3, p. 98. The editors of *Letters* assume, perhaps correctly, that Gissing read the Beethoven essay in the translation by Edward Dannreuther, published in 1880 (vol. 3, p. 122); but he may just as well have read the original German, with which language he was perfectly comfortable.

¹⁸See also the letter to his mother of 21 December: “Napoli! Napoli! How glorious it is to be here [...] The Via Roma [also called Via Toledo] is lined with Christmas stalls. Curiously they have the habit here of playing bagpipes at Christmas,—the players come down from the mountains. Of course they don’t allow you to sleep at night,—an extraordinary row!” (*Letters*, vol. 4, p. 174).

¹⁹The reference is presumably to the Church of San Ferdinando.

²⁰*Roma*, XXVIII, no. 352 (20 December 1889), p. 1: “Il questore, con recente disposizione, ha proibito il suono degli organini nelle vie interne della città, consentendolo solo per i villagge e pel suburbio”; my thanks to Professor Alfredo Tarallo for locating this notice for me.

²¹*Corriere di Napoli*, XVIII, no. 353 (20-21 December 1889), p. 2; again, my thanks to Professor Tarallo for tracking down the notice.

²²I cite the Signet Classic edition, with introduction by V. S. Pritchett (New York: The New American Library, 1961), pp. 102-04; *The Private Papers* is divided into four parts, each of which is named after one of the seasons.

²³Cited after the edition by Jacob Korg (Brighton: Harvester, 1974), p. 111.

²⁴Cited after the three-volume-in-one Garland reprint (1976) of the first edition, part 3, chapter 2, p. 37.

²⁵On this point, see Poole: *Gissing in Context*, p. 83; and Keating: *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, p. 62; see also my article, “George Gissing’s Concertina,” in *Journal of Musicology*, vol. 17 (1999), pp. 304-18.

²⁶That Gissing read Haweis’s *My Musical Life* (1884) is evident from an entry in his diary on March 1892 (p. 272), and it is likely that he also read his earlier *Music and Morals* (1871), which contains lengthy chapters on “Bells” (pp. 348-77) and “Carillons” (pp. 378-408), as well as a short one on “The organ grinder” (pp. 457-60); I cite the American edition (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871). Gissing refers to Haweis’s work on campanology in a letter to his brother William on 26 February 1880 (*Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 242-43). As for Haweis’s own political sympathy for the street organ: “I bless that organ-man—a very Orpheus in hell! I bless his music. I stand in that foul street where the blessed sun shines, and where the music is playing; I give the man a penny to prolong the happiness of those poor people, of those hungry, pale, and ragged children, and, as I retire, I am saluted as a public benefactor; and was ever pleasure bought so cheap and so pure?” (*Music and Morals*, p. 461). Further on Gissing’s possible debt to Haweis, see Atlas: “George Gissing’s Concertina,” pp. 309-10, 316 n. 31, and 318 n. 35. On the other hand, Gissing was not particularly kind to Haweis in his so-called “Scrapbook”: “In the person of some foolish fellow take off the habit of such men as Stead and Haweis of talking about their great acquaintances. ‘Ah, the last time I saw

Tennyson’: and so on...” The “Scrapbook,” still unpublished, is preserved at the Lilly Library, Indiana University; a critical edition is being prepared, in collaboration with Pierre Coustillas, by Dr. Bouwe Postmus, who kindly called this entry to my attention.

²⁷See Arthur W. J. G. Ord-Hume: *Barrel Organ: the Story of the Mechanical Organ and its Repair* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), pp. 233-54.

²⁸Letter to Margaret, 22 January 1890 (*Letters*, vol. 4, p. 187); see also the entry in the diary for 20 January 1890 (p. 205). Tosti, of course, was especially popular in London, where he had settled in 1880

with an appointment as singing teacher to the royal family; see Keith Homer, “Tosti, Sir (Francesco) Paolo,” in *New Grove*, vol. 19, p. 90. Gissing plants a reference to Tosti in *New Grub Street*; here, Jasper Milvain, the ambitious young journalist, describes Miss Rupert, daughter of a “useful” advertising agent as follows: “She isn’t exactly good-looking [...] but fairly intellectual. Plays very well, and has a nice contralto voice; she sang that new thing of Tosti’s--what do you call it?” (I cite the Penguin Classics edition, ed. Bernard Bergonzi [Harmondsworth, 1985], p. 330.

²⁹Letter to Algernon, 22 January 1890 (*Letters*, vol. 4, p. 190) and diary entry for 21 January 1890 (p. 205).

³⁰On Gissing’s health problems, especially his pulmonary and respiratory disorders, see Tindall: *George Gissing: The Born Exile*, pp. 245-50.

³¹He admits in a letter of 6 November to Edward Clodd: “I have not been able to see very much of Siena; but this is not *my* part of Italy; I have [...] comparatively little interest in the Renaissance” (*Letters*, vol. 6, p. 375).

³²Cited after the Marlboro Press/Northwestern edition (Evanston, 1996), p. 4. The reference to the “police provision” is to the actions of December 1889 (see above). Sir Thomas Browne (1605-82) is best known for his *Religio Medici* (1642), and that Gissing was familiar with the work is evident from notes in both his diary (26 August 1895, p. 385) and his so-called “Commonplace Book”; for the latter, see Jacob Korg: *George Gissing’s Commonplace Book: A Manuscript in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library* (New York: New York Public Library, 1962), p. 38; see also, *George Gissing at Work: A Study of his Notebook “Extracts from My Reading,”* eds. Pierre Coustillas and Patrick Bridgwater (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1988), p. 82. Gissing also read Browne’s *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (“Vulgar Errors”), from which he quotes in his novel *Born in Exile* (1892), part 2, chapter 2: see *George Gissing at Work*, p. 164.

³³Gissing extended his diatribe to Calabrians in general: “filthy & barbarous” as he put it in his diary on 22 November (p. 465). Yet just a little more than two weeks later (9 December): “The Calabrian peasants seem very interesting [...] not less civilized than English peasants. A good deal more [civilized], I think” (*Diary*, p. 469).

³⁴Brian Ború Dunne: *With Gissing in Italy: The Memoirs of Brian Ború Dunne*, eds. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustilas (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1999), pp. 60-61.

³⁵For Gissing's views on the music hall in England, see Atlas: "George Gissing's Concertina," pp. 310-13. On the *cafés chantants* of Naples in particular, see Paolo Sommaio: *Il café-chantant: artisti e ribalte nella Napoli belle époque* (Naples: Tempolungo, 1998).

³⁶Gissing also described the event in a letter of 16 February to his son Walter, mentioning that "a band of twenty silver trumpets began to play" (*Letters*, vol. 7, p. 62). Though it offers no details, Dunne's diary has, under the rubric "Topics," a note about a "woman violinist in St. Peter's"; see *With Gissing in Italy*, p. 145.

³⁷On his complaints about the price of attending the opera at San Carlo, see above. On the other hand, he did attend an occasional musical evening at a private home. Thus on 22 January 1890, he wrote to his brother Algernon from Naples: "Next Sunday I am going to dine at a house where I shall meet a teacher of music; there will be singing & playing, thank heaven!" (*Letters*, vol. 4, p. 190). And in the course of his final Italian sojourn, on 26 March 1898, at Rome, he attended a "musical party" at the house of the novelist E. W. (Willie) Hornung (brother-in-law of Arthur Conan Doyle, whom he also met in Rome) (*Diary*, pp. 487-88). Unfortunately, Gissing tells us nothing about what he heard on such occasions.

³⁸Gissing displays his knowledge of the standard repertory in his novel *The Whirlpool* (1897), the heroine of which is the aspiring violinist Alma Rolfe (*née* Frothingham). Among the pieces mentioned there: Beethoven's String quartet in F minor (op. 95), Chopin's Polonaise in A flat (op. 53), Bach's Chaconne in D minor (BWV 1004), and Dvorak's Trio in B flat (op. 51); in addition, he offers "critical" comments on Brahms's Sonata in A for violin and piano (op. 100): "A stiff piece, but one must not be too popular--Heaven forbid that one should catch at cheap applause!" (p. 214), and Sarasate's cadenza for the first movement of Beethoven's Violin Concerto: "though marvellous for technical skill [...] not at all in the spirit of the work" (p. 237); I cite the Everyman edition, ed. William Greenslade (London: J. M. Dent, 1997). Gissing did not think of himself as being at all well-versed in the fundamentals of music. As he put it to his brother William (who played both piano and violin) on 11 March 1880: "I would give a trifle to have you playing frequently in my neighbourhood, so that I might form my taste and learn at all events the elements of musical criticism" (*Letters*, vol. 1, p. 249). On the other hand, he certainly thought himself capable of discerning a good voice, as when he raves about Adelina Patti in letters to his sister Ellen and brother Algernon on 26 May 1887 (*Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 118-21), or bemoans the poor voices at this or that performance of an opera (see, for example, note 14, above).

³⁹Admittedly, Gissing does on occasion express his sympathy for the poor and uneducated here.

⁴⁰"Undoubtedly it would be a glorious thing if the *multitude* were the true arbiters in art & morals. But we are very far from that ideal, &, for my own part, I fear that both art & morals will always depend for their active existence upon a leading minority of the human race" (*Letters*, vol. 7, p. 169). Following two disastrous marriages, Gissing met

Gabrielle Fleury in 1898 and spent the remaining years of his life with her in a common-law arrangement.

⁴¹Perhaps he best summed up his ambivalence in this respect in his “Commonplace Book”: “I do not love the people--true. But my passion of sympathy for the suffering poor”; see Korg: *George Gissing's Commonplace Book*, p. 54.

⁴²Typically, he ends with an expression of self doubt. He says much the same in a letter to Edward Clodd from Paris on 6 May 1900: “We were at a concert given by Delaborde, one of the finest of living pianists. I, who am no friend of public entertainments” (*Letters*, vol. 8, p. 41). Ironically, in both instances (*Ryecroft* and the letter to Clodd) he goes on to say that he enjoyed the concerts that elicited the remarks.

⁴³He says the same in a letter to Gabrielle Fleury, 22 September 1898: “I owe many a happy idea to a casual melody played by someone who little knew what he was doing. Even the poorest *tinkling* on a lodging-house piano has helped me to live, to hope, to labour” (*Letters*, vol. 7, pp. 193-94).

⁴⁴In a letter of 21 December 1880 to his brother Algernon: “Without wishing to be at all harsh to these people, you must recognize how utterly impossible close relations with them gradually become [...] I fear they put me down for a prig, an upstart, an abominable aristocrat, but *que voulez-vous?* The matter is entirely intellectual” (*Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 318-19).

⁴⁵See Postmus: *George Gissing's Memorandum Book*, p. 62.

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University of London, 24/25 July 2003

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The Institute of English Studies, University of London and The School of Humanities & Social Studies, University of Glamorgan

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The Biographical-Critical Circle: "A Lodger in Maze Pond"

ROBERT L. SELIG
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Gillian Tindall and also John Halperin have emphasized the strong autobiographical element in Gissing's fiction. Both critics have seized upon "A Lodger in Maze Pond" (written in 1893) as one of his most autobiographical short stories.¹ Tindall first called attention to it in 1974. She concludes that it depicts in fictional terms Gissing's two worst mistakes in his life: his first unhappy marriage to the prostitute Nell Harrison and his second unhappy marriage to Edith Underwood,

from the artisan class. Tindall notes Gissing's own comment to Clara Collet "that the lodger" in the narrative "was himself." Halperin uses a critical-biographical approach in a somewhat-less-nuanced way than Tindall. He calls the story "twenty pages or so of pure autobiography."² I will take a rather different approach than either of these critics and will focus on how "A Lodger" diverges in its various details from Gissing's own life. In my view, the imaginative element in this short story changes it into something more interesting than a record of his own stumbles into two mismarriages.

The title itself stresses a significantly changed background detail--the place where Henry Shergold lives. A "short narrow street" called Maze Pond did exist only a few blocks south of the Thames and London Bridge (p. 243), but Gissing himself never lived on that street. Importantly for the narrative events, it lies "close" to Guy's Hospital, where the protagonist himself "walks" (p. 242)--British English for getting clinical instruction while also helping at surgery. For a few months in 1877 and 1878, Gissing did work at St. John's Hospital, Leicester Square, but only as a temporary clerk, a paper-pusher, far from Maze Pond. And the associations evoked by Guy's Hospital itself transport us even further away from Gissing's own world.

An especially notable link exists between Guy's Hospital and English literature. John Keats studied surgery there from 1815 to 1816, nudged towards medicine by an unsympathetic guardian. Keats actually did qualify as an apothecary-surgeon, though he promptly left doctoring for poetry.³ In a similar way, Gissing's protagonist gets pushed into medical studies by his physician uncle but yearns to devote his life to poetry instead, having already published some of it (in contrast, of course, to Gissing himself--mainly a novelist and a writer of prose). Keats had an inheritance, but lawsuits kept him from it. Shergold receives a rather large inheritance from his uncle but spoils the sudden prosperity by his utterly foolish marriage. Not so incidentally, too, the poet Keats and the poet Shergold both die young--the great romantic at 25 and the fictional late-Victorian at 32 (pp. 249, 245, 264). Gissing died at a middle-aged 46.

Perhaps still more importantly, the story's most sensible character, the narrator Harvey Munden, finds symbolic implications in Shergold's having lodged on Maze Pond. When the protagonist has entrapped himself by his stupid marriage proposal, Munden dryly comments: "remarkably suggestive, Shergold, the name of the street in which you have been living" (p. 262). The *OED* defines *maze* as "a structure consisting of a network of winding and intercommunicating paths and pas-

sages arranged in bewildering complexity, so that without guidance it is difficult to find one's way in it..." and, we might add, out of it too. Munden tries to help Shergold escape from his mistakes with women, but he stumbles off instead into an even worse maze of self-created troubles. Although common usage defines a maze as identical to a labyrinth, the maze has greater intricacy. If a true labyrinth has just a single pathway that, in spite of all its twistings, leads at last to an indisputable center, a maze branches off into numerous dead ends and lacks a genuine center.⁴ Those two characteristics make a good symbolic fit with Shergold's tangled existence. He has lost his way so thoroughly that no center remains to his life nor any escape from his cul-de-sac of stumbles. Even more importantly, he has blundered into the exact same dead end in which he had lost his way many years before.

In a mazelike pattern, then, Shergold repeats with a second unsuitable woman his disastrous previous marriage to a woman unsuitable for the very same reasons. Now the reader who knows about Gissing's life can, of course, agree with Tindall, Halperin, and also Gissing himself that Shergold's double trouble draws upon Gissing's feelings concerning his life with Nell and then with Edith. Yet the story's crux of two identical bad marriages diverges sharply from the actual details of what Gissing himself experienced. Shergold met wife number one, "the daughter of a journeyman tailor," as she waited in a tobacco shop on customers (p. 248). Gissing met Nell Harrison as she waited for sexual customers, and he himself then became one of them.⁵ The divergence probably arises from Gissing's own reticence about his youthful sexual blunders, but the change alters the story rather sharply. The fictional character's problem becomes reduced, as he confesses, to mere "sentimentality" instead of resulting from sexually driven bad choices (p. 257). As a further contrast with Gissing's Nell, Shergold's first wife returns for good from a brief separation because she expects him to inherit heaps of money. At last screaming herself into speechless fury, she has a fit, falls downstairs, and dies from the injuries (p. 249)--events owing less to Gissing's early life than to his early fiction. In *The Unclassed* (1884) specifically, Julian Casti's detestable widow Harriet suffers from a similar fit and dies from a similar fall downstairs.⁶ By contrast, Gissing's Nell at last agreed to a permanent separation with no expectation of his ever getting rich, and she died alone in a sordid rented room from a combination of acute alcoholism, too little food, too much cold, and also perhaps venereal disease (*Diary*, pp. 22-23).

The second marriages of Shergold's and of Gissing's differ still more from one another than the first ones differ. Shergold responds

platonically to the open flirtations of his landlady's housemaid-daughter. Yet immediately after his uncle's bequest, Shergold proposes marriage to this "untidy" Emma from "the lower orders." Harvey Munden, the narrator-character, stresses her total inappropriateness for a man like his educated friend (pp. 243-44). But Shergold gives Munden an un-Gissing-like reason for having proposed in the first place: "simply for the pleasure of telling Emma when she had accepted me, that I had eighty thousand pounds!" (pp. 260-61). And even after seeing his actions as absurd, he goes through with the marriage anyway merely because he fears a scandal from a breach-of-promise suit by the money-grubbing housemaid. In any case, Shergold explains, he "stands in awe of refined women," so that his marital choices remain very much restricted (pp. 263-64, 260). Yet a quite different fear of a quite different scandal drove Gissing's behavior with women: a lingering apprehension that his brief youthful imprisonment for thefts at Owens College would somehow emerge to disgrace him. Significantly, "A Lodger" avoids explaining why Shergold left college without his degree (p. 248). Another point seems particularly significant. Gissing married the working-class Edith because of an underlying worry wholly different from Shergold's: one that a wife of good social status might scorn his small, unreliable writer's income.⁷

The outcomes of Shergold's and Gissing's second marriages differ even more sharply than the motives of the fictional man and the real one. The now-wealthy Shergold starts on "a voyage round the world" with his new wife but dies in Calcutta only three months later. His suddenly rich widow cables the report that he has died of "dysentery, or something of that kind" (pp. 243, 264). Some readers may conclude that she has poisoned Shergold for the sake of his money. But even without resorting to such a melodramatic reading, one can see that Shergold's foolish action of tying himself to Emma leads by narrative sequence to the punishment of death. Gissing remained, by contrast, very much alive and stayed with Edith all of six and a half years--not just three months--and more than four years after writing "A Lodger."⁸ In the end, he left her instead of leaving life.

My reading of "A Lodger" as diverging from Gissing's own actual experiences may suggest a basic paradox about any biographical approach to fiction. This kind of criticism begins by studying the author's letters, diaries, and assorted other documents, along with biographies and critical-biographical interpretations of the works. Unless the critic personally knows the author, the biographical critic arrives at a reading of the life not by observing the life itself but by reading assorted

texts connected with it--readings propelled by a wish to make them parallel the fiction. Both Tindall and Halperin assert, for example, that Gissing's marriage to Edith simply repeated his foolish decision to marry Nell. But only a simplified and even oversimplified reading of Gissing's life permits these two critics to arrive at their readings of "A Lodger." By this means, they can interpret Shergold's pair of senseless proposals as not just mere carbon copies of each other but also as carbon copies of what they see as Gissing's own carbon-copy proposals to Nell and to Edith. Yet I see and read Gissing's life in a quite different way. I note that Edith, unlike the desperate Nell, neither drank herself unconscious nor worked as a prostitute. As a result, I suggest that Gissing had good reason to hope that Edith would make him a better wife than Nell, even though, in the end, Edith turned out not to. Hindsight, of course, remains a luxury of biographers and not of living persons who have to make choices.

Let me summarize briefly, then, the interrelated issues that I have touched upon. Throughout this paper, the specific way that I read Gissing's life led me to view "A Lodger" differently from Tindall and even more differently from Halperin. Gissing gave shape to "A Lodger," I believe, by transforming his two unfortunate yet also contrasting marriages into virtually identical ones. By doing so, he created a symmetrical tale about a man's foolish repetition of a brainless first stumble into a state of wedded unbliss.

I have reached this fresh interpretation by combining new readings of both the life and the story in order to argue that they do not really fit. In the process, I myself have hardly escaped the same paradox constraining Tindall and Halperin. It resembles the famous hermeneutic circle, in which one cannot ever grasp a part without already grasping the whole but cannot grasp the whole without already grasping the part. I will call the analogous paradox the biographical-critical circle: reading the life to relate it to the fiction in a certain way and reading the fiction to relate it to the life also in that way. Even without having evaded that paradox, I would contend, nevertheless, that any particular approach that fits Gissing's fiction into his life like a hand within a glove underestimates the breadth of his imaginative capacity. Looking for differences instead of mere sameness will help us to see in a fresh, new way such impressive short stories as "A Lodger in Maze Pond." Even more importantly, an emphasis on Gissing's basic creativity rather than on his simply drawing from life can help re-illuminate the whole range of his other works of fiction.

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

¹For the story's completion, see *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1978), p. 312; hereafter cited in the text as *Diary*. "A Lodger in Maze Pond" first appeared in the *National Review*, February 1895, pp. 847-62. In this article, I shall refer to the pagination of the story as reprinted in *The House of Cobwebs* (London: Constable, 1931 [originally published 1906]), pp. 241-64.

²Gillian Tindall, *The Born Exile: George Gissing* (London: Temple Smith, 1974), pp. 87-89. John Halperin, *Gissing: A Life in Books* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982), p. 191.

³See, for example, the headnote in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed., vol. 2, ed. M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), p. 824.

⁴John Ray, "Long Trail A winding," review of Herman Kern's *Through the Labyrinth*, ed. Robert Ferre and Jeff Saward, *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 December 2000, p. 28.

⁵P. Coustillas, "George Gissing à Manchester," *Etudes Anglaises*, July-September 1963, pp. 155-61.

⁶*The Unclassed*, new ed. (London: A. H. Bullen, 1901), p. 312.

⁷Gissing constructed much of *New Grub Street* (1891) around this same assumption--that a struggling writer had better marry a lower-class woman rather than one from the middle classes. But in this novel more than any of his others, a creative use of a large cast of writers moves us far away from autobiography.

⁸Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, eds., "Chronology," *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 6 (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1995), p. xiii.

A Recently Discovered Essay on Gissing

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Gissing's early interest in Scandinavian literature and his affinity with "the intellectual activity among those northern peoples" and their "genuine pessimists"¹ seems to have been largely unreturned. Only three of his books have so far been translated into Swedish² and few have read Gissing in the original or even heard of him. Nevertheless, there seems to have been a slight increase in an otherwise almost nonexistent interest in Gissing in the first two decades of the last century, chiefly among the intelligentsia, the select reading public which Gissing consciously sought.

A long essay on Gissing by the Norwegian David Grünbaum was published in *Nordisk Tidskrift* in 1913, obviously prompted by Morley Roberts's *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* which appeared in 1912. Four chapters from *The Nether World* were reprinted in *A Gissing-Hardy Reader*, edited by T. H. Svartengren in 1916, and a short story, "The Pig and Whistle," was published in the weekly magazine *Allt för alla* in 1924. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* was translated into Swedish in 1929 and an essay on Gissing published by C.-A. Bolander in his *Ismer och Dikt* (1928) has now emerged from oblivion.³

Carl-August Bolander (1888-1969), who was a prolific writer and journalist, is all but forgotten to-day, and very few modern encyclopedias mention him. He wrote plays, travel books and some twenty novels (the first was published in 1917), most of them with a young, male protagonist who "strongly experiences the time of great unrest and change." With this in mind it is easy to imagine that Bolander felt a special sympathy for, maybe even a spiritual kinship with, Gissing. But unlike the English writer, Bolander had employment at the same time, and his career as a journalist was obviously more successful than that as a writer. He was a literary critic for one of the biggest national daily papers, *Dagens Nyheter*, from 1918 to 1946 and served as its foreign correspondent in Paris for fourteen years.

Ismer och Dikt (Isms and Fiction) is a collection of short essays which shows Bolander's deep interest in and knowledge of English and French literature. The short (six pages) essay on Gissing, entitled "The Literary Treadmill" begins by stating that "Gissing is not highly popular on the literary market, Anglo-Saxon literary agents do not boost his works, and only those interested in literary history have heard of him as one of the English naturalists, a kind of British Strindberg or Zola ... he is a misanthropic individualist who writes about the tragic fates of lonely people, their struggle with poverty, environment, heredity, temperament, psychological studies of the modern, nervous psyche."

When Bolander describes Gissing's life, he relies on the biographies of Swinnerton and May Yates in which, he says, there are only vague hints about the dark elements, the discontinued academic studies and the mysterious year in exile. To get to know more, Bolander turns to *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, where he learns that Gissing as a young student had a relationship with a prostitute and was jailed for theft: "this is the dark chapter of his life, which British respectability so anxiously tries to conceal." Bolander describes what happened as the great watershed in the author's life; before, the diligent and promising student who received scholarships and prizes, and

after, an utter failure who tries to revenge himself through literature and vainly seeks an outlet for his ambition. The year of hard struggle in Boston and Chicago proves to be a practical course in human misery, later to be complemented with theoretical studies of German philosophy in Jena (this is the only incorrect fact in the essay). When he returns to London "Gissing works feverishly like Balzac; he aims at becoming one of the great authors, writing a new *Comédie humaine*. But he does not have the genius of a Balzac, not the great, creative imagination, he is too much of a cerebral character to become one of the great in fiction. But he has the will, an energy that urges him on, a diligence which plays havoc with his nerves. And he demanded much of himself; he cannot compromise with the prevailing literary taste; nor can he write for the public. True, ruthlessly true, he had to be; he cannot glorify life as he knew it. Not write to divert or entertain some idle readers, no, he wanted to stir up discontent in the self-righteous bourgeois. But the slack and secure did not buy or read his books."

Bolander mentions the early works and an unhappy marriage with an alcoholic (obviously not associated with the earlier mentioned prostitute). He never had popular success, and worse--never the personal satisfaction, the blissful feeling that in spite of the lack of response, he had created the artistic work he had aimed at, always wanted to do. The novels are studies of human tragedies, of human wrecks in the great maelstrom of life. One type of character recurs, the lonely self-tormentor, the individualist-misanthrope: Gissing himself.

New Grub Street ("of current interest, not least in these days of literary industrialism") is the literary treadmill. It is about "literature as a profession, its curse for someone who is in his heart a poet, the urge to write the year's book and the Book of the Year, the humiliation at the hands of the publishers, the intrigues in the world of magazines and newspapers, the dreadful interplay of the book which must be written and the bills which must be paid. The poor, hunted Reardon purges his mind from this world by reading Homer." So did Gissing and Bolander finds it ironic that this modern realist is at heart a classicist. After all, Gissing feels more at home in ancient Rome and Hellas than in London; the Tiber is his river more than the Thames. His interest in the classics is traced back to his school days, and when after the publication of *Demos* he can afford his pilgrimages to Greece and Italy, it is the schoolboy's dream come true. The memories from one of these trips are recorded in *By the Ionian Sea* and for once, Bolander says, you can feel that the author really enjoyed writing the book. Seventh-century [actually sixth-century] Rome is the theme of what

was intended to be Gissing's greatest work. But poor finances were followed by poor health and *Veranilda* was never finished.

"Sincerity, trustworthiness, assiduity, are all there," Bolander concludes, "but not Balzac's creative joy, not Dickens' narrative zest, not the joie de vivre, the charm, the lustre. A slave to the literary treadmill, he sits in his basement room, agitated and overworked, sensing the presence of the sun out there, dreaming of the great work, cursing the life of the literary man. There is a phrase which comes to mind when one is ploughing through his voluminous novels to-day; it is a line from his autobiographical book *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*: 'he who encourages any young man or woman to look for his living to "literature" commits no less than a crime.'"

Given that this essay was published more than seventy years ago, it strikes one as discerning and sincere, written with a great deal of insight and sympathy, even tenderness at times. Accustomed as one is to factual mistakes where writings about Gissing are concerned, one gratefully notes the absence of serious blunders, an indication that even if Bolander of course had insufficient knowledge of the author's biography and personality, he had actually read his books carefully. Undoubtedly, he gives a gloomy picture of Gissing, his life and artistic achievement. It is not untrue, but modern scholars, who have access to the results of the last decades' Gissing studies and so greatly benefit from the publication of his diary and collected letters, are able to adjust this picture and see the grains of gold that existed even in Gissing's life.

¹Letter to Edith Sichel, 20 July 1889, *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, ed. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (Athens, OH: Ohio UP), vol. IV (1993), p. 88.

²*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1929), *The Odd Women* (1980) and *New Grub Street* (1982).

³Pierre Coustillas drew my attention to this essay. The work has never been published in English, so the translation from Swedish into English is my own.

NEW GISSING LETTERS

*** An article on the subject will be published ***
in our April number

The Greek Translation of “Sleeping Fires”: A Review

[This review of the Greek translation by Maria Dimitriadou—see our numbers for January and July 2001—, was written by a friend of the translator, Michael Parfect. It first appeared on the Internet (<http://www.ralph.parfect.btinternet.co.uk/gissing.html>). It was sent to us by Ralph Parfect, of King’s College, London.]

In May 2001, an unusual and probably unique literary event took place in the municipal hall of the Athens district of Cholargos. An audience of distinguished Greek literati and artists, the Mayor, his wife, and councillors with townspeople and students, gathered together in a symposium to mark the writing in 1895 of the novel *Sleeping Fires* by the English scholar and author George Gissing. More, however, it was to celebrate its translation into Greek by the writer and painter Maria Dimitriadou, who had also illustrated the work with 14 original paintings, one for each of Gissing’s chapters.

It cannot be often that a 19th century historical/romantic novel, set in an ancient city such as Athens by a relatively little-known English author, as George Gissing then was, should not only be successfully translated into the indigenous language of Greek, but translated in such a way that the original writing is given new life, expression, and indeed evocative atmosphere by a talented writer and illustrator such as Maria Dimitriadou. In this way Gissing and *Sleeping Fires* (under the Greek title *Flames from the Ash*) have been made available to a much wider audience than would otherwise have been possible. Thus this event has implications and reverberations for the English literary scene to-day, as well as the invaluable extra benefit to the native Greek reader and historical aficionado, and, indeed, to literary history in general.

Sleeping Fires is a realistic testimony of Athens in the 19th century. The reader is provided with scenes the writer had experienced and noted during his visit to the city in the winter of 1889, and which he recorded in his diary at the time. In this way he immortalised them for the English reader subsequently. Thus, the reader may see through the writer’s eyes the violet sunsets of old Athens; he may admire the glorious Theseion, or look through his window to glimpse the honey-coloured Parthenon in the distance.

The plot proceeds naturally. Fate moves the strings behind the curtain to bring close to each other two old English friends at Kerameikos. They have both come to Athens inspired by their love of Greek culture. Their meeting is going to give rise to dramatic effects,

fatal events, and soul-stirring revelations and disclosures. Starting from the marbles of the Periclean Golden Age and reaching to the misty neighbourhoods of Northern England (from where Gissing himself had originated), an old strong love is going to revive, reborn under extraordinary conditions, and seal the lovers' hearts for ever. The reader finds himself in a multidimensional universe, represented by the past and present, myth and reality, the familiar and the unfamiliar, enabling him to look at Athens in the perspective of eternal "transition."

The originality of the translation is due in part to the 14 illustrations by Mrs. Dimitriadou. They appear at the end of the book, in bright colours and in a bold and original style. She depicts in a personal synthesis scenes from each chapter that had either inspired her or had a strong effect on her. An example is that of the poor women whom Gissing saw on Lycabettus hill, breaking the stones for the construction of the road. Because of these illustrations the Greek edition has been characterised by *Gissing Journal* editors as artistically unparalleled among recent publications of Gissing's works. All the scenes are crowned by the sacred rock of the Acropolis: all transport you to the fantastic world of the past.

Another thing that contributes greatly to the special quality of the edition is the initiative of the translator in writing an unusually long preface. This contains seven different "topics," of which the second is entitled "The letters and diary of G. Gissing from his journey to Athens." Gissing selected Athens as the setting for the first part of his book for several reasons but chiefly his desire to incorporate and to immortalise his experiences from his trip to Athens five years before, as recorded in his diary. It was one of the most extraordinary events in his life, to see the land from which the Classical world had emerged, the world he had been studying for so long and had been dreaming about.

We may therefore understand his enthusiasm as he found himself in the land of his dreams. In one month's stay he tried to get as much done as he could, in a furious rush. His emotion for Athens became even stronger after his visit, supplied as he was with new and strange experiences, including landscapes, antiquities, images of life as well as ideas concerning Greek philosophy, etc. He decided therefore to select the most characteristic images he had seen and incorporate them into the novel. The romantic setting of Athens with all its ancient remains was suited perfectly to the special needs of the novel, in which the central theme is the revival of a romantic love.

What scenes did Gissing embody in his novel out of the numerous experiences he had had in Athens? The Acropolis with the Parthenon of course occupy first place, as “sine qua non.” Thus, they both open and close the novel, in a symbolic manner. In the last chapter, for example, he writes of the Acropolis: “rock and ruins all tawny gold, the work of art inseparable from that of nature, and neither seeming to have bodily existence; the gorgeous purples of Hymettus; that cloud on Pentelikon, with its melting splendours which seemed to veil the abode of gods.” (He wrote the same sentence in his diary). And in a letter to a friend he writes (Athens, 14 December 1889): “the temples and the statues must have seemed to *grow* out of the Acropolis itself and form part of the living rock.”

If any title for this review were necessary to embody the spirit of this 19th century novel and its modern-day translation into Greek, it would surely be “Gissing returns to Greece.”

Notes and News

Literary archæology is both an unrecognized and indispensable instrument of research. We constantly need to be reminded of the past. For ages, however, bibliographical studies were shallow and inadequate, and some books would seem to have been published so that they might be almost immediately forgotten. To this category doubtless belongs the slender collection of extracts from Gissing’s letters to Clara Collet, of which only six copies were printed by A. H. Bullen at the Shakespeare Head Press. One would hesitate to place under the same heading a travel narrative such as *Naples and Southern Italy* by Edward Hutton, first published in 1915, yet commentators on the works of English travellers in South Italy almost invariably ignore it. Hutton’s journey took him to many of the places visited by Gissing, partly in 1888 but mainly in 1897. His narrative is often strongly reminiscent of his predecessor’s, a fact which cannot be sufficiently explained by the partial similarity of their routes. In places one feels that he was in Gissing’s footsteps and that he wished to update the impressions recorded in *By the Ionian Sea*. “To begin with, the roads everywhere in the South are good, the trains as a rule punctual if slow, the inns in the larger places fairly clean and comfortable, the food a little rough and monotonous but plentiful. Indeed, there is nothing at all to hinder anyone in travelling through the South, or from seeing all

that is to be seen with a fair amount of comfort and continual delight in the monuments and the natural beauty of a country for the most part delicious [...] Calabria is a paradise that has not yet been opened to the tourist, and in consequence it is quite unspoilt" (p. 138). As one reads chapter after chapter one becomes, perhaps wrongly, convinced that Hutton, although he never mentions Gissing or *By the Ionian Sea*, had a copy of Gissing's book in his luggage. Hutton's contains a large number of illustrations, in colour by Francis Edward Fitzjohn Crisp or in monotone, among them Lake Avernus, the road to San Fili, Cosenza from the Castello, and a Calabrese peasant girl. Like Gissing, Hutton put up at the Albergo Concordia, Cotrone, and he wrote very ambivalently about it as being, save for the inns in the upper town at Catanzaro (shades of Coriolano Paparazzo's establishment?) and at Taranto, "horrible though it be, the best upon this coast" (p. 190).

A very different impression of the albergo is given by the well-known Calabrese journalist Virgilio Squillace, who has often commemorated Gissing, in particular his stay in Cotrone. His latest article, "L'albergo di Douglas, Gissing e Lenormant," will be found in a recent number (August 2001, pp. 58-61) of *Calabria*, the monthly magazine of the Regional Council. Squillace gives some new details about the history of the albergo which in Gissing's day was the property of the Bruni family and was sold to another family, named Pezziniti, in 1949. The name of the establishment was changed to Albergo Italia in 1976, the word *concordia* having taken on undesirable connotations. The present owner, who is fifty-nine and belongs to the second generation of Pezziniti proprietors, is Francesco Antonio Pezziniti. His sisters Lina and Angela assist him. A reproduction of an old postcard shows the Piazza Vittoria with the "Hotel et Restaurant Concordia" as they were about a hundred years ago and the same piazza and hotel as they are now. Four views of the inside of the first floor with quotations from Gissing and Douglas are reproduced. For Gissing collectors this number of *Calabria* is distinctly an item worth having and preserving, all the more so as it contains articles on the *parco letterario* "Old Calabria," with photographs of Mirella Barracco, the founder of the *parco*, and Norman Douglas, as well as a review by Carlo Carlino of Mimmo Jodice's album *Old Calabria: I luoghi del Grand Tour*.

Other references to Gissing have appeared in Calabrian newspapers recently. *La Provincia KR* for 13 October 2001 published a letter from Dott. Badolato under the title "Una linea editoriale che

piace anche agli inglesi” with the photograph of Gissing in his macfarlane and a letter from the editor of the newspaper. Francesco Pedace published in *Il Crotonese* for 26 October an article on the projected *parco letterario* George Gissing-Riccardo Sculco, while *La Provincia KR* for 27 October 2001 carried an article by Teresa Liguori, “L’Esaro: un fiume da bonificare,” echoing Gissing’s and Douglas’s words on the river which winds its way through Crotone to the sea.

Susan Root, a second-hand bookseller in Hartford, Connecticut, has exhumed from the *Hartford Daily Times* for 19 May 1896 a short review of the first American edition of *The Unclassed* ([1896]), which was for a time a leading seller in America. The review is offered as characteristic of American reviewing of fiction in the daily newspapers of the period. “A Realistic Novel/The Unclassified [*sic*]. By George Gissing/R. F. Fenno & Co. New York./This is a thoroughly modern novel of the realistic school. It deals with subjects that used to be avoided in polite fiction, and finds its heroes and heroines in what would have been called fifty years ago a hopelessly commonplace rank of life. There is a good deal too much of it, but it carries a certain interest and makes a number of pictures of contemporary life in London that are worth having on record. The chief heroine and finest character in the book is a woman of the town who in this follows her mother’s profession, but who is really as nearly guiltless as well as can be, and who revolts at her life almost as soon as she knows it, and abandons it for love of the man who shows her friendship alone until long after that time, but who comes at last to desire her in marriage. The book closes with the last remaining obstacle to their union removed” (p. 13).

The same correspondent also drew our attention to an article by the Chicago bookseller Carlos Martinez (“Bookshop Talk,” *Bookseller Monthly*, September 2001, pp. 14-16), who happened upon a copy of *New Grub Street* he thought to be one of the first American edition, but which proved to be the undated Dutton edition with an introduction by Morley Roberts. Miss Root later reported the sale of two letters from Gissing to Henry Hick of 29 November 1895 and 6 January 1896 at a Sotheby auction on 7 November 2001. These letters, which have been printed twice from the typescript deposited by Hick at the British Museum, fetched £1,500. The letter of 7 June 1903 from Gissing to the Secretary of the Ethical Society also emerged from oblivion last year.

John Keahey, the author of *A Sweet and Glorious Land*, has sent us a recently published book (Penguin Books, 2001), in which Gissing--somewhat unexpectedly--is present, *Casanova Was a Book Lover* by John Maxwell Hamilton. The mock old-fashioned subtitle reads: *And Other Naked Truths and Provocative Curiosities about the Writing, Selling, and Reading of Books*. The volume, in the language of advertisers, is a good read, possibly more serious than its bantering tone indicates. Adequate homage is paid to Gissing as early as the epigraph to Chapter I, when Jasper Milvain is quoted at some length: "But just understand the difference between a man like Reardon and a man like me..." Readers of this journal occasionally write to the editor that they have found Gissing's name as well as his books mentioned in novels or volumes of essays. If we can hardly be surprised to find him in other stories by H. G. Wells than the early *Wheels of Chance* (1896)--see Simon James's article in no. 24 of the *Wellsian* (2001), where *Marriage*, *The Wife of Isaac Harman* and *Mr. Britling sees it through* are listed--can we expect to come across his name in *Foreign Affairs* by Alison Lurie (1984), *Falling Slowly* by Anita Brookner (1998) and *The World is my Home* by James A. Michener (c. 1999)?

The 1916 Battle of the Somme: A Reappraisal, by Peter H. Liddle, Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2001 (first published by Leo Cooper in 1992) is a book, imperfect in some ways but thoroughly documented, which throws abundant light on the circumstances under which Walter Gissing was killed in action on 1 July 1916.

Recent Publications

Articles, reviews, etc.

Melissa Witte Antinori, "Family Dynamics in George Gissing's Novels," in *Shaw and Other Matters*. A Festschrift for Stanley Weintraub on the Occasion of his Forty-Second Anniversary at the Pennsylvania State University, edited by Susan Rusinko, Selingsgrove: Susquehanna University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1998, pp. 95-109.

Saverio Tomaiuolo, "Recensioni," *Merope*, Vol. 11, no. 28, September 1999, pp. 197-201. Review of *With Gissing in Italy*.

- Elaine Hadley, "Book Reviews," *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 43, no. 3, Spring 2001, p. 534. Brief comment on the article on Bosanquet and Gissing in *Homes and Homelessness in the Victorian Imagination*, edited by Murray Baumgarten and H. M. Daleski.
- Kate Taylor, "Life of words and wives: Gissing, George (1857-1903)," *Express* (Wakefield), 2 November 2001 (Leisure and Sports Section), p. 9.
- Anon., "Frankfurter Buchmesse," *Rnotes* (in-house monthly published by Rubbettino Editore), November 2001, p. 63. *La terra del sole* was on show at the Frankfurt Book Fair.
- Deirdre David, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, Cambridge University Press, 2001. References to Gissing's novels from *Workers in the Dawn* to *The Odd Women*.
- Graham Law, *The Illustrated London News (1842-1901) The Graphic (1869-1901): Indexes to Fiction* (Victorian Fiction Research Guides 29), The University of Queensland, 2001. The short stories by Gissing and his brother, as well as Morley Roberts, that appeared in the *Illustrated London News* are duly listed.
- John Maxwell Hamilton, *Casanova Was a Book Lover*, New York: Penguin Books, 2001. For Gissing, see in particular pp. 14, 15, 52, 55, 286.
- Anthony Petyt, "Of Graves and Epitaphs: Wakefield Cemetery," in *Aspects of Wakefield 3*, ed. Kate Taylor, Barnsley: Wharncliffe Books, 2001. Naturally the Gissing family and many of their friends and acquaintances are mentioned, for instance Camidge, Milner, Eastmead, Hick, Mackie, and Wood. The chapter (no. IV) is illustrated with a familiar photograph of T. W. Gissing and views of the cemetery by the author of the article. The volume also contains a chapter on the yards of Wakefield, Thompson's Yard among them, with many illustrations.
- A. C. Grayling, "The Last Word on Winter," *Guardian Saturday Review*, 5 January 2002, p. 12. Echoes from Gissing's words on winter in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.