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

Mourning, Pleasure and the Aesthetic Ideal in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*

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Once considered to be Gissing's masterpiece, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903) has not commanded the critical attention that it deserves by contemporary readers of late 19th and early 20th century literature.¹ Though earlier readers generally appreciated the book, often identifying with its tone and sensibility, contemporary critics have either neglected it or have disliked it for its cultural perspective and its pervasive mood of melancholy and loss. Still, despite the relative lack of recent interest, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* is important, not simply for scholars of Gissing, but for anyone interested in late-Victorian culture and aesthetics. Ironically, the very tendencies that are derided by some readers are precisely part of the fascination and power of the work.

If in fact the pervasive mood of the book is mournful, it is because much of its primary subject is pleasure – specifically, aesthetic pleasure and its felt limitation and loss in the world of modernity. We typically understand mourning as the natural and necessary emotional expression of loss. As a concept and experience, mourning accurately characterizes the overall expressive “condition” of Henry Ryecroft. He is above all else a figure deeply aware of loss and limitation. But what is to be made of this fact and what is its relationship to artistic creation and pleasure? Ultimately, Ryecroft's sense of loss is directly related to his perception of art. For Ryecroft, the capacity to know and enjoy art recedes through the experiences of modernity. Thus, in part, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* is a book about art and historical experience. In its predominant structure of feeling, Gissing's narrative is contemporary with what Thomas Hardy describes as the “ache of modernism,” for the narrative expresses a troubled artistic sense and sensibility in relation to dominant late-Victorian culture and society. But whereas Hardy illustrates the ache of modernism in the lives of socially

marginalized characters of deep sensitivity (I am thinking in particular of Hardy's *Jude* and *Tess*), Gissing alone offers us an exploration of this experience in terms of the writer/artist himself.

I

Ryecroft's Aesthetic Ideal: Perceptions of Authentic and Inauthentic Literature

I begin with writing, for it is the thing that occupies the mind of the writer most. Gissing was deeply concerned with both the craft and profession of writing. As a writer who often felt slighted and largely misunderstood, the subject of art/writing makes its way into most of Gissing's strongest work. Few I think would contest that *New Grub Street* stands as the 19th century's most powerful indictment and yet deeply moving account of the "life of literature" in (late) Victorian Britain. Equal in many ways to the critical force of *New Grub Street*, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* presents a particular type of literary experience and consciousness that are both historical and personal. Henry Ryecroft shares many of the "literary" ideas and experiences of Gissing himself, but ultimately should be seen as a representative figure of a conflicted artist at the close of the 19th century.² Forced to earn his living through the pen and then miraculously relieved of the insecurity and burden of the literary profession, Ryecroft is in a unique position to articulate gradations of writing, particularly in terms of aesthetic value, personal fulfillment, and social function. The social experiences and critical evaluations of the profession of writing that Ryecroft presents are fairly characteristic of the pervasive structure of feeling that is so central to the modernist revolt against the commodification of culture. Ultimately, his negative account of the writing profession can only be understood fully by noting his perception of the qualitative differences between legitimate and illegitimate (authentic and inauthentic) literature.

For Ryecroft, writing that is utilitarian (the writing that pays the bills, though just barely it would seem) is often described as little more than debased hackwork. It is not the type of writing that fulfills deep subjectivity (the seemingly "true" Self – capital S), which gives a sense of satisfaction and completeness. Precisely for this reason, writing that is motivated by material want or the desire for fame and fortune is necessarily inauthentic for Ryecroft. But why is this the case? What motivates the differentiation of authentic and inauthentic writing; and what does the authentic work promise to do for artist and audience, for those who create authentic works

and those who have the capacity to know and *enjoy* them? Part of the answer to these questions is clear enough: authentic writing designates and promises access to a certain *form of being and experience* – a mode of presence and pleasure; a sense of non-alienated utterance and reception – where the true voice forms and expresses the authentic self (where voice and self appear as one *in writing*). In the musings of Rycroft, authenticity in writing is the presentation of truth, the real behind appearances – whereas inauthentic writing merely expresses what is artificially necessary (the pandering of the artist and work to the created needs of a buying public).

The contrasts between the different perceptions of writing are made fairly evident right at the start. Having the security of an income for life, Rycroft quits London and writing for a living. Whereas formerly Rycroft wrote out of economic necessity, now he writes partially for pleasure and partially from habit. There is an important distinction to be made in this – by implication, writing that is intended for a paying public is qualitatively different from writing that is private or personal (writing from inspiration). The difference for Rycroft is the distinction between literary and non-literary writing, or, more precisely, literature and “literary work” (p. 76).

In the preface, Gissing tells us that the written impressions of Rycroft have an unspoken “literary purpose” (p. xi). We discover that the “literary purpose” is to communicate a sense of truth that is inseparable from the authorial perception of self and experience. What is called literary writing is “born” out of something profound that cannot be induced by the need or wish to be paid. It would seem then that literary/authentic writing must be free from the necessity of seeking a buying public. Added to this is the idea that authentic writing can transmit and contain essence, individuality, presence, and beauty – modes of being that are seemingly immediate and absolute – whereas inauthentic writing cannot because it requires and seeks the approval of an audience. In the preface, Gissing tells us how Rycroft’s impressionistic “papers” create presence and pleasure: “Sitting in the room where I had often been his companion, I turned page after page, and at moments it was as though my friend’s voice sounded to me once more. I saw his worn visage, grave or smiling; recalled his familiar pose or gesture” (p. xi). Because authentic writing creates presence, it thus offers the very essence of the writer: “But in this written gossip he revealed himself more intimately than in our conversation of the days gone by. Rycroft had never erred by lack of reticence; as was natural in a sensitive man who had suffered much, he inclined to gentle acquiescence, shrank from argument, from self-assertion. Here he spoke to me without restraint, and, when

I had read it all through, I knew the man better than before” (p. xi). The so-called “gossip” of Ryecroft approaches the artistic ideal of writing because it reveals the truth and individuality of the man and is not motivated by anything other than the presentation of such truth (i.e. the consciousness and impressions of the author).

The revelation of essence is the artistic ideal of writing and it is part of the idea that connects writing and nature. According to Ryecroft, nature, as the so-called “great artist,” presents itself as direct being (and thus, essence). Nature is what it is in all of its beauty, terror, and complexity, and is understood and cherished by those who are capable of experiencing and knowing it as such. Furthermore, nature makes itself without consciousness, without the influence of anything other than itself. In so doing, it makes both “common” and profound art:

Nature, the great Artist, makes her common flowers in the common view ; no word in human language can express the marvel and the loveliness even of what we call the vulgarest weed, but these are fashioned under the gaze of every passer-by. The rare flower is shaped apart, in places secret, in the Artist’s subtler mood ; to find it is to enjoy the sense of admission to a holier precinct. (p. 9)

Here we have the expression of the aesthetic diversity of nature’s creation and its indifference to “the gaze of every passer-by.” Nature thus becomes a metaphor of an artistic practice that has no concern other than being – i.e. of presenting itself *as it is* in all of its “moods.”³ The metaphor of nature as the great artist is extended to literature: literature reveals the truth (presence/essence) of the writer or subject intimately only to the extent that it models the state of nature.

The implication of this is fairly startling. It would seem that the consciousness of another, and of *the* other, troubles authentic writing, for the writing moves away from the truth of expression (i.e. writing what must be written because it is true and essential) to writing in order to seek the understanding and approval of an audience, which necessarily brings the reality of the audience into the act of writing. The reality of the audience is a problem to the extent that consciousness of another can shape or dictate the form and content of writing. For Ryecroft, the imposition of an audience disrupts what he describes as the “natural sprouts” of artistic impulses and inspiration. Under the influence of an audience, “natural sprouts” become unnatural in that the audience and its desire enter into the creation ; thus the “truth” of art, which seemingly exists irrespective of any concern for an audience, is corrupted by a foreign presence of sorts. As a result, the “best products of life” (i.e. inspired artistic creations) are degraded and displaced.

II

“The rough-and-tumble of the literary arena”

The idea of the degradation and displacement of the truth of art through the consciousness and imposition of an audience plays itself out most forcefully in the consistently negative attitude expressed toward “literary work” and the culture that creates it. For Ryecroft “literary work” cannot be literature, *because* it is writing that seeks to be paid ; and in the pursuit of payment the author moves away from natural inspiration to satisfy the demands of a public (both publishers and consumers). Meanwhile, Ryecroft disparages the economic reality that overshadows and determines literary work because it creates a hostile and intolerable condition for authentic artists and writers. Knowing the conditions and burden of literary work, Ryecroft feels a deep sympathy toward “literary workers” while offering a calculated critique of the reality that determines them:

I dare not think of those I have left behind me, there in the ink-stained world. It would make me miserable, and to what purpose ? Yet, having once looked that way, think of them I must. Oh, you heavy-laden, who at this hour sit down to the cursed travail of the pen ; *writing, not because there is something in your mind, in your heart, which must needs be uttered, but because the pen is the only tool you can handle, your only means of earning bread !* Year after year the number of you is multiplied ; you crowd the doors of publishers and editors, hustling, grappling, exchanging maledictions. Oh, sorry spectacle, grotesque and heart-breaking ! (p. 48, my italics)

The image here that Gissing creates is one of feverish competition and desperation. In the struggle to earn a living the writer must compete with other writers, not to express true thought or emotion, but simply to create commodities that are of little artistic substance. As a commodity, writing binds the writer to both work and audience negatively and in the process the writer loses a sense of self. Under such conditions writing becomes an abstracted entity that is in opposition to the self and the authentic impulses of artistic creation. In a powerful series of reflections, Gissing reveals precisely what is hated in “literary work” and its culture. At the core of what is despised is the alienated reality of the writer who seeks to “earn his bread”:

Innumerable are the men and women now writing for bread, who have not the least chance of finding in such work a permanent livelihood. They took to writing because they knew not what else to do, or because the literary calling tempted them by its independence and its dazzling prizes. They will hang on to the squalid profession, their earnings eked out by begging and borrowing, until it is too late for them to do anything else – and then ? [...] Hateful as is the struggle for life in every form,

this rough-and-tumble of the literary arena seems to me sordid and degrading beyond all others. Oh, your prices per thousand words ! Oh, your paragraphings and your interviewings ! And oh, the black despair that awaits those downtrodden in the fray ! (p. 49)

In the struggle for material existence, the “rough-and-tumble of the literary arena” is the most degrading precisely because in writing one has the potential to create and reveal truth, beauty, and essence. The literary arena thus represents most clearly the sordid materialism of late-Victorian culture itself. In the mind of Ryecroft, the practice of art and authentic writing *should* be beyond the fray of the market because its subject is truth. However, these things appear to be of little matter within the general culture. Rather, crass materialism overruns art according to Ryecroft. The apparently degraded condition of culture negatively affects him in that it shapes his own experiences and capacities to create and enjoy art – here then is an inkling of the source of Ryecroft’s mourning. Artistic hope and possibility seem to vanish within the commercialization of culture.

Interestingly, Ryecroft’s critique of culture is not aimed directly at the economic system that determines so much of its character, though there is an undeniable awareness that economy and experience are deeply connected:

You tell me that money cannot buy the things most precious. Your commonplace proves that you have never known the lack of it. When I think of all the sorrow and the barrenness that has been wrought in my life by want of a few more pounds per annum than I was able to earn, I stand aghast at money’s significance. What kindly joys have I lost, those simple forms of happiness to which every heart has claim, because of poverty ! Meetings with those I loved made impossible year after year ; sadness, misunderstanding, nay, cruel alienation, arising from inability to do the things I wished, and which I might have done had a little money helped me ; endless instances of homely pleasure and contentment curtailed or forbidden by narrow means. I have lost friends merely through the constraints of my position ; friends I might have made have remained strangers to me ; solitude of the bitter kind, the solitude which is enforced at times when mind or heart longs for companionship, often cursed my life solely because I was poor. I think it would scarce be an exaggeration to say that there is no moral good which has not to be paid for in coin of the realm. (pp. 13-14)

Arguably the strongest forms of writing in the book are instances such as this in which Ryecroft reflects upon the experience of poverty. The effective pathos of the above passage functions as a form of cultural critique. Ryecroft knows first hand that in the economic relations of modernity, the writer and artist’s autonomy is limited at best (one if “free” to starve ; but not free to create as one pleases, *if payment is part of the goal of artistic*

creation⁴). The hated struggle for existence and the uncertainty of financial security are suggested as foundational enemies of art and literature. In the pursuit of economic security the writer is fragmented and driven in myriad directions, often losing sight of and contact with the essence of artistic inspiration and creation. Perhaps more than any other experience, poverty is the historical wound that cannot be healed for Ryecroft. As a result, we are made acutely aware of what is lost for him.

III

Aesthetic Taste and the Condition of (mass) Culture

However, the book's general critique of "economy" and the economic relations in the world of writing and art are largely displaced by, or subsumed within, a critique of taste. It would seem that the struggle to maintain oneself financially as an artist/writer is a curse – not because the economic system generates and demands a certain kind of social and material relationship, but rather because the populace (who presumably can pay for and support art) is largely boorish and crude. Although the taste of the public is represented primarily through suggestion and implication, it is clear that Ryecroft feels that there is an enormous gap between popular and "artistic" taste. Thus, Ryecroft sees the mass of humanity as an economic force that towers over art and artists. Recalling his own economic precariousness and his necessitated concern with an audience, Ryecroft tells us:

The fact of the matter was, of course, that I served not one master, but a whole crowd of them. Independence, forsooth ! If my writing failed to please editor, publisher, public, where was my daily bread ? The greater my success, the more numerous my employers. I was the slave of the multitude. By heaven's grace I had succeeded in pleasing (that is to say, in making myself a source of profit to) certain persons who represented this vague throng ; for the time, they were gracious to me ; but what justified me in the faith that I should hold the ground I had gained ? (p. 20)

Though "successful" writing in the marketplace is characterized as writing that sells (i.e. the value of the work is measured by consumption), it does not secure the writer as *an artist*, even though it may guarantee a certain amount of economic freedom. Rather, material success makes the writer a servant to a process that is loathed, because it compromises art and must be repeated *ad infinitum* if the writer is to survive financially.

The problem then is that the "taste" of the general populace creates a negative relationship between itself and the artist. Indeed, Ryecroft tells us: "For me, there have always been two entities – myself and the world, and

the normal relation between these two has been hostile” (p. 19). Ultimately, this hostility is grounded in both a difference of aesthetic sensibilities and a determining economic relation. The writer must struggle and face compromise *as an artist* because the public does not sufficiently appreciate and reward art. One of the main regrets that haunt Ryecroft is how much time and effort he expends amidst an ignorant and largely indifferent public. Moodily, we get: “The only trouble that touches me in these moments [of peace] is the thought of my long life wasted amid the senseless noises of man’s world” (p.65). The “senseless noises of man’s world” become emblematic of many interconnected experiences for Ryecroft, but are always associated and coupled with the “literary arena” and the crude aesthetic taste and sensibility of the general public. Concerning their interests, Ryecroft bitterly tells us:

Lay aside the “literary organ,” which appears once a week, and take up the newspaper, which comes forth every day, morning and evening. Here you get the true proportion of things. Read your daily news-sheet – that which costs three pence, or that which costs a half-penny – and muse upon the impression it leaves. It may be that a few books are “noticed” ; granting that the “notice” is in any way noticeable, compare the space it occupies with that devoted to the material interests of life: you have a gauge of the real importance of intellectual endeavour to the people at large. No, the public which reads, in any sense of the word worth considering, is very, very small ; the public which would feel no lack if all book-printing ceased to-morrow, is enormous. (p. 60)

The general public does not value or concern itself with art and literature ; nor does it seem to have the capacity to know and enjoy them. In one sense, the idea that there are only a select few who appreciate and are concerned with pursuing the arts as necessarily valuable and satisfying is significant because it suggests a realm of freedom and distinction beyond the life of the majority of people. Indeed, for Ryecroft art and literature remove and distinguish the individual from the mass of humanity. In knowing and enjoying art (as well as nature) one is at least momentarily free from the reality of the masses, which are viewed as base and corrupt. Ryecroft tells us that art helps “one to forget the idle or venomous chatter going on everywhere about us, and bids us cherish hope for a world ‘which has such people in ’t’” (p. 142).

And yet, as Ryecroft’s experiences show, the idea of the transformative quality of art is more ideal than reality. Still, even as an ideal, it is significant to our understanding of Ryecroft’s (and perhaps Gissing’s) aesthetic principles and his emotional response to a variety of socio-cultural phenomena. Ryecroft’s hatred of democracy, the culture of the masses, and the

degradation of poverty must be understood in the light of his artistic and aesthetic need to maintain the boundaries and sense of self in opposition to a largely indifferent culture. Ryecroft and the artists/writers that he loves are nothing if not distinguished and differentiated as individuals, for the isolated self exists above and beyond culture and society in total and is seen as the saving entity of art. The mass of humanity is so much irritation and misery for individuals like Ryecroft because they do not realize the power of art and thus create a world of strife, ugliness and noise. Indeed, the metaphor of the “noise of humanity” brings into stark clarity the pathos of the book’s aesthetic principles:

I remember the London days when sleep was broken by clash and clang, by roar and shriek, and when my first sense on returning to consciousness was hatred of the life about me. Noises of wood and metal, clattering of wheels, banging of implements, jangling of bells – all such things are bad enough, but worse still is the clamorous human voice. Nothing on earth is more irritating to me than a bellow or scream of idiot mirth, nothing more hateful than a shout or yell of brutal anger. Were it possible, I would never again hear the utterance of a human tongue, save from those few who are dear to me. (p. 64)

London and the noise of humanity are interchangeable metaphors of degraded culture. Furthermore, as metaphors, they mark the terrain of a psychological wound and a personal desire to be beyond the fray of modernity where one can exist in a state of aesthetic purity and pleasure. In a sense, the desire to get beyond modernity, beyond the often calamitous struggle of existence, is the desire to be outside of history itself in a perpetual present that knows no past and fears no future.

Although the problem or “ache” of modernity exemplified in Ryecroft is rooted in the painful consciousness and experience of history, it is realized perhaps most clearly as a social and historical limitation of aesthetic pleasure itself. Ryecroft desires – while feeling and perceiving inability and limitation – to live fully and enjoy the life of the artist and the aesthete. The authentic life of the artist, as Ryecroft envisions it, is one of unencumbered and untroubled existence and creation. Unfettered by negative social experience and financial need, the artist is free to express and create abiding forms of beauty – which are part of the defining characteristics of authentic art for Ryecroft. He tells us:

It has occurred to me that one might define Art as: an expression, satisfying and abiding, of the zest of life. This is applicable to every form of Art devised by man, for, in his creative moment, whether he produce a great drama or carve a piece of foliage in wood, the artist is moved and inspired by supreme enjoyment of some aspect of the world about him. (p. 53)

The value of art is contained in beauty, pleasure, and self-expression. The above passage is key, for it exemplifies part of the core of Ryecroft/Gissing's aesthetic, which is a form of impressionism. The sincere artist communicates experience, as it exists *for the artist*. In the creative moment, the artist is transfixed and the impressions of experience mark and shape artistic creation through the mind and practice of the artist. The problem of modernity (as a social and historical reality) is the wedge created between social experience, historical knowledge, and the pleasure and essence of art. Art in its ideal form is like nature, a communication of being. To fulfill his task of creation, the artist must be moved and inspired by supreme *pleasure* in, and enjoyment of, the world. The limitation placed upon the experience of beauty thus creates a problem for the production and reception of art. If mourning is the pervasive emotional experience expressed throughout the work, it is because Ryecroft (and perhaps Gissing) realizes that the possibility of fully experiencing and achieving an artistic ideal is lost as a result of the experience of contemporary life. Indeed, we discover through Ryecroft that the typical experience of modernity does not generally add to or embody the "zest of life" (which is pleasure and insight into the truth and beauty of the real); and thus the impressions communicated by the artist bear the marks of historical experiences, which overshadow and dull aesthetic pleasure while placing severe limitations upon artistic creation and insight. The truth of art (the real communicated through the mind and emotion of the artist) degenerates and fades as the conditions of historical reality devalue art and aesthetics, turning them into mere commodities. Burdensome historical reality thus limits the capacity to know, create, and enjoy art and authentic writing. The realization of this creates the mournful sense of irretrievable loss.

IV

Mourning and the Wish to be beyond History

The desire of the text to imagine, if not recover, a sense of aesthetic pleasure that exists beyond the knowledge and degradation of historical reality is what accounts for so much of the mournful tone of the book. Ryecroft is profoundly aware of the emotional and intellectual loss of possibility of experiencing and creating art. Added to this is the fact that Ryecroft had once known deep aesthetic pleasure and hope in his youth – thus he must necessarily lament their displacement in his maturity. Though he tells us at various points that to turn away from reality is pointless and ignoble –

this does not discount the desire for some type of un-, or meta-, historical consciousness ; that is, a consciousness before the wounds of knowing a negative social and cultural reality. We see this desire in Ryecroft's attempt to experience nature without the memory of what has been lived in London. We also see it in his recollections of youth. If London, the masses, and the "struggle for existence" are interrelated tropes of catastrophe, the very signs of degraded humanity and culture, then, in contrast, solitude, nature, and aesthetic pleasure (a triad dear to Ryecroft) are emblematic of what is ideal. Faintly remembering the experience of a childhood seaside holiday, Ryecroft reveals the gulf that separates the two consciousnesses and experiences. The lament of lost aesthetic pleasure is undeniable:

Ah, that taste of the brine on a child's lips ! Nowadays, I can take holiday when I will, and go whithersoever it pleases me ; but that salt kiss of the sea air I shall never know again. My senses are dulled ; I cannot get so near to Nature ; I have a sorry dread of her clouds, her winds, and must walk with tedious circumspection where once I ran and leapt exultingly. [...] I can but look at what I once enjoyed. (p. 72)

Ryecroft's musings suggest that dulled senses and burdensome knowledge of past and present existence are the results of socio-historical experience. Indeed, time itself is not a problem, nor the aging of the body, but rather the layers of experience that mark the passing of historical time. In nature, time is simply cyclical – whereas historical time is marked by social experience. For Ryecroft, the capacity for aesthetic pleasure and appreciation is inseparable from the positive experience of childhood itself – particularly the security and curiosity of childhood. Ryecroft recalls his youth as filled with wonder, vitality, and a total absence of guilt and remorse. It is a stark contrast to his adult consciousness. His descriptions of youthful experiences of nature are thus inscribed with the pathos of life before knowledge of the negativity and pain of contemporary life. Ryecroft tells us that nature can no longer "invigorate" him in his adulthood. Likewise, art, also, no longer invigorates Ryecroft ; indeed, its power is lost and relegated to a past existence no longer accessible, except as memory.

Ironically, it is perhaps historical consciousness and the requirements and realities of modern life, the very things loathed by Ryecroft, that necessitate art as a kind of protectiveness of the self and as an imagined and longed for realm of freedom. If true art is in part the expression of self – and literature is seen as the embodiment of selves communicating what is essential and natural – then it must, necessarily, function as a kind of protective barrier to the pressure and strain of modern life. Ryecroft himself is

aware of this ; he tells us that art, literature, and reading provide pleasure, solace and strengthening (p. 56). The ideal of art is thus very much rooted in the experience of history. As such, it organizes and structures a very powerful orientation to experience and the world. From Ryecroft's perspective, the promise of art stands as an alternative to history in that one is, ideally, removed and protected from its grind and misery. In the transfiguring instance of artistic perception there is absolute immediacy, complete presence in the present. And yet the fantasy and wish to be beyond history is revealed as unavoidably historical (determined and inscribed within history itself). Whenever Ryecroft's "papers" move into aesthetic reflection (seeking to communicate the experience of an aesthetic sublime) it is immediately disrupted and overshadowed by the memory of socio-historical experience.

In the last instance, we are left with the tone of the work and the pervasive mood created and communicated: the fact of mourning. The experience of living and struggling among and with people creates desire and loss. Nothing is made more apparent than this in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Ryecroft envisions an artistic ideal, but knows it to be out of reach as a result of memory, experience, and social reality. His knowledge thus creates the state of mourning which casts its shadow over the entire "papers" themselves. The tone of the book is probably the key autobiographical link to Gissing himself. Gissing too shares dimensions of Ryecroft's artistic vision – and likewise knows of its impossibility. Gissing thought *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* was his strongest work. In a letter to Clara Collet, he writes: "On the whole, I suspect it is the best thing I have done, or am likely to do ; the thing most likely to last when all my other futile work has followed my futile life" (24 December 1902).⁵ In the light of the aesthetic perspective of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, the so-called futility of Gissing's life and work must be defined as the inability to realize the perceived promise of art. This of course is a *necessitated*, historical futility outside of the control of the writer. Those who know and appreciate Gissing will not agree with his harsh self-reflection. Still we may concur that of all of Gissing's works, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* perhaps comes closest to achieving the artistic integrity and sincerity of expression that he valued so highly.

⁵Early readers generally agreed that the book was Gissing's *tour de force* and often restated much of the aesthetic sensibility of the book in their praise of it. For example, in an unsigned review in the *Week's Survey*, dated 4 July 1903, we are told that "it is one of the most distinguished books that has been written in the last ten dull years, years of an astound-

ing intellectual stagnation, brought about to all seeming by the commercialisation [...] of literature” (*Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, p. 426). It is interesting that this review contrasts *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* with the “commercialisation of literature,” suggesting that Gissing’s book stands in opposition to “commercial” literature. This is a key point, as we shall soon see, in the aesthetic of the work. For Ryecroft, artistic authenticity is at least partially measured by a disregard for commercial concerns.

²For the continuing debate on the autobiographical nature or otherwise of the book, see notably Lowell T. Frye, “‘An Author at Grass’: Ironic Intent in Gissing’s *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*,” *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 24, no. 1, 1981, pp. 41-51, and P. F. Kropholler, “Gissing and Henry Ryecroft: Some Parallels and Affinities,” *Gissing Newsletter*, January 1989, pp. 1-13. The question was also discussed at length by Pierre Coustillas in his bilingual edition of *Henry Ryecroft* (Paris: Aubier, 1966).

³Of course the quote also reveals a hierarchy of aesthetic value. That which is hidden and subtle, beyond the common view, is sublime, *because it is removed and inaccessible to just any passer-by*.

⁴The point can be clarified by recalling the contrasts in *New Grub Street* between Edwin Reardon and “literary tradesmen” such as Jasper Milvain. Reardon is an artist who “won’t make concessions” and thus suffers and perishes from his devotion to art ; whereas the literary tradesman “thinks first and foremost of the markets” and thus survives, though creating nothing of any real significance.

⁵See also Gissing’s journal entry dated 23 October 1900 in *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England* for a slightly different assessment of the strength of the work.

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The deadliest enemy of the poor ?¹

Gissing's Nether World provides an intense psychological study of the link between alcoholism, poverty and degeneration in late Victorian society

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The Nether World represents a fusion of the late nineteenth-century literature of temperance reform, social science and new journalism that examines the link between alcohol abuse and the moral and physical degeneration of the poor. Where *The Nether World* differs, however, is in the empathetic study of the psychological tensions of alcohol addiction in Maria Candy and John Hewett. The characters' awareness of their degeneration as human beings reveals a deeper understanding of the problem of alcoholism than is generally shown in the literature of the period.

As J. Mortimer-Granville notes in his medical treatise, *Alcohol: Its Use and Abuse*: "The worst estate of man is that wherein he loses the knowledge and government of himself."² Gissing's lasting achievement in *The Nether World* is to explore, with Shakespearean intensity, the psychological tensions suffered by characters who remain fully aware of their moral and spiritual degeneration and yet are helpless to control it. It is a most compelling study of drink-induced madness and the struggle for a return to sanity.

In his portrayal of the alcoholic family Gissing traces the addictive predilection through the parents to the children and with a surprising twist it is the once respectable Robert Hewett who follows the path of least resistance and goes to the dogs, while the unfortunate Pennyloaf Candy struggles to achieve absolution from the sins of the parents through total abstinence. Unlike the naturally abstinent Margaret Hewett, Pennyloaf is not miraculously free of the addictive personality but gorges on treacle whenever she can afford it, "knowing by experience that she could not resist this form of temptation, and must eat and eat till all was finished" (p. 267). So, too, the young Amy Hewett drinks vinegar "as a toper does spirits [...] an anticipation of what will befall them [female children of the poor] as soon as they find their way to the public-house" (p. 241).

Gissing deviates from the conventional view of the degenerate type by portraying his flawed and haunted characters – Maria Candy, John Hewett and Pennyloaf – with more sympathy and fascination than his respectable and restrained hero Sidney Kirkwood and heroine Jane Snowdon. Sidney and Jane who, in the context of *The Nether World*, represent the Victorian ideal of manliness and womanliness, are yet denied emotional fulfillment

and live vicariously through members of the Hewett and Candy families. Ultimately it is Pennyloaf, the waif-like daughter of a chronic alcoholic mother and violent father, who escapes the brutality of her existence and emerges at the end of the novel safe in her “humble security” (p. 391).

The term alcoholism was not in common use until the 1860s but the social concern about the effects of alcohol abuse among the poor found its voice in the early temperance movement of the 1820s and 1830s. However, the pioneers of temperance reform tended to confuse occasional drunkenness with chronic alcoholism and insisted that the problem was specifically related to the drinking of spirits rather than to alcohol in general. As Lilian Lewis Shiman observes: “The Beer Act of 1830 was successful only in showing that beer could intoxicate almost as easily as gin.”³ It is a point aptly illustrated by Mrs. Candy, who “cared only for beer, the brave, thick, medicated draught, that was so cheap and frenzied her so speedily” (p. 248).

The use of alcohol was endemic in nineteenth-century society and employed as everything from a thirst quencher (the purity of drinking water in poor areas was still questionable in the second half of the century), to a painkiller. However, the early temperance reformers failed to distinguish between drinking in general and the serious chronic condition that in the case of Maria Candy was as much a terminal disease as her son’s heart condition. As Brian Harrison admits, “chronic alcoholism” is “a neglected aspect of the temperance question.”⁴ Yet through the fictional characters of *The Nether World* Gissing distinguishes quite clearly between alcoholism – the obsessive, compulsive disorder that fragments the mind of John Hewett and Maria Candy – and the sporadic drinking of, say, Joseph Snowdon and Charles Scawthorne during their clandestine meetings, or the drunkenness at a funeral (ch. 5) and on a bank holiday (ch. 12). It is this awareness that raises *The Nether World* above the studies of poverty and alcohol in contemporary literature. Even in the drink-sodden text of Arthur Morrison’s *Tales of Mean Streets*, which shares the hallmarks of “new” journalism in its unflinching realism and lack of sentimentality, the characters lack the psychological depth of John Hewett, Maria Candy and Pennyloaf. For all Lizerunt’s similarities with Pennyloaf as the victim of a brutalized husband, her poverty is of a more physical nature and she does not share Pennyloaf’s mental torment.

Gissing was indeed “a master of irony and pathos,”⁵ and this proves to be a potent combination. Pathos and, in particular, empathy are not always apparent in Morrison’s *Tales of Mean Streets*, although his style is characterized by the same heavy-handed use of irony, for example in the wooing

of Lizerunt by Billy Chope at the fair on Whit Monday on Wanstead Flats: “Here is a square mile and more of open land where you may howl at large ; here is no danger of losing yourself as in Epping Forest ; the public houses are always with you.”⁶ In a scene reminiscent of *Io Saturnalia* (*The Nether World*, ch. 12) Billy wins Lizerunt’s affections from his rival by buying her the hat of her dreams with “the reddest of all the plushes and the bluest of all the feathers ; a hat that challenged all the Flats the next bank holiday, a hat for which no girl need have hesitated to sell her soul.”⁷

In *The Nether World*, on Pennyloaf’s wedding day Gissing sets the scene with all the irony and cynicism of the opening lines of Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*: “Good morning to the day ; and next, my gold ! | Open the shrine, that I may see my saint. | Hail the world’s soul and mine ! More glad than is | The teeming earth to see the longed-for sun....”⁸ With a similar inversion of Christian imagery, the narrator in Chapter 12 cries: “With joy does the awaking publican look forth upon the blue-misty heavens, and address his adorations to the Sun-god, inspirer of thirst. Throw wide the doors of the temple of Alcohol !” (p. 104).

Pennyloaf, a dazed victim on the altar of the god Alcohol, “shone in most unwonted apparel [...] Her broad-brimmed hat of yellow straw was graced with the reddest feather purchasable in the City Road” (p. 105). Like Lizerunt’s, Pennyloaf’s inability to perceive a fate that is inevitable is both comic and pathetic. With her dread of “all such bottles” Pennyloaf refuses the ale when it is passed round the railway carriage and “In her heart she rejoiced that Bob knew no craving for strong liquor” (p. 106). Her wedding day ends in violence and the true significance of her ring (“Gold, Pennyloaf, real gold! ” [p. 105]) is its worth on the morrow at the pawn-shop. The girl who starts out in a first-class carriage returns in third class. In her wedding chamber her drunken husband lies bleeding on the bare floor. Pennyloaf hears Mrs. Candy’s voice which is raised “in the fury of mad drunkenness” and as she listens to the sound of her father beating her mother she laments with comic pathos: “I knew she wouldn’t get over today. She never did get over a Bank-holiday” (p. 113).

This is no melodramatic fairground show, with Mr. Punch beating Judy to the great amusement of the audience. “To George Gissing life was tragic, but it was not stage catastrophe,”⁹ comments J. D. Thomas in “The Public Purposes of George Gissing.” Disgusting as are the public displays of violence and drunkenness at the Crystal Palace, it is the furtive, shameful actions that excite the greatest feelings of horror ; the sound of Mr. Candy

beating his wife is far more sinister than the public fighting between the rival Clerkenwell gangs.

A similar sense of furtive shame characterises the fall into degradation of John Hewett. Wracked with anger and grief at his daughter's disappearance he is drawn to the gin-shop. At "such a door" he pauses and hesitates, his face "flushed" and "perspiring" as though he were already drunk. He is tormented by a "struggle between his despairing wretchedness and a life-long habit of mind" but, as the narrator explains, there is no contest. Drink, personified in *Io Saturnalia* as a pagan god, now offers warmth, light and a "noisy welcome" that contrasts sharply with the grey landscape of the nether world (p. 119).

And so where Charles Booth (*Life and Labour of the People in London*), Andrew Mearns (*The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*) and others, allow us to observe the sordid yet exotic world of paupers vicariously – as an exhibit or as though through the bars of a cage – Gissing takes us into their very minds. Where Mearns, for example, might point out the sheer number of beer houses and gin-shops in parts of London: "one public house to every 100 people" in the district of Euston Road, and "100 gin-palaces" in another district,¹⁰ Gissing draws us to the more sinister side of alcohol and its potential danger for a man like John Hewett, for whom "indulgence of his passion" was already "making a madman of him" before he takes to drink in a serious way (p. 118). For despite the rather wayward strength of mind John Hewett demonstrates in the opening chapters of *The Nether World*, it was "not difficult to foresee which would prevail ; the public-house always has its doors open in expectation of such instances. With a gesture which made him yet more like a drunken man he turned from the pavement and entered" (p. 119). Later in the novel we read that John comes out of a public-house "in a slinking way, and hoped that Kirkwood might not scent the twopenny-worth of gin" (p. 296).

Gissing indicates that John Hewett's propensity for drink is latent rather than absent in his early life. "Throughout his life until that day of Clara's disappearance he had seemed in no danger from the deadliest enemy of the poor ; one taste of the oblivion that could be bought at any street-corner, and it was as though drinking had been a recognised habit with him" (p. 186). Hewett's awareness of his degradation and shame make his fall from respectability and temporary loss of sanity all the more poignant. "A year, two years, and he still drank himself into forgetfulness as often as his mental suffering waxed unendurable. On the morrow of every such crime –

interpret the word rightly – he hated himself for his cruelty to that pale sufferer whose reproaches were only the utterances of love” (pp. 186-87).

Inevitably John Hewett’s drinking brings financial difficulties. He is forced to leave the Peckovers’ house – a clear symbol in the context of *The Nether World* of his downward journey – and ends up in a squalid cellar where his wife dies. Gissing was as aware as Charles Both that pauperism was caused by illness, the number of children in a family and unemployment as well as by drink, but in *The Nether World* Gissing excels in depicting the alcoholic depression that, once in its grip, keeps a man down. The temperance reformer Alexander M’Dougall points out “that there is a depression arising from misfortune and loss of comforts that appears to paralyse effort and break down hope.”¹¹ James Whyte supports this view in *The Cost of Our Drinking Custom*, where he says that “intemperance not only causes poverty but keeps people there.”¹²

Drink “stupefies, debases, and embrates them, thus rendering them contented or, rather, apathetic, in the midst of circumstances which would be altogether intolerable to them if they were habitually sober. That is, it robs them of the desire for improvement.”¹³ In this we hear echoes of Max Nordau’s polemic in *Degeneration*: “Things as they are totter and plunge, and they are suffered to reel and fall, because man is weary, and there is no faith that it is worth an effort to uphold them.”¹⁴

Robert Hewett demonstrates a human characteristic, which “has always been self-evident” according to M’Dougall, “that it is more difficult for persons who have come down from a competence to poverty to rise again, than for those born in poverty to struggle and overcome adverse circumstances.”¹⁵ Bob is aware of his deterioration – a downward spiral in part driven by Clem’s plotting. “The man was conscious of his degradation ; he knew how he had fallen ever since he began criminal practices” (p. 333). Just as Maria Candy signs the pledge in vain, so Bob Hewett “knew the increasing hopelessness of his resolves to have done with dangers and recover his peace of mind [...] His disposition was now one of hatred and the kind of hatred which sooner or later breaks out in ferocity” (p. 333). The final mark of his degradation is not his pursuit by the police but his violent outburst prior to this point in the narrative when, “infected by the savagery” of Clem Peckover, he beats Pennyloaf, just as her father beat her mother. From this scene of domestic violence he leaves his wife and “went into a public-house, to quench the thirst that had grown unbearable” (p. 334).

Unfortunately, with his propensity to drink, alcohol has its inevitable impact on Bob’s personality. He fits the profile drawn by Walter Moxon in

Alcohol and Individuality: “None so reasonable when sober, so explanatory, so promising ; such a nice man to talk to. But meet him when on the drink and then try your influence....”¹⁶

In Chapter 8 we find that it is already too late for Mrs. Candy to rally against her fate and she has brought down her entire family in her degradation. Shooter’s Gardens is the scene of the first major outburst of alcohol-induced violence in *The Nether World*, when Mr. Candy attempts to prevent his wife from drinking herself to death – not through the gentle reproaches employed by Mrs. Hewett towards her husband John or by Pennyloaf towards Bob, but through a severe beating. Mrs. Candy, nursing her bruised face, longs for an end to her miserable life. “But for the harm to himself, the only pity was he had not taken her life outright. She knew all the hatefulness of her existence ; she knew also that only the grave would rescue her from it” (p. 76). Echoes here, surely, of Gissing’s dismay at his first wife’s death from alcoholism and starvation.

Shooter’s Gardens is the lowest sort of lodgings where landlords charge an extortionate rent for those whose reputations bar them from anywhere more respectable. These are the very poor who actively choose degradation over a more respectable life and prefer a slum to more respectable lodgings. In Shooter’s Gardens they can be “as vile as they please” (p. 74) – a phrase that echoes Nordau when he describes the congenitally degenerate who lack “the sense of morality and of right and wrong. For them there exists no law, no decency, no modesty....”¹⁷

Gissing writes social science and new journalism along with the best, but it is where he departs from what Judith R. Walkowitz describes as the “urban male spectator and flaneur within an imaginary landscape”¹⁸ that he excels. Unlike Charles Booth, who in Walkowitz’s view “reproduced familiar tropes of degeneration, contagion and gender disorder, in order to mark off the dangerous from the respectable working class,” Gissing describes Shooter’s Gardens with almost casual disregard. It is a slum “like any other slum ; filth, rotteness, evil odours...” (p. 74) – he ticks off the unwhole-some characteristics as though paying lip-service to an obligatory literary convention.

We know that the Candy family previously resided at Mrs. Peckover’s lodging-house, but were evicted “on account of failure to pay their rent and of the frequent intoxication of Mrs. Candy” (p. 72). With a husband and a son in work (and, until she marries, Pennyloaf as well) we are left to conclude that it is Mrs. Candy’s drinking that has brought the family so low. Mr. Candy’s job – up to 19 hours a day as a journeyman baker – would

place the family in Charles Booth's Class D poor, where "want rarely presses unless the wife drinks."¹⁹ But as the family moves further down the social scale we find them at home in the degradation of Shooter's Gardens among Charles Booth's Class B poor where "there is drunkenness amongst them, especially amongst the women."²⁰

Moxon points out that the mere signing of the pledge, however honestly undertaken, is not enough to keep the alcoholic under control. Indeed each signing of the pledge and subsequent relapse brings with it an increasing sense of shame and helplessness. "Drunkenness prevails in spite of teetotalism, whilst the pledge inflicts useless self-torture,"²¹ he says.

Ironically, in Mrs. Candy's room the only touch of colour is provided by the five pledge certificates pinned above the fireplace – further echoes of Gissing's descriptions of Nell Harrison's room where he is asked to identify the body. The significant passage that follows is worth quoting at length. "Yes, five times had Maria Candy 'promised, with the help of God, to abstain,' &c. &c. ; each time she was in earnest. But," the narrator continues in a tone of heavy irony, "it appeared that the help of God availed little against the views of one Mrs. Green, who kept the beer-shop in Rosoman Street" that had once belonged to Mrs. Peckover. "For many years that house, licensed for the sale of non-spirituous liquors, had been working Mrs. Candy's ruin ; not a particle of her frame but was vitiated by the drugs retailed there under the approving smile of civilisation. Spirits would have been harmless in comparison. The advantage of Mrs. Green's ale was that the very first half-pint gave conscience its bemuddling sop ; for a penny you forgot all the cares of existence ; for threepence you became a yelling maniac" (p. 76). It is an image as visual as the temperance reformer George Cruikshank's series of drawings entitled *The Bottle* (1847). In Plate VIII the shivering lunatic is watched with chilly disdain by his degenerate children and the caption reads: "The bottle has done its work. It has destroyed the infant and the mother, it has brought the son and daughter to vice and to the streets, and has left the father a hopeless maniac."²²

Compared with the detailed physical descriptions of most of Gissing's characters, Maria Candy is portrayed as little more than a bundle of rags, as though the humanity has already left her. Even her voice is inhuman and "thick." Mortimer-Granville notes that the speech of the persistent drinker may be "thick from the defective action of the tongue."²³ In Chapter 37 Bob Hewett, wounded and on the run from the police, arrives at Shooter's Gardens to find Mrs. Candy "an animated object, indescribable," who speaks in a voice "which was horrible to hear" (p. 339). She slumps on the floor

moaning and rocking, then starts at Bob's question and looks at him "in wild fear" (p. 340).

The drinking woman is particularly destructive within the context of the Victorian family unit and a serious aberration from the Victorian ideal of selfless motherhood. Mortimer-Granville notes the "effect of drunkenness in the mother, which has terrible results in infant mortality or life-long disease [...] that the moral and mental character of children is influenced by the action of alcohol in the mother, and greater misery thus caused than even by crippling or fatal disease."²⁴

Disillusioned temperance reformers of the mid- to late nineteenth century turned their backs on chronic drunkards and instead focused on the children of alcoholics who could yet be saved. An early issue of the *Band of Hope Review* (the Band of Hope was the offshoot of the temperance movement aimed at children) reported that in its experience, while it was very difficult to reclaim drunkards, it was easy to prevent people becoming drunks "if they never taste anything that can intoxicate."²⁵ Yet even this intrepid organisation found difficulty in the environment of the nether world where, as Lewis Shiman points out, "delayed gratification [...] had very little meaning for people who had little or no chance of collecting on the promises for to-morrow."²⁶ In a similar vein, Charles Booth states that a man stands no chance of respectability if his wife drinks. "It may be the woman who drags her family down. Marriage is a lottery, and child-bearing often leads to drink. What chance for a man to maintain respectability and hold up his head among his neighbours if he has a drunken wife at home, who sells the furniture and pawns his clothes?"²⁷

Abstinence, by contrast, is a virtue that is barely noticed among the "refined," but is the "most precious of moral distinctions" in the nether world (p. 57). In Chapter 6 we learn that the second Mrs. Hewett has little to recommend her in terms of domestic skills but does possess one virtue "which compensated for all that was lacking – a virtue merely negative among the refined, but in that other world the rarest and most precious of moral distinctions – she resisted the temptations of the public-house" (p. 57). Moreover on her deathbed in Chapter 21, the narrator makes it clear that Mrs. Hewett is instrumental in saving her husband John from "the despair of the drunkard" (p. 186) after Clara's disappearance.

But while Mrs. Hewett appears to be free of any temptation to drink, poor Pennyloaf is tortured with temptation and it is this tension that gives her character a subtle depth and interest that otherwise would be lacking. Pennyloaf's misery begins in earnest on her fateful wedding day when Bob,

in whom she rejoices because he “knew no craving for strong liquor” (p. 106), starts to drink excessively. He is “elated with beer and vanity” and “consumed with thirst he began to drink without counting the glasses” (p. 107).

Her misery continues unabated and by Chapter 15 she tells Jane of her fears as she sits in her squalid rented room with her listless children waiting for her errant husband to return. “I know what’ll be the hend of it ! I’ll go an’ do like mother does – I will ! I will ! I’ll put my ring away, an’ I’ll go an’ sit all night in the public-’ouse ! It’s what all the others does, an’ I’ll do the same. I often feel I’m a fool to go on like this. I don’t know what I live for. P’r’aps he’ll be sorry when I get run in like mother” (p. 132).

Jane is able to help save her from this fate by kind words and admonition in equal measure – words Pennyloaf was “learning to depend upon [...] for strength in her desolation. They did not excite her to much hopefulness, but there was a sustaining power in their sweet sincerity which made all the difference between despair tending to evil and the sigh of renewed effort” (p. 132).

It is Sidney who sums up Pennyloaf’s hopes, bleak as they are: “What chance had Pennyloaf of ever learning how to keep a decent home, and bring up her children properly ? How was *she* brought up ? The wonder is that there’s so much downright good in her [...] Suppose Pennyloaf behaved as badly as her mother does, who on earth would have the right to blame her ? But we can’t expect miracles ; so long as she lives decently, it’s the most that can be looked for” (p. 140).

Charles Booth expresses a similar pessimism when he refers to the time he took a lodging among the very poor and observed a hard-working man with a drunken wife. The daughters manage the domestic duties but one of them continually runs away and gets into trouble. “What chance of a respectable life had she ?” Booth asks.²⁸ Indeed, given the awareness of the plight of the children of drunken women, Pennyloaf’s abstinence is all the more remarkable, having grown up in a home where “money is wasted, children are ill-clad and ill-fed, homes are dirty and squalid [...] [money is] so misused as to purchase mental, moral and physical degradation and chaotic misery.”²⁹

William (“General”) Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, laments the helplessness of the children of drunken women in his 1890 publication *In Darkest England*. He quotes Bishop South’s concern that with drunkenness so prevalent among mothers “thousands of poor wretches” are “not so much born into this world as damned into it.”³⁰ General Booth describes

with horror and disgust the girl who is the “bastard of a harlot, born in a brothel, suckled on gin...” and the boy “begotten when both parents were besotted with drink, whose mothers saturated themselves with alcohol every day of their pregnancy, who may be said to have sucked in a taste for strong drink with their mother’s milk, and who were surrounded from childhood with opportunities and incitements to drink.”³¹ Their chances of escape are slim. “Even if they make a stand against it, the increasing pressure of exhaustion and of scanty food drives them back to the cup.” We should, Booth urges, pity the children, the “born slaves of the bottle, predestined to drunkenness from their mother’s womb.”³²

Yet Pennyloaf abstains from alcohol and Stephen shows no signs of drunkenness despite his daily allowance of beer at work. Both offer what little support they can to their mother in a filial loyalty and kindness that is generally lacking in the Peckover and Hewett households. “Stephen took things with much philosophy ; his mother would drink herself to death – what was there astonishing in that ? He himself had heart disease ; and surely enough would drop down dead one of these days ; the one doom was no more to be quarrelled with than the other” (p. 249).

Poor Stephen even blames himself for his mother’s latest alcoholic episode because he gave her money to pay the rent. When Bob Hewett seeks a hiding place at Shooter’s Gardens he notices the lack of furniture – never very plentiful in the Candys’ single room. Stephen explains that “they took it for rent. I thought we didn’t owe nothing, but mother told me she’d paid when she hadn’t” (p. 341). He nods towards the prostrate form of Mrs. Candy on the floor. “I couldn’t say nothing to her [...] she was sorry for it, an’ you can’t ask no more. It was my fault trustin’ her with the money to pay...” (p. 341).

This is the last winter for Shooter’s Gardens, which is scheduled for demolition the following year. It is also, one suspects, the last winter for Maria Candy. “Rage for drink was with her reaching the final mania. Useless to bestow anything upon her ; straightway it or its value passed over the counter of the beershop in Rosoman Street” (p. 248). And all the while Stephen’s paltry income as a pot-boy depends on the drink trade and on the very weakness of people like his own mother. His job is indeed “the curse of curses” (p. 343) – an allusion to the curse God places on Adam in Genesis that forces him to labour all his days. Yet Stephen is not resentful – a character trait that virtually destroys Clem Peckover and Clara Hewett – and will not abandon his mother, “though to continue living with her meant hunger and cold and yet worse evils.” His thin frame is “supported chiefly

on the three pints of liquor which he was allowed every day” – so the alcohol that feeds him is the same alcohol that destroys his mother’s sanity. Like a patient beast of burden he is a “good-hearted animal” and would have made “a very tolerable human being, had he had fair-play” (p. 340).

The outward appearance of Shooter’s Gardens reflects the physical and moral degeneration within. “The walls stood in a perpetual black sweat ; a mouldy reek came from the open doorways ; the beings that passed in and out seemed soaked with grimy moisture, puffed into distortions, hung about with rotting garments” (p. 248). This recalls Mearns description of “these rotten and reeking tenements” in *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*: “Walls and ceiling are black with the accretions of filth [...] It is exuding through cracks in the boards overhead ; it is running down the walls ; it is everywhere.”³³

For Stephen an early death is inevitable but not so for his sister. Though fate piles every obstacle in her way, the Cinderella-like Pennyloaf emerges at the end of the novel a free woman following the providential death of her husband. She goes on to find work, friendship and a home for herself and her remaining child at Mrs. Todd’s second-hand clothes shop. With delightful irony and unconventional plotting it is to Pennyloaf that Gissing brings Jane for consolation “if ever life seemed a little too hard” (p. 386). In Pennyloaf’s new home Jane finds a place where the “laughter was merry” (p. 387). The two young women are now equals and mutually supportive. Pennyloaf is not yet free from depression brought on by the misery of the past, but in Jane’s company she “found the dark thoughts slip away insensibly” and the once timid waif at last finds her voice. “She talked, she talked – where was there such a talker as Pennyloaf nowadays, when once she began ?” (p. 388) and while she does not escape, nevertheless she finds a sanctuary from the nether world in her “humble security” (p. 391).

¹George Gissing, *The Nether World*, p. 186 (1889, repr. 1999, Oxford, New York: Oxford World’s Classics, Oxford University Press). References to subsequent quotations from the novel are given in the text between brackets.

²J. Mortimer-Granville, *Alcohol: Its Use and Abuse* (London: Walter Scott Limited, c. 1895, bound in *Temperance Pamphlets*, Volume I), p. 39.

³Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 16.

⁴Brian Harrison, *Drink & the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (first published in England by Faber & Faber, n.d.; repr. 1971, University of Pittsburgh Press), p. 407.

⁵Ruth Capers McKay, *George Gissing and his Critic Frank Swinnerton* (Philadelphia: University Press, 1933), quoted in Pierre Coustillas, *Collected Articles on George Gissing* (Frank Cass & Co., Ltd.), p. 29.

⁶Arthur Morrison, *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894 ; repr. 1997, Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers), p. 15.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, Act I, sc. I, lines 1-4 (1607 ; repr. 1983, Harmondsworth, New York: Penguin Books), p. 51.

⁹J. D. Thomas, "The Public Purposes of George Gissing," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (September, 1953), p. 119.

¹⁰Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883), in S. Ledger and R. Luckhurst, eds., *The Fin de Siècle, A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 27.

¹¹Alexander M'Dougall, *Drink and Poverty* (Manchester: United Kingdom Alliance, c. 1886), p. 13 (published in *Temperance Pamphlets*, vol. 3).

¹²James Whyte, *The Cost of our Drinking Custom* (Manchester: John Heywood, 1890), p. 11.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1895) in S. Ledger and R. Luckhurst, eds., *The Fin de Siècle, A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 13.

¹⁵M'Dougall, p. 13.

¹⁶Walter Moxon, MD, "Alcohol and Individuality: or Why did He Become a Drunkard?" (in *The Alcohol Question*, Sir James Paget and others, London: Strahan and Company Limited, 1879), p. 100.

¹⁷Nordau, *Degeneration*, in S. Ledger and R. Luckhurst, eds., *The Fin de Siècle*, p. 16.

¹⁸Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* (London: Virago Press Limited ; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 33.

¹⁹Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, Vol. I (1889 ; repr. 1892, London: Macmillan Co.), p. 43.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Moxon, "Alcohol and Individuality," p. 136.

²²Robert L. Patten, *George Cruikshank: A Reevaluation* (1974, repr. 1992, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), Fig. 25.

²³Mortimer-Granville, *Alcohol: Its Use and Abuse*, p. 39.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁵*Band of Hope Review*, November 1852, quoted in Lewis Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England*, p. 135.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 148.

²⁷Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, Vol. I, p. 161.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁹James Whyte, *The Socialist Propaganda and The Drink Difficulty* (Manchester: United Kingdom Alliance, 1894), p. 7.

³⁰General Booth, *In Darkest England and The Way Out* (London: International Headquarters of the Salvation Army, 1890), p. 47.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*

³³Mearns, *The Bitter Cry*, p. 29.

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“Across the Bidassoa” A Forgotten Essay by Morley Roberts

[Morley Roberts wrote about Gissing and his works on many occasions, his first piece being apparently the essay he contributed to H. H. Champion’s short-lived *Novel Review* in May 1892, the last being certainly an unpublished typescript, part of “Farewell to Letters,” which is only known through the copy of it held by the University of Pennsylvania. Gissing’s presence is also felt through a number of Roberts’s writings, occasionally texts in which his friend’s name, for reasons that can easily be guessed, does not appear. An example can be found in a collection of autobiographical essays which form a travel narrative of sorts, *A Tramp’s Note-Book* (London: F. V. White & Co., 1904). The book is divided into thirty-one chapters and some of them concern datable episodes in Roberts’s life before Gissing’s death. For instance, a paragraph in the very first chapter, which is entitled “A Watch-Night Service in San Francisco,” reads like a footnote to *The Western Avernus* (Smith, Elder, 1887), with some self-pity added. In “Books in the Great West,” after significant allusions to Walter Savage Landor’s *Imaginary Conversations*, notably “Aesop and Rhodope,” which Gissing like Roberts, was so fond of quoting, and to Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, we come across this passage: “Another time I rode into Santa Rosa, Sonoma County, California, and, while buying stores, saw Gissing’s *Demos* open in front of me. It was anonymous, but I knew it for his, and I read it as I rode slowly homeward down the Sonoma Valley, the Valley of the Seven Moons.” Or again the chapter about “A Visit to R. L. Stevenson” is easy enough to date thanks to an essay that Roberts wrote on the same subject and to a passage in Volume V of Gissing’s *Collected Letters*, shortly before Stevenson’s death. However, to Gissing readers the chapter in which the novelist’s presence is most strongly felt is “Across the Bidassoa,” that is, the river which, on the last twelve kilometres of its course, serves as a frontier between France and Spain. But Gissing is never named. The nearest we get to him is when Roberts mentions St. Jean-de-Luz, which is so close to Ciboure, where Gissing, Gabrielle and Mme Fleury actually lived, and where he visited them in late January 1903. Were they the “exiled friends” to whom he alluded? Roberts aptly conveys the local atmosphere, which of course, despite material progress, remains very much the same; he gives a picturesque description of the Basque *passeur* who poled him across the Bidassoa, but he betrays his poor grasp of place names in French and Spanish when he misspells La Rhune and Fuenterrabia, not to speak of Emperor Charles Quint, King of Spain Charles V or Carlos Quinto. But does it matter? To anybody who is familiar with the Basque country, whether French or Spanish, and the Landes, that Gissing himself vividly described when he was living in Arcachon, Roberts’s essay is worth reading. It is easy to visualize the “uncounted millions of slender sea-pines,” standing in “serried rows” that cover the plain, easy also to imagine Roberts and Gissing discussing *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, then just published, each with his copy in hand, the one presented

on the occasion of this visit which was to find its way to the Brotherton Library, the other, through Gabrielle Fleury and her cousin Denise Le Mallier, being now on the shelves of the present writer.— Pierre Coustillas]

I came out of London's mirk and mist and the clouds of the Channel and the rollers of the Bay to find sunshine in the Gironde, though the east wind was cool in Bordeaux's big river. And then even in Bordeaux I discovered that fog was over-common; brief sunshine yielded to thick mist, and the city of wine was little less depressing than English Manchester. But though I spent a night there I was bound south and hoped for better things close by the border of Spain. And truly I found them, though the way there through the Landes is as melancholy as any great city of sad inhabitants.

The desolation of the Landes is an ordered, a commercial desolation. Once the whole surface of the district bore nothing but a scanty herbage. The soil is sand and an iron cement, or "hard-pan," below the sand. Here uncounted millions of slender sea-pines cover the plain; they stand in serried rows, as regular as a hop-garden, gloomy and without the sweet wildness of nature. And every pine is bitterly scarred, so that it may bleed its gum for traders. When the plantations are near their full growth they are cut down, stacked to season slowly, and the trees finish their existence as mine timbers deep under the earth.

After seventy miles of a southward run there are signs that the Landes are not so everlasting and spacious as they seem. To the south-east, at Buglose, where St Vincent de Paul was born, the Pyrenees show far and faint and blue on the horizon. And then suddenly the River Adour appears, and a country which was English. Dax was ours for centuries, and so was Bayonne, whose modern citadel has had a rare fate for any place of strength. It has never been taken; not even Wellington and his Peninsular veterans set foot within its bastions.

This is the country of the Basques, that strange, persistent race of which nothing is known. Their history is more covered by ancient clouds than that of the Celts; their tongue has no cousin in the world, though in structure it is like that of the North-American Indians. I met some of them later, but so far know no more than two words of their language.

The wind was cool at St Jean de Luz, but the sun was bright and the sea thundered on the beach and the battered breakwaters. To the east and south are the Pyrenees — lower summits, it is true, but bold and fine in outline. The dominant peak, being the first of the chain, is Larhune (a Basque word, not French), where English blood was spilt when Clauzel held it for Napoleon against the English. Further to the south, and across the Bidassoa, in

Spain, rises the sharp ridge of the Jaisquivel, beneath which lies Fuentarabia. Yonder by Irun is the abrupt cliff of Las Tres Coronas, three crowns of rock. Here one is in the south-east of the Bay, where France and Spain run together, and the sea, under the dominion of the prevailing south-westers, is rarely at peace with the land. To the northward, but out of sight, lies windy Biarritz ; to the south is blood-stained, battered and renewed San Sebastian, a name that recalls many deeds of heroism and many of shame. The horrors of its siege and taking might make one cold even in sunlight. But between us and its new city lies the Bidassoa. Here, at St Jean de Luz, is the Nivelle flowing past Ciboure. The river was once familiar to us in despatches. The whole country even yet smells of ancient war. For here lies the great western road to Spain. And more than once it has been the road to Paris. It is a path of rising and falling empire.

During my few days at St Jean de Luz I had foregathered with some exiled friends, walked to quiet Ascaïn, and regretted I lacked the time even to attain the summit of so small a mountain as Larhune, and then, desiring for once to set foot in Spain, took train to Hendaye. This is the last town in France. Across the Bidassoa rose the quaint roofs and towers of old Fuentarabia, the Fontarabie of the French. I hired an eager Basque to row me across the river, then running seaward at the last of the ebb.

The day was splendid and mild. There was no cloud in the sky, not a wreath of mist upon the mountains. The river was a blue that verged on green ; its broad sand glowed golden in the sun ; to seaward the amethystine waters of the Atlantic heaved and glittered. On the far cliffs they burst in lifting spray. The hills wore the fine faint blue of atmosphere ; the wind was very quiet. This seemed at last like peace. I let my hands feel the cool waters of the river and soaked my soul in the waters of peace.

And yet my bold Basque chattered as he stood at the bows and poled me with a blunted oar across the river shallows. He told me proudly that he had the three languages, that he was all at home with French and Spanish and Basque. He was intelligent within due limits ; he at any rate knew how to extract francs from an Englishman. That generosity which consists in buying interested civility as well as help or transport with an extra fifty centimes is indeed but a wise and calculated waste. It occurred to me that he might solve a question that puzzled me. Were the Basques united as a race, or were their sympathies French or Spanish ? After considering how I should put it, I said, --

“Mon ami, est-ce que vous êtes plus Basque que Français, ou plus Français que Basque ?”

He taught me a lesson in simple psychology, for he stopped poling and stared at me for a long minute. Then he scratched his head and a light came into his eyes.

“Mais, monsieur, je suis un Basque Français !”

My fine distinction was beyond him, and it took me not a little indirect questioning to discover that he was certainly more French than Basque. He presently denounced the Spanish Basques in good round terms, and incidentally showed me that there must be a very considerable difference in their respective dialects. For he complained that the Spanish Basques spoke so fast that it was hard to understand them.

He put me ashore at last on a mud flat and accompanied me to the Fonda Miramar, where a bright and pretty waitress hurried, after the fashion of Spaniards, to such an extent that she got me a simple lunch in no more than half an hour. My Spanish is far worse even than my French, but in spite of that we carried on an animated conversation in French and English, Basque and Spanish. At lunch my talk grew more fluent and Mariquita went more deeply into matters. She desired to know what I thought of the Basques, of whom she was one, and a sudden flicker of the deceitful imagination set me inventing. I told her that I was a Basque myself, though I was also an Englishman. She exclaimed at this. She had never heard of English Basques. How was it I did not speak it ? This was a sore point with me. I assured her of the shameful fact that the English Basques had lost their own tongue ; they were degenerate. I had some thoughts of learning it in order to re-introduce it into England. As soon as Mariquita had mastered this astounding story she hurried to the kitchen, and as I heard her relating something with great excitement, I have little doubt that a legend of English Basques is now well on its way past historic doubt. Leaving her to consider the news I had brought, I went out with my boatman to view the old town. I found it quaint and individual and lovely.

A man who has seen much of the world must hold some places strangely and essentially beautiful. My own favourite spots are Auckland, N. Z. ; the upper end of the Lake of Geneva ; Funchal in Madeira ; the valley of the Columbia at Golden City and the valley of the Eden from Barras in England. To these I can now add Fuentarabia, the Pyrenees and the Bidasoa. I stood upon the roof of the old ruined palace of Charles Le Quint, and on every point of the compass the view had most peculiar and wonderful qualities. Beneath me was the increasing flood of the frontier river: at my very feet lay the narrow and picturesque street cañons of the ancient town ; to the south was Irun in the shelter and shadow of the mountains ; east-

south-east rose the pyramidal summit of Larhune ; the west was the sharp ridge of the brown Jaisquivel which hid San Sebastian ; to the north was the rolling Bay ; and right to the south the triple crown of Las Tres Coronas cut the sky sharply. Right opposite me Hendaye burnt redly in the glow of the southern sun. In no place that I can remember have I seen two countries, three towns, a range of mountains, a big river and the sea at one time. And there was not a spot in view that had not been stained with the blood of Englishmen.

But now there were no echoes of war in Fuentarabia. Peace lay over its dark homes and within its ancient walls.

Book Review

Bouwe Postmus, ed., *A Garland for Gissing*, Amsterdam-New York, NY: Rodopi, 2001. Pp. vi + 290.

In her contribution to this collection, “Gissing and his Japanese Readers,” Fumio Hojoh explains the popularity in Japan of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* in the early twentieth century. She mentions its praise of natural beauty, especially in terms of seasonal changes, its reverence for the past and its meditative tone. She notes, though, that during the militaristic 1920s published versions in Japan omitted those sections in which Ryecroft expresses his disgust for school drill. Although the book is now largely forgotten in Japan, Fumio Hojoh reports that recently a section has been included in an anthology for students: the passage chosen is Chapter 19 of *Spring*, concerned with conscription and drill.

Nothing could more neatly illustrate the dependence of literary reputation on cultural and political context. And it raises the question of what, in our society, we currently highlight or suppress in authors. *A Garland for Gissing* is an anthology of essays arising from the International George Gissing Conference held in Amsterdam in 1999. Bringing together critics from many different backgrounds, it offers valuable insights into the current state of Gissing scholarship.

The first point to note is the sheer range of responses. In his characteristically lucid and learned opening chapter, “Gissing the European,” Pierre Coustillas states that Gissing’s works have been translated into ten European languages. In this volume Anglo-American approaches predominate,

the majority of contributors being from Britain or the United States, but there are also papers from France, Italy, Canada and Japan ; and the editor is from the Netherlands. The 1999 conference was genuinely international: the collection of essays based on it confirms Gissing's breadth of appeal.

Equally diverse are the critical approaches adopted. Interestingly, the biographical orientation common in Gissing criticism from Frank Swinerton to John Halperin has now substantially diminished, though what it is still capable of, when supported by original research and sharpened by a scent for literary implications, is admirably demonstrated in Anthony Curtis's article on Gissing and the Lushingtons. Traditional practical criticism is also in evidence in Russell Price and Francesco Badolato's close reading of Gissing's story "A Daughter of the Lodge" – an illuminating and knowledgeable exercise, even though some of its clarifications might be redundant for English readers still all too familiar with the idioms of class. Modern theory, by contrast (with the exception of feminism), seems to have made little impact on Gissing's critics. The noticeable exception is Christine Huguette, who deploys narratological terminology in her metatextual reading of *Born in Exile*. Similarly, though she never mentions him explicitly, Emanuela Ettorre (in her chapter on *Denzil Quarrier*) is clearly aware of the work of Greimas. Surprisingly, perhaps, only one contributor – Simon James in "Experiments in Realism: How to Read a George Gissing novel" – relates Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic to Gissing's often multi-voiced fiction.

The approaches that do predominate are sociological and historical. In "Gissing's Criticism of Dickens" Michael Cronin reminds us of Gissing's insistence on "the importance of viewing Dickens and his novels within their historical context." Most of the critics gathered here apply the same priority to Gissing. The volume musters a wealth of material on all aspects of late Victorian culture. Following the footnotes, one could find relevant reading on employment, professionalism and domestic service ; advertising, consumerism and mass culture ; prostitution, street walking and sexual morality ; cities, suburbs, mobs and crowds ; Ruskinism, Darwinism and education. The effect of this density of documentation is to root Gissing's fiction inextricably in the activities and arguments of his period.

At the same time there continues to be radical disagreement as to what attitudes his fiction adopts towards the world it evokes. As John Sloan points out in "Gissing and Hogarth," critics keep returning to "the outstanding problem of Gissing's moral viewpoint." Broadly, the critics here are divided between those who discern clear patterns of value and those who

find unresolved contradiction – the latter quality itself being regarded as either regrettable or commendable. For Sloan, Gissing (like Hogarth) is a moralist, though a complex and ambiguous one. For James, it is clear that Gissing’s fiction “does not square deserts with reward.” And for Raymond J. Baubles, Jr, Gissing’s indictment of moral bankruptcy is not only unmistakable but “eerily prescient” of our own era. But for Lucy Crispin, Gissing’s protagonists, torn by contradictory needs and beliefs, embody “the mutability and obscurity of the self.” And for William Greenslade, Gissing’s fiction, despite its “rhetoric of disenchantment,” manifests “a post-modern recognition of the multifarious play of oppositional cultural energies.”

The volume also offers a range of answers to the question of Gissing’s intertextual relations. Can his work be most profitably linked to New Woman fiction of the 1890s, sensation fiction of the 1860s, modernism, aestheticism, classicism or realism? And what writers can be fruitfully affiliated with him – Turgenev, Meredith, Trollope, Larkin? Plainly, different facets of Gissing’s work catch the light according to which figures are placed in proximity to him.

As with most collections of this kind, the multifarious voices sometimes supplement and sometimes correct one another. Liz Hedgecock’s view that Nancy Lord (in *In the Year of Jubilee*) is “equipped with a good education” looks less plausible in the light of evidence adduced later by Sandra R. Woods and David Glover. Similarly, Lewis D. Moore’s praise of Agnes Brissenden (in *The Odd Women*) as “a loftier female version than the general run of modern women” is sharply qualified by Arlene Young’s characterisation of Agnes as “a cipher who can fill the role of the perfect Victorian wife.” This is not to say that the pieces by Hedgecock and Moore aren’t packed with useful perceptions. It is rather that critical self-adjustment is part of the volume’s diversity.

Nevertheless, despite the stimulating range of contributors, readings and critical methods, certain clear tendencies are discernible in contemporary approaches to Gissing. One, admittedly crude measure of current interests would be the number of citations for each of Gissing’s novels in the index. At the top of the list comes *The Odd Women* followed by *New Grub Street*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *Born in Exile* and *The Whirlpool*. Way down are *The Nether World* and *Thyrza* – the latter rating only two mentions, the same number as *Sleeping Fires*. What these figures broadly indicate is something apparent from the book itself: a large-scale shift of critical attention from the “working-class” novels of the 1880s to the “women and marriage”

novels of the 1890s. The distinction is too stark, of course, since class and gender interweave in Gissing ; but the tendency is unmistakable.

In the Year of Jubilee is rapidly joining *The Odd Women* as a source of fascination for modern critics. So too, in a lesser way, is *Eve's Ransom*, the same passages from which are quoted by Maria Teresa Chialant in her sociologically sophisticated essay, "The Feminization of the City in Gissing's Fiction," and Arlene Young in her equally striking "Eve Madeley and Rhoda Nunn: Gissing's Doubled Enigma." Not all readers are likely to accept Young's surprising contention that *Eve's Ransom* provides a blissful, fairy-tale ending, close to "wanton sentimentalism" and without ironic intention (nor would Gissing, to judge by his comments to Bertz). Yet Young's piece is salutary in revealing how this novella might look if read from Eve's viewpoint, not Hilliard's.

All readers will have their own favourite chapters depending, partly, on their prior interests. There are illuminating pieces by Barbara Rawlinson (on Gissing's short stories), Sandra R. Woods and Emma Liggins (on female education and female independence in Gissing's fiction of the 1890s), Stephen Ogden (on Darwinian scepticism in *Born in Exile*) and Jacob Korg, who contributes a short, elegant essay on "Gissing and Ancient Rome." My personal favourites are Constance Harsh's subtle and acute contribution, "Women with Ideas: Gissing's *The Odd Women* and the New Woman Novel," and Diana Maltz's brilliant chapter "George Gissing as Thwarted Aesthete" (even though this recycles the *canard* that Alma commits suicide in *The Whirlpool*). The standards of editing in this volume are high: factual errors are few and far between and Bouwe Postmus's introduction is typically cogent and fair-minded. The volume may not be "a garland for Gissing" in the sense of an uncritical celebration, but the essays gathered here do pay him the compliment of sustained and intelligent attention.

David Grylls, University of Oxford

Notes and News

Gissing news is becoming more and more international and it concerns people, books and places. Wulfhard Stahl reports that a German translation of "Comrades in Arms" was published under the title "Waffengefärten" in 1992. The volume in which it is included is entitled *Love Stories: Geschichten von Liebe, Erotik und Eifersucht* (Munich: Wilhelm Heyne Ver-

lag). The translator is Charlotte Franke. The English volume, published under the imprint of Michael O'Mara Books Ltd in 1990, was merely entitled *Love Stories*, Lynn Curtis being responsible for the selection, Rosamunde Pilcher for the introduction.

John Keahey, the author of *A Sweet and Glorious Land*, an account of his journeys in Gissing's footsteps in the deep Italian South, published a new book in March, *Venice Against the Sea: A City Besieged* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books: St Martin's Press). The title is explicit, as are most of the 16 black and white illustrations. Gissing apparently never refers to the haunting subject dealt with by his admirer. Venice is permanently in Italian news. *Italia Nostra*, the bimonthly, beautifully illustrated review of the eponymous society, devoted its number 376 (July-August 2001) to the problem of the survival of the city. The leading article was entitled "La battaglia continua."

A French translator has drawn our notice to a long, unexpected quotation from *The Nether World* ("The economy prevailing [...] forbidding walls," p. 274 of the one-volume Smith, Elder editions) in *Modern Architecture since 1900*, by William J. R. Curtis (Phaidon, 1996; previous editions 1982, 1987), p. 35. An impressive, attractively produced, study of the subject.

New foreign correspondents tell us about their projects and activities. Mr. Ying Ying, a student at the Zhejiang Education Institute, Hangzhou, China, is writing a thesis on Gissing's attitude towards poverty and the poor. Ms. Michou Lamprini, of Athens, announces that after reading *New Grub Street*, *Sleeping Fires* and *The Odd Women*, she has decided to translate the last named novel. Professor Francesco Marroni has published a number of critical essays under the title *Disarmonie vittoriane* (Roma: Carroci, formerly La Nuova Italia). One of these essays is devoted to *The Whirlpool*. Professor Marroni's former book, *Silverdale*, in one of whose stories we are introduced to fictional adventures of Gissing, Nell and Bertz (see this journal, July 2000, pp. 34-36), has just been translated into Brazilian under the title *O Ouro de Sevilha*. A new collection of short stories by the same author has reached us, a 170-page volume entitled *Brughiere*, containing five short stories with English and Irish settings (Scheda editore, Viale Stazione 177 - 72015 Fasano (Br), ISBN 88-8229-319X, €12.00.

Jacob Korg is writing a long article for the centenary of Gissing's death next year. It will appear in the appropriate annual volume of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, a multivolume work in which Gissing has already appeared on three occasions. A propos of the paragraph in our April number about the discovery of a televised version of "A Poor Gentleman," Korg comments that, short of finding an earlier adaptation, we can refer to the "October 1983 number of the *Gissing Newsletter* which reported that Jane Weiner, an American producer, in 1981 proposed to produce *The Odd Women* as a television series directed by Inger Aby under the auspices of The Odd Women Production Company. The proposal for this production contained an introduction, descriptions of the characters, a script by Laurette Harris consisting of dialogue and stage directions, and a plot outline for the remainder of the series. The introduction was to give the salient facts of Gissing's life, to outline his opinions about women, social morality and the responsibility of the writer, and to describe the effects of the Industrial Revolution on the social position of women. The proposal read in part: 'The thematic and dramatic wealth of this novel makes it a prime story for interpretation through the visual media [...] the topic is still so timely, so accessible, and so compelling to men and women alike, that it should easily acquire a viewership worth the effort and expense involved.' As far as is known, this television series was never produced. However, it was no doubt convictions of this kind that led to the successful stage dramatization of *The Odd Women* by Michael Meyer, performed in Manchester in 1992."

A new project worthy of the attention of all scholars is the *Literary Encyclopedia* to which Robert Clark devoted a most informative article in the *European English Messenger*, volume XI/1, Spring 2002, pp. 73-75. The *Literary Encyclopedia* at <<http://www.LitEncyc.com>> is, Clark writes, an enormous co-operative publishing enterprise which has been growing on the internet since 1999. As far as Gissing is concerned, nothing was done until recently, but David Grylls has just contributed a 2,500-word biography and he is preparing entries on *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile*, which will be ready at the end of the summer.

A recent contact with a Moscow antiquarian bookdealer (e-mail: anni@orc.ru), has had some positive and unexpected results: it would seem that besides *Thyrza*, which was published, in book form only, in 1893, *New Grub Street* and *A Life's Morning* were reissued as volumes after serial-

ization. However, tracing copies of the last two titles is a feat of which no collector has yet boasted.

Anthony Petyt reports that “on 11 April there was a programme on BBC2 called ‘When Heroes Die’ – the remarkable story of 100 Norfolk public schoolboys, known as the ‘golden lads,’ who gave their lives during World War 1. The school in question was Gresham’s School at Holt. The programme was really about the writing of a book of the same title by a schoolmistress who had lost her own daughter at the age of about 15. It was a very strange programme and was more about the feelings of the author than the fate of the schoolboys. It did not mention Walter Gissing, but his name was quite visible on the shots of the war memorial.” In the book (*When Heroes Die*, by Sue Smart, published by Breedon Books, ISBN 1 85983 256 3), an illustrated volume, Walter Gissing is simply mentioned as dying in 1916. No account is given of his parentage. A photograph shows the war memorial.

Two groups of travellers visited the Gissing Centre in Wakefield in May. Kate Taylor held a seminar on *Born in Exile* and a reading group came from London.

The *Guardian* for 12 April carried an interesting advertisement for Sarah Waters’s favourite Victorian novels. The “top tens” were *Jane Eyre*, *Great Expectations*, *Vanity Fair*, *New Grub Street*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Our Mutual Friend*, *Dracula*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Woman in White*. Gissing’s masterpiece was – fairly enough – described as follows: “A devastating study of the late Victorian literary industry, *New Grub Street* still has an unnerving modern ring. It’s also a kind of anti-romance: Gissing was uncompromising in his analysis of gender relations and his exposé of the withering impact of economics upon love.” Sarah Waters is the author of three thrillers set in Victorian London.

Debbie McDonald informs us that her website on Clara Collet is now to be found at <clara-collet.co.uk>. She is undoubtedly the most knowledgeable scholar about Gissing’s best woman friend.

Our October number will contain a full account of recent Gissing activities in Calabria, notably the unveiling of a plaque commemorating his stay in Crotona.

Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *The Nether World*, Oxford University Press (Oxford World's Classics), [2002]. Third impression in the new format. £6.99.

George Gissing, Penguin Classics, [2002]. Seventeenth impression since 1968, according to the publishers. In fact this is the eighteenth. £7.99.

Mauro F. Minervino (ed.), *George Gissing a Catanzaro: Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Catanzaro 23 ottobre 1999*. Published in May 2002 by the Biblioteca comunale, Catanzaro. 151 pages. Contents: Saluto delle autorità: Sergio Abramo, Sindaco di Catanzaro ; Aldo Costa, Assessore alla Cultura del Comune di Catanzaro ; Mauro Francesco Minervino, "Mr. Paparazzo, I presume" ; David Grylls, "Gissing and Italy" ; Bouwe Postmus, "An Exile's Homecoming" ; Pierre Coustillas, "Gissing in Catanzaro" ; Francesco Badolato, "Gissing, Paparazzo et la Dolce Vita di Fellini." 37 illustrations. Price unknown. Orders should be addressed to the Biblioteca comunale, Filippo de Nobili, 88100 Catanzaro, CZ, Italy.

Aurelio Fulciniti, *Catanzaro Ieri e Oggi* [Yesterday and To-day]: Attualità dei ricordi di viaggiatori ed osservatori tra '800 e '900, Catanzaro: Tele-selling, via Largo Prigione, 7, 88100 Catanzaro, 2001. 128 pages. The book contains seven chapters, devoted to Duret de Tavel, Luigi Settembrini, François Lenormant, Caterina Pigorini-Beri, Gissing, Norman Douglas and Giuseppe Isnardi. Many old illustrations convey the atmosphere of life in Catanzaro about the time Gissing visited the city, and there is a photograph of the plaque which commemorates his stay at the Albergo Centrale. Lire 20,000, now €10.33.

Articles, reviews, etc.

The British Library Catalogue of the Ashley Manuscripts, London: The British Library, 1999. Vol. I, Descriptions ; Vol. II, Index. Contains a complete bibliography of the autograph material of Gissing interest in T. J. Wise's library.

Peter Newbolt, *William Tinsley (1831-1902), "Speculative Publisher": A Commentary*, with a checklist of books published by Tinsley Brothers

1854-1888, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001. Contains references to Gissing and *New Grub Street*.

Andrew Dowling, *Manliness and the Male Novelist in Victorian Literature*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001. Chapter 6, pp. 96-115, is entitled "Masculine Failure in Gissing's *New Grub Street*." Dowling writes that Gissing is a proto-fascist. A preposterous accusation with a boomerang effect. Its author, let it be noted, is research manager in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Technology in Sydney. By attacking Gissing and one of his best commentators, Robert Shafer, he has placed himself in the same category as William McFee, Douglas Goldring and John Carey. He has done his publishers little credit.

Clemente Angotti, "Il fascino del 'Grand Tour' allogia in quell'Albergo," *Calabria* (the monthly review of the Regional Council), February 2002, pp. 50-53. With a photo of the entrance of the Albergo Italia, Crotona. In the same number is an article by Teresa Liguori: "Il parco 'By the Ionian Sea' salverà lo storico albergo." With Rothenstein's portrait of Gissing.

Luigi Abbramo, "Chiederà alla Soprintendenza di tutelare la destinazione d'uso dell'albergo. Italia nostra per il 'Concordia': L'attuale 'Italia' ospitò Gissing, Douglas e Lenormant," *La Gazzetta del Sud*, 6 April 2002, p. 26. With an old photograph of Crotona, Piazza Vittoria.

Christine Huguot, "George Gissing et la 'nouvelle Bible,'" *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, April 2002, pp. 107-17.

P. N. Furbank, "Blowing a discordant gourd," *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 May 2002, p. 36. A review of *Ford Madox Ford: Critical Essays*, ed. Max Saunders and Richard Stang, Manchester, Carcanet, 2002. "He [Ford] blames recent English novelists, like Gissing and Arnold Bennett, for their depressingness. They have missed the point, that 'the whole concern of art is the telling of a good tale in a rattling sort of way.'" A hopelessly dated view of the art of the novel, which amounts to placing the trashy novels of Morley Roberts above those of Gissing.

Alfonso Barone, "I viaggiatori stranieri e l'archeologia in Calabria," *Calabria Sconosciuta*, no. 93, April-June 2002, pp. 63-66. The author frequently refers to Gissing.

Francesco Badolato, "Una poesia giovanile di George Gissing: Italia," *Pick Wick* (Besana in Brianza), July-September 2002, p. 14. Text in English, with Italian translation.

William Baker and Kenneth Womack, eds., *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, London: Greenwood Press, 2002. In M. Clare Loughlin-Chow's chapter, "The Sociological Contexts of Victorian Fiction," pp. 77-79 are about Gissing, mainly *Demos* and *The Nether World*.

John Peck and Martin Coyle, *A Brief History of English Literature*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002. For Gissing, mainly *New Grub Street* and *The Odd Women*, see pp. 213-16.

Sandra Kemp, Charlotte Mitchell and David Trotter, *The Oxford Companion to Edwardian Fiction*, Oxford University Press, 2002. A revised paperback reprint of the original edition (1997). The volume contains entries on the Gissing brothers as well as on *Our Friend the Charlatan*, *Henry Ryecroft*, *Will Warburton* and *The House of Cobwebs*, but not on *Veranilda*. George also appears in about a dozen entries about fellow writers, historical romance, regional fiction, etc.

Tailpiece

Here I am, between the Pyrenees & the sea, a few miles from the frontier of Spain, & here I hope to stay till the end of *next* June, when, if all go well, I must visit England. Do not imagine southern heat, though it is so far south ; the climate is that of Devon, without mist. Change of weather about every 36 hours ; much cloud ; frequent rain—yet *no* dampness ; occasionally a day of extraordinary brilliance. The flora is that of the south of England, & very rich. In addition we have grapes & figs, & a few flowering trees, such as magnolias & mimosas—very fine. [...] I manage to work from 9 to 12 every morning ; the rest of the day I teach myself Spanish. I have already got through 8 chapters of *Don Quixote* in the original, & find it vastly enjoyable. Thus is one more ambition of mine in way of realization. This Basque people is very interesting. Strange to hear them talking a language older than any other in Europe, & of absolutely unknown origin. It is *agglutinative*—in that akin to Chinese. Most of them speak French as well, (in Spain, of course, Spanish) but there seems no decay of their own tongue.

Letter from George to Algernon Gissing, from Ciboure, 27 July 1902