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

Commonplace Book

Roman Celebrations of Christmas Seen in Perspective Gissing’s Essay “Christmas on the Capitol”

[Gissing’s interest in journalism was at no time of a compelling nature. In so far as he was aware that his father contributed to the Wakefield Liberal weekly called *The Free Press*, he must early on have realized that it could easily degenerate into controversy and that anonymity could serve as a cloak for evil intentions, a permanent threat to the expression of opinions which had to be delivered quickly and could not benefit from the proverbial advantages of reflection. No information is available about the reasons why the articles he wrote for the Russian monthly *Vyestnik Evropy* ceased appearing after two years, but it is not improbable that further journalism was a prospect that the author could not bring himself to contemplate. Two years before both John Morley and Frederic Harrison had with a purblind lack of understanding of the young man blamed him for ceasing to contribute to the *Pall Mall Gazette* once he had had a successful trial run with his (by now well-known) “Notes on Social Democracy.” And it is hardly necessary to repeat that in the early years of his career as a novelist he had to ask Smith, Elder to stop sending him reviews of his novels, most of which he regarded as incompetent, shallow and unperceptive. In later years it might seem that Gissing relented when Blackie and Son published his critical study of Dickens, but the abundant reviews of the book in the author’s papers at Yale owe their presence to Colles’s subscription to a press-cutting agency, a decision alien to Gissing’s wishes. So the fact remains that Gissing was keen neither on writing for newspapers and periodicals nor on reading what journalists might have to say of his works.

The case of “Christmas on the Capitol” is an exception—of which the author was undubitably conscious, since his first reaction to Tillotson’s request was negative. However, writing a 5,000 word article on his Roman experiences was sorely tempting, his knowledge of Roman history, his familiarity with the topography, past and present, of the city, his fluency in Italian and the Latin from which it derived—all these aspects of Gissing’s culture were as many assets and spoke in favour of a positive reply to Tillotson. Writing his piece in London once he had completed his Continental journey in late February 1889 proved difficult at first but by mid-March the essay lay ready on his desk. It proved to be a valuable opportunity to voice his opinions about various aspects of Italian life, a subject to which he was to return on many occasions, notably in *The Emancipated*, *By the Ionian Sea* and, from a historical point of view, in *Veranilda*. Juggling with past

and present, with facts and legends appealed to his imagination. The setting of his narrative must have been suggested to him by his Baedeker which duly reminded its reader that it was in Santa Maria in Ara Cœli that Gibbon first conceived the idea of writing his history of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, an impressive work of which he had been given a sumptuous edition as a prize at Owens College. This very ancient church had been mentioned in the 8th century as Sancta Maria de Capitolio and it occupied the site of the Capitoline temple of Juno. The building as Gissing saw it only dated from the 14th century. He could also read in the same guide book, under “Church Festivals” (p. 15 of the 1904 edition) that on Christmas day there was a procession with the “Santo Bambino” and that recitations by children began which continued until 6 January.

The abundant notes taken by Gissing at the Ara Cœli can be read in the diary entries for 26 and 27 December 1888 and there is a strict correspondence between his impressions and the article he wrote in the following March. Tillotson very likely decided at once that Gissing’s thoughtful article would be very suitable copy for the Syndicate when next Christmas would be close at hand. Contributing to newspaper syndicates had never been on his agenda, but he was familiar with the methods of syndicates and imagined that his piece would be printed in hundreds of newspapers. The exact number will never be known, but thorough research has only produced three publications besides that in Tillotson’s *Bolton Evening News* for 28 December 1889, p. 2. They are listed in *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*. However, since the publication of the book in 2005, a totally unexpected American printing has been exhumed by Frederick Nesta, who found it, of all places, in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* for 22 December 1889, p. 18. For Gissing the story of this unlikely essay from his pen ended with the receipt of his fee, which amounted to £10. Only one reprint of it is on record and we owe it to Alfred Gissing, who included it in his useful *Selections Autobiographical and Imaginative* from his father’s works. It is much to be regretted that the original manuscript, as so often happened with Gissing’s miscellaneous writings, has not been preserved. Because no close analysis of it has yet been published, and because the volume of *Selections* has become very scarce, we venture to offer our readers a new transcription of the essay accompanied by some observations.

In his letter of 7 January 1889 to Tillotson & Son Gissing summed up his intentions, assuring the recipients that his piece would be neither doctrinal, nor statistical nor educational. “Ara Cœli would be the nucleus of the sketch, and round about it would be clustered various picturesque little odds and ends which impressed [his] imagination.” He kept his promise and fortunately did not attempt to obliterate his personality. Indeed, if we overlook his aesthetic response to the unsophisticated ceremony he had an opportunity to attend, his intellectual attitude towards “the whole business,” as he called it in his diary, was pleasantly straightforward. During his stays in Rome the consideration he gave to local life was that of a peaceful local enquirer into native manners and, as appears in *With Gissing in*

Italy, in which we see Gissing through the eyes of his naïve American friend Brian Ború Dunne, who was intoxicated with formalist Roman Catholicism, he was openly critical of all the pomp and absurdity of religion. So long as he focuses his attention on the religious show offered by the children gathered in the church his opinion of the religious motivation of it all hardly transpires, but when he goes beyond appearances we are at no loss to read his deeper thoughts. Christianity is viewed as a tradition on the decline, as something of an anachronism. It should be borne in mind that he had in his library a copy of William Edward Hartpole Lecky's *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (eighth edition revised, 2 volumes) in which the evolution of Christianity is analysed at great length in a scholarly way, with a wealth of footnotes. The book remains a magisterial discussion of the subject, and the pencillings in the margins attest that Gissing read it carefully. The devastating account it gives of the frequently disgraceful course followed by the meanderings of Christianity was of course throughout uppermost in his mind, a legend at odds with material and scientific progress, the sad story of an arbitrary conception of the world more and more inexorably confronted with its own lies, crimes and intolerance, a system less and less acceptable by rational minds and likely to collapse under the weight of its own accumulated absurdities. In its incessant "struggle not to fall behind the age," the Rome of Papal Christianity, Gissing lucidly predicts, "will soon be little more than tradition." Had he cared to do so, he could have kept up to date a list of pontifical pretensions publicized in his lifetime, notably Leo XIII's dogma concerning his own infallibility, which amounted to a ludicrous assertion that his own view of human affairs was the only tenable one. The number of scandals generated by the Church throughout the ages was enough to destabilize any system invented once for all by a naïve clergy which clung to its dogma, and Gissing was indignant at the sight of peasants' children being enlisted by overzealous priests with a view to propagating their own ready-packed spiritual constructions.

With a light hand Gissing notes that the performers of what he politely calls a sort of miracle play are all young children whose age could not be much over ten; his dominant feeling is amusement. "The kindly peasants of the Campagna," he writes, "are purely childlike in their thoughts of religion, and have nothing in common with the grave northern spirit." But after the tender age of the children he watched (mainly girls, of course), the credulous clergy had to let go their prey as credulity tends to decrease with age. Indeed Gissing discreetly notes that among the potential young recruits there are some older ones who refuse to enter into the game organized by priests and women, a game which, he readily admits, could be called "a paltry and unbecoming show." And his reprobation waxed when he reported the burlesque dialogue between a girl at least twelve years old and a younger girl "justifying the Christian religion against modern disbelief." The fulmination of the older girl against philosophers who rejected the old creed was indeed ludicrous and ill-advised and one wonders how long the so-called religious

authorities needed to realize how counter-productive this kind of absurdity was. It was of a piece with the sale of figures of the Bambino outside the Church, part of a fair, the commercial nature of which served as a transition between the outmoded relics of Christianity and modern Italy which had ousted the Papal States and other tangible signs of the Middle Ages from what was to become twentieth century Italy.

To the end of this carefully written piece Gissing remained himself, and more so than ever when, near the end of his colourful picture of a country which offered such a contrast with his native land, within walking distance of the Coliseum, a perished world with which he had no quarrel, he heard occasional harsh cries from a field at the foot of the Celian Hill. On a drill ground, companies of soldiers were going through their exercises, a sight than which there were few he detested more. So, most suitably, he could conclude his article with these words which offered food for reflection: "So long as the Coliseum hears such sounds as these, there is no distinction worth noting between our time and that of Romulus."—P. C.]

Christmas on the Capitol

Yet another Rome that is perishing. Upon the lips of her inhabitants, the name sounds as it ever did; but from the day of the square-walled stronghold on the Palatine to this of the modern capitol, proud of every most modern ugliness, how many a time has the abiding city transformed and renewed herself—so long embodying in her successive existences the progress of the western world, and now at length sacrificed in the struggle not to fall behind the age. Once more has the name a new significance; the Rome which is familiar to our imagination from many a modern page, the Rome of Papal Christianity, will soon be little more than tradition.

On my way to St. Peter's, on Christmas morning, I would gladly have thought of other things than *il progresso*, but it was impossible. At every step the change, rapid and inexorable, forces itself upon one's attention. To live in Rome at present is much the same as inhabiting a house in process of reconstruction; everywhere is the squalor of demolished buildings, the gaunt newness of edifices as big and as unsightly as modern enterprise can make them. It would matter comparatively little that all about the Piazza di Spagna spreads a town scarcely to be distinguished from parts of London; one is prepared to find the track of English and American tourists marked with the commonplace and the ignoble. But in every quarter the same activity presents itself. Not an ancient ruin that can be viewed without a background of to-day's hideousness; one must get far out into the Campagna if one would escape torturing incongruities and be at peace with the Rome one desires to know. Commercial knavery is said to be respon-

sible for much of the building that goes on, and indeed I noticed everywhere on the walls an instructive proclamation of the *sindaco*, bidding contractors remove by a certain date the scaffolding from numerous buildings on which work was suspended. More interesting, however, was the announcement, at a lecture delivered before the British Archæological Society, that the municipal authorities have in mind to construct an iron bridge across the middle of the Roman Forum, to facilitate traffic. "Thereupon," said the newspaper report, "an exclamation of pained astonishment broke from the whole assembly." But the time for such exclamations is gone by.

"*Roma capitale d'Italia*,"—Rome the capital of Italy; that is the phrase which the progressist Italian delights to repeat, and which sums the transition from the old order to the new. Eighteen years have sufficed for the transformation of the City. Roman nobles and ecclesiastics, by eagerly disposing of their landed property to speculative purchasers, have hastened the process of development. Italy is bent on declaring to the world that she has at length made definite breach with the Middle Ages and is prepared to keep on a level with the other States of Europe, friendly or hostile. As with the capital, so with the other cities, everywhere the Italian is impatient of all that has hitherto made his country's charm for those who dwell amid the clangour of commercial prosperity. "Italy" will have a new and strange sound for the ears of the next generation.

To grumble is no doubt irrational enough. It seems to be the law of advance that all peace and beauty shall perish out of the world, and the Italians cannot be expected to keep their country as a museum for the *forestieri*. One may lament, for instance, that the most picturesque part of Naples will shortly disappear, and its place be taken by a town built on sanitary principles; but it can scarcely be asked that a population should face perpetual epidemics to spare the artist's eye. There is no way out of it, as things are ordered; we must be content to remember what was.

And on Christmas morning, crossing the Tiber towards St. Peter's, it is with Rome the capital of Christianity that one's thoughts are busy. I passed the bridge of Ripetta, and traversed the district which is—or was—named the Castle Meadows; a little while ago it made a broad division of green land between the hill of the Vatican and that part of Rome where strangers mostly dwell. Now it is being rapidly covered with houses of the familiar modern kind. In this encroachment, there is a peculiar significance. Beyond there, amid the priceless treasures of his palace, which by compact with the

State is an independent possession, and forms no part of the Italian territory,—there, with the Castle of St. Angelo, once the Papal bulwark, frowning against him, sits Pope Leo XIII, at odds with destiny. Between him and the capital of Italy is feud irreconcilable; at his accession he did not even bestow the wonted blessing upon the people; in their view he is supported in his futile claims by Foreign Powers which look askance on the results of Italian unity: he is the enemy within their gates. And, day by day, Rome is spreading, spreading towards that hill of St. Peter; the new Rome, which has no mercy for its own past, which is impatient of mediæval incongruities. These barrack-like houses have more meaning than was in the mind of their architect.

The great ceremonies of the Church are no more. Within St. Peter's, I sought in vain for that which could support a mood proper to the place and the season. There was music in the Chapel of the Choir; at many an altar the Christmas offices were being celebrated; but too plainly everything was only the feeble echo of past sincerities. Amid the crowd of people scattered over the vast temple there were, I doubt not, worshippers; but the great majority were merely curious. Worst of all was the prominence of foreign visitors—German, American, English—who discussed the ceremonies in loud tones and with happy freedom of comment. In their hands, were the volumes of Baedeker and Murray.

Perhaps in places less obvious lingered more of the Roman Christmas. Eventually, I chanced upon such a corner, and witnessed a ceremony which is at all events quaint enough to rescue one from the present; not wholly without jarring notes—but I will tell you about it.

The hill of the Capitol can be ascended, from the north side, by three ways. There is the direct ascent, for pedestrians, by which you climb speedily to the Piazza del Campidoglio,—the Piazza which was planned by Michael Angelo, and in the midst of which stands the bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius. To the right of this statue is the winding course by which carriages go up. To the left are the marble stairs whereby you ascend to the church of Ara Cœli, long ago called St. Mary on the Capitol. Let us take this last.

The steps to be mounted number a hundred and twenty-four, the marble of which they are made was taken from the ruins of the temple of Quirinus, something more than five hundred years ago. The aspect of the building above would by no means tempt one to the labour of climbing so far, for, as is so often the case with Italian churches, this of Ara Cœli has an unfin-

ished façade; it was once adorned with mosaics, but for a long time has shown nothing but plain grey bricks, as unsightly a front as well could be. Those who come hither to worship are for the most part poor people, and it struck me as symbolically appropriate that the approach should be by a laborious stairway. In this world, for those who possess nothing, everything is made difficult and wearisome, and it expresses a hard truth when those of poor estate have to weary themselves, before they can reach the place where they may for a little while lay down their earthly burdens, and make appeal to a justice other than that of man.

This afternoon the steps are thronged with people. Not only with those who are going up to, or coming down from, the church. A sort of fair is being held on them, and numbers of men are crying out the things they have for sale. Chiefly one notices little figures of the infant Jesus, the *Bambino* in Italian, which are much purchased; for at Ara Cœli (it belongs to the order of Reformed Franciscans, the Grey Friars) there is held, from Christmas to Epiphany, a Festival of the Holy Child, and to it come the peasantry from the Campagna as well as the poor of Rome. Here, too, you may purchase the *lunario* of the new year, an antiquated almanack, full of curious rhymes and riddles. Pastry and sweets are, of course, laid out temptingly. But the sellers of *Bambini* have the most custom; you see mothers picking out those that look the prettiest for the children who accompany them. Very gentle and affectionate they are, these mothers of the Roman poor; one overhears the most wonderful words of endearment on their lips, that poetry of the South which atones for so many faults, and which contrasts so strongly with the inarticulate utterance of our own uneducated.

The scene is a lively one when the top is reached, and you look back. From here, too, there is a good view down into the Piazza of the Capitol, and over much of modern Rome. But let us join the cluster of people at the door, and with them pass under the lifted curtain.

The interior of the church itself is very interesting, but cannot be seen aright at this time, when much of it is hidden beneath the Christmas drapery. The columns, some of granite, some of marble, which divide the nave from the aisles, were brought hither by the architects from ruined temples of the old gods; they are of different sizes, of different orders, and of necessity rest on pedestals of varying height. The floor is not easy to walk upon, especially in the dusk of evening, for its mosaic work is thickly set with monumental slabs, whereon is sculpture in high relief; every now and then

one stumbles over the effigy of some long-forgotten churchman. There are no paintings of the first importance, but a great deal of admirable carving, and among the tombstones you may mark with gratitude that of the man to whom is due the discovery of the "Laocoon," the fact being hereon worthily recorded. However, it is to more modern points of interest that we are just now paying attention. Walking along the left aisle, we notice a curious proof of the reality their religion still has for some of the poor people who come here to worship. Between two of the chapels the wall is completely covered with the rudest and often most grotesque little oil paintings, each one commissioned and hung here, in token of devout thankfulness, by some nameless person who has survived a great peril, or perchance has seen rescued from the like someone near and dear. The pictures represent, generally very much in the fashion of a schoolboy drawing on his slate, all manner of escapes from risk of death; the greater number are concerned with accidents with vehicles, which would seem of common occurrence in Rome. Then there are children falling out of windows, mothers rescuing their babies from burning houses, catastrophes with firearms,—all sorts of mishaps and calamities, and in each case you see depicted in an upper corner of the picture either the Madonna or some familiar saint in the act of exercising protection. At the foot are inscribed the three letters, "P.G.R.," which stand for the Italian words, "Per Grazia Ricevuta"—"For Grace Received."

But clearly the chief point of attention to-day is the chapel a little further on in the same aisle, the second from the entrance. It is towards this that the people are thronging. And, indeed, it presents a singular, at the first glance a startling, appearance.

The chapel, in fact, has been converted into the stage of a theatre framed with a proscenium imitating rugged rock; within is arranged a tableau—still to use theatrical language—representing the adoration of the Holy Child by the shepherds and the Magi. In an open hut, allowing a view of hilly country in the background, sits the Virgin, a life-sized figure arrayed in bright-coloured vestments, and on her lap is the wooden image of the *Bambino*, the great treasure of the church of Ara Cœli. The story goes that this image was carved by a devout Christian and subsequently coloured by St. Luke; it possesses miraculous powers, chiefly exercised in healing the sick, to whose houses it is often solemnly borne. The gratitude of the pious has adorned it from head to foot with gold and precious stones. I say from head to foot, but in truth feet it has none; a very rude effigy, cone shaped

down from the shoulders. But the golden crown that gleams upon its head, and the lustre of rich ornaments all over its body may attract the eyes of the simple people who crowd hither to kneel before the chapel; for my own part, I found something touching in its combined rudeness and magnificence, aided by the thought of the generations of toiling and untaught men and women, who have been raised into a world of beautiful belief by dwelling upon its legend and its significance.

Grouped about, in kneeling attitudes, are figures of the Shepherds and the Eastern Kings; sheep and other animals, reasonably life-like, stand here and there, giving much joy to the children who come to gaze. Above hang wreaths of clouds, with adoring angels; and highest of all is seen the Eternal Father, bending earthwards. The whole is brightly illuminated with concealed candles, producing a capital scenic effect.

How else should one speak of it? The kindly peasants of the Campagna are purely childlike in their thoughts of religion, and have nothing in common with the grave northern spirit. It touches them and awakens all their better feelings, this which you would call a paltry and unbecoming show. All the Italians are child-worshippers; the word *Bambino*, so common upon their lips, always sounds with a peculiar tenderness; they make pretty diminutives of it, they are fond of continuing its use until the child has passed far beyond babyhood. It does one good to watch the family groups that press forward to have a long look at the scene; one hears pleasant laughter, anything but irreverent,—and gentle affectionate words interchanged between young and old; one sees a mother finding a space to kneel and teaching her little one to kneel by her and whisper a petition to the Holy Child. I could not help thinking of certain cold, dark churches in London, and of the hapless English toilers who would never dream of going there for comfort.

But here, close at hand, is something yet more curious, something that smacks yet more strangely of the old world. Turn your back upon the chapel, and you will witness perhaps the quaintest scene that a Roman Christmas can still offer.

Directly opposite the illuminated tableau, against the first pillar on the right of the nave, has been constructed a little carpet-covered platform, some five feet above the ground. Round about this is a considerable gathering of people, with numbers of children; they are listening to a little girl, perhaps six years old, who is reciting a long piece of poetry. Wonderful to watch and hear this little creature! By no conceivable training could

an English child of this age be taught so to deliver verses,—with such delightful self-possession, such clearness of delivery, such amusing precocity of gesture. The piece she is speaking is a simple and pretty story of the events of Bethlehem; it is written in rhyming couplets, and in the measure of “Hiawatha.” How distinctly at this moment I can hear the child’s voice! Not in the least strained, yet perfectly audible to all the listeners; the sweet Italian words, made yet sweeter upon the baby-lips, falling like the music of a summer streamlet. Upon every face there was a smile, but a good, kind smile, which one is the happier and better for seeing. And at the end of the piece of poetry came a prayer, still in the same verse, addressed to the *Bambino Santissimo*; the child knelt when she began it, and put her hands together, and fixed her eyes upon the wooden image with its crown and its jewels. The prayer finished, she sprang up at once, made a curtsy to the audience, and by friendly hands was lifted down from the platform.

A murmur of approbation, of affectionate applause, went through the crowd. The women looked at each other and laughed quietly, and seemed proud of the child’s success. They were all women of the poorest class, either *contadine* (peasants), or from the obscure quarters of Rome; and among them was to be noted many a striking face, the kind of face one would wish to see on canvas, beautiful in the way which suggests noble, even heroic, possibilities. The young faces interested me less than those of the old; in the former there was often enough a rare charm, but it seemed as if age and experience were needed to bring out all the significance inherent in this type of feature. The older men, too, frequently possessed a remarkable dignity of countenance; and their figures showed well in the rough long cloaks. But in matter of costume one found little that was noteworthy; the coloured handkerchiefs on the women’s heads were picturesque and of the locality, but the fatal influence of modern commerce showed itself even in the poorest, more deplorably so in the case of children. Those who had been prepared for recitations were too often decked out with a vulgar smartness which reminded one of England’s plebeians. Well, one must forget that, and be thankful for the sweet child voices and the Italian music and the spirit of simple goodness.

The reciters were nearly all girls, and seldom much more than nine years old. When a little boy made his appearance on the platform, he was sure to prove comparatively a bungler; he came forward in a half shame-faced way, and spoke mechanically, and—in short had no business to be there at all. Now and then it happened that a little girl could not pluck up

courage to face the crowd; mother or sister would lift her on to the platform, and she would make her bow, and even speak a few words, but there came the choking in the throat and stammering and abashed hiding of the face. Many would be the efforts made to encourage her, but to no purpose, and then one saw her take final refuge in mother's arms, where she was received with just a little disappointment, but none the less with tender comforting, and assurance of undiminished faith. These were the rare exceptions. For the most part, an astonishing self-confidence was exhibited. And the word must be understood in its best sense. The children simply behaved as though none but a few of those they knew and loved were present; they enjoyed speaking their pieces, and in some instances were very ready to give them a second time,—in which case, by-the-bye, one observed how careful had been their instruction, every tone and gesture being exactly the same as in the first delivery.

It appealed greatly to one's humanity, this spectacle of children addressing a child; easy to see that the fathers and mothers present were moved by just this aspect of the observance. Appraise the religious value of such a practice at as low a rate as you will, it is yet certain that these little Roman maidens will grow up with a memory and an association in their hearts which can scarcely be fruitful of anything but pure thoughts and gentle pieties.

But I must describe to you in more detail one incident of the ceremony. This was nothing less than a sort of "miracle play," a dialogue presented by two little girls of exceptional sweetness and cleverness. When they appeared upon the platform one of them leaned her head against the pillar, feigning to be asleep—they were shepherds watching their flock by night. The companion of the sleeper presently becomes aware of a strange and wonderfully bright star; she gives a description of its splendour, and at length awakes the second shepherd, that they may look and marvel together. There follows a long conversation between the two, and in the end they are guided by heavenly voices to the manger of Bethlehem. Then both fall to their knees and worship the *Bambinello*, finally offering prayers for their parents and relatives and for their own guidance in life.

This dialogue delighted the audience, and with reason. It was charmingly done, with delightful grace, with an indescribably touching ingenuousness. The verses were throughout of extreme simplicity, with scarcely a word or a thought that might not have come spontaneously to the children's lips. And not the least wonderful thing was the effort of memory

involved in the performance, which occupied at least twenty minutes; never a slip or an instant's hesitation from beginning to end.

Whilst these things were in progress at the lower end of the church, in the choir had begun the celebration of vespers, but this caused no interruption. The two ceremonies went on concurrently. When the singing grew loud, the children raised the pitch of their voices, so as still to be heard. There was constant accession to the throng within the church; people moved hither and thither, now listening to the recitations, now regarding the illumined picture in the chapel, now kneeling for a few minutes to participate in the evening office. As dusk fell, numerous candles were lighted in front of the various altars: the scene grew still more impressive among this blending of uncertain rays.

I had moved away from the platform, but was recalled by the sound of a voice considerably louder and more mature than those to which my ear had become accustomed; at the same time a movement among the straying people indicated that some fresh attraction had offered itself. On drawing near I saw that the stage was occupied by a girl of at least twelve years old, and of appearance far less sympathetic than the younger ones who had preceded her; she was self-conscious in pose and utterance, and her tones had a disagreeable hardness. Unfortunately these points were only too much in harmony with the matter of her recitation. This, I soon found, was a prose sermon, and the very last kind of sermon that should have been delivered at such a season and by such lips. The production, doubtless, of some unwisely zealous priest, it aimed at justifying the Christian religion against modern disbelief. The arguments were painfully trite, and all their conventional feebleness was emphasised by the accents of triumphant infallibility in which the child had been taught to display them. She went through a long list of recorded miracles, the object of which had been to supply evidence of the truth of Christianity; then, passing to the present, bore witness that the signs and tokens of Heaven's power, were still abundantly manifest to those who wished to read them. One rhetorical passage which occurred twice or thrice remains in my memory,—partly because the manner in which it was thrown forth made it disagreeably burlesque. *Tace Dio? Dio non tace; favella!* “And is God silent? God is not silent; he speaketh!” But the culmination of impropriety and absurdity was reached in a period which began: *O congiurati filosofanti!* “O, ye philosophers conspired together!” With dramatic gesture and accent the child fulminated against those who in our day deem themselves wise, and gave

them to understand that she, from the vantage ground of her simplicity and her pure-mindedness, championed the faith against all such accursed foes. Finally, as in the other instances, came a prayer to the Holy Child: "May Thy blessing descend upon all, and especially upon my parents and relatives." The whole oration was long enough to have made a respectable sermon in a real pulpit, but the constantly increasing audience followed it with close attention. As soon as the girl rose from her knees and made her curtsy, there broke out a chorus of "Brava! Brava!"

Here was the utterly false note, the intrusion of modernism into what had thus far been so pleasant in its old-world naïveté. And I think I am not wrong in saying that the "Brava!" of the audience was worth just as little as the harangue itself. Not many days previous to this I had conversed with an Italian gentleman on the religious state of his country; his matter-of-fact remark was, "We have no religion." As regards Italy in general, there can be small doubt that he spoke the truth. These peasants gathered in Ara Cœli still have a faith, however, and the more pity to hear them applauding its unworthy defence against something they did not in the least understand.

Sorry not to have missed this detail, I quitted the church. The hour drew towards sunset; I stepped aside to the corner of the little terrace and stood for a long time looking westward, watching the colours of the sky. Crowds of people still came and went, ascending and descending the long marble stairs. The almanack vendors, the sellers of *Bambini* and of pastry still cried their goods; night began to darken over Rome.

But before going my way, I again lifted the heavy curtain of the door and re-entered the building. There was now no daylight within: the recitations had come to an end, the choir was empty, and only a glimmer of tapers showed the forms of those who moved between the draped pillars. As to the tableau of the chapel, it had vanished; doors were drawn together in front of it. I was just in time, however, to witness its momentary reappearance. Two of the Franciscan brothers, one holding a candle, came down the aisle, pushed back the sliding doors, and stepped up on to the stage, now in gloom; there one of them took the miraculous image from the Madonna's lap, and, turning to the cluster of observers, held it aloft. His companion knelt, so did many of the people. Then they descended, reclosed the chapel, and solemnly bore away the *Bambino* to its wonted place of safety.

So I went out again with the departing crowd, walked down from the Capitol, and northwards towards the Corso. Here was a roar of traffic, and a

glare of shop windows; newsboys were crying their papers, very much as they do in London. “*La Riforma! La Riforma!*” There sounded the modern ring again; I had been spending a few hours with the ghost of old Rome, and now must return to the city of the present, to the capital of bran-new Italy, the centre of reform and progress. In the Piazza della Colonna I paused to appreciate this privilege. This square is so named from its centre being occupied by the column of Marcus Aurelius; at present the column is surrounded by globes of the electric light: a favourite lounging place of the Romans. In the evening there are always many groups standing about, discussing affairs and politics and *il progresso*. No better spot for submitting oneself to the strange impressions produced by the Rome of to-day. A monument raised by the Senate in honour of Marcus Aurelius, carved with pictures of his triumphs, and you view it under the electric light. Add the fact that on the summit of the pillar stands a statue of St. Paul, and surely one has matter enough for musing.

Yet, is the new world so very different from the old? One more recollection of this Christmas season by the Tiber.

On an afternoon of delightful warmth and brightness, too precious to be passed within the walls of the Vatican, I rambled idly over the sacred ground of the Forum, and thence to the Coliseum, where, by ruined stairs, I mounted to one of the great arches that look southward. There was scarcely a chance that another wanderer would seek this spot; in safe solitude I could sit on the mossy travertine, and bask in glorious sunlight, and marvel at the azure above the ruins on the Palatine. Below me was Constantine’s Arch. It is built over the *Via Triumphalis*, along which the victorious armies entered old Rome; the road is now called via San Gregorio, and will lead you out to the tomb-bordered Appian way. Before I had been here many minutes I became aware of odd sounds from a field close by—disagreeable, monotonous shoutings of voices in unison, and the occasional harsh cry of someone giving orders. Only too evident what was going on; the field at the foot of the Celian hill is a drill-ground, and raw companies were going through their exercises.

The Coliseum a quarried ruin; the triumphs of the Triumphal way only read of in the history of a perished world;—but the soil of Rome still sounding under the feet of men being trained to the art of slaughter. Thus far has *il progresso* brought us, and no further. This single fact obscures all others; this one point of similarity makes all differences trivial. So long as

the Coliseum hears such sounds as these there is no distinction worth noting between our time and that of Romulus.

[the article was followed by Gissing's signature in facsimile]

“The Knight of the Simple Heart”: Twemlow into Tymperley

M. D. ALLEN
University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley

It is generally known that Gissing wrote short stories as a useful way of supplementing his income over the last decade or so of his life, a period when calls upon his purse multiplied as he found himself obliged to provide for the maintenance and education of his elder son, the support of the wife from whom he had separated and the son she kept with her, and, eventually, the upkeep of the French establishment which the complications of his life brought into existence. (He also had a chronically unsuccessful brother whose wife and children he could not see starve.) Gissing's books sold so poorly that he worried about money to the very end, and was obliged to produce copy at a rate much higher than ideally he would have wished. The events of his life and the obsessions they seeded, along with the intelligent interest he took in questions of the day, gave him material. But, constantly under pressure, the bookish Gissing did not so much permit as actively encourage his incessant reading to fertilise his own writing, to suggest character and situation. The aim of this essay is to indicate one such germ. “A Poor Gentleman,” written in January and February 1899 and first published in the *Pall Mall Magazine* in October of the same year, owes its existence to *Our Mutual Friend*. In personality and plight Dickens' Mr. Twemlow and Gissing's Mr. Tymperley closely resemble each other.

We are introduced to Twemlow in the second chapter of *Our Mutual Friend*. He is attending a dinner party given by the *arriviste* Veneerings, who are attempting to slobber their mushroom rise to social prominence by claiming long-standing friendship with all their guests. Twemlow's current preoccupation is thus trying to settle “the insoluble question [of] whether he was Veneering's oldest friend or newest friend,” many of his fellow guests also seeming to be designated as the former. His main characteristic is self-repression: he is “grey, dry, polite, susceptible to east wind, First-Gentleman-in-Europe collar and cravat, cheeks drawn in as if he had made

a great effort to retire into himself some years ago, and had got so far and had never got any farther” (Dickens 18, 21. All future references to this edition).

We first meet Tymperley too at a dinner party. The claim of his hostess, Mrs. Charman, that he is “Such a very old friend of ours” is in this case justified: Tymperley had gone to Harrow and Cambridge with her now-deceased husband, then lived near the couple in Berkshire. His “pale-grey eyes, very soft in expression, looked timidly this way and that from beneath brows nervously bent, and a self-obliterating smile wavered upon his lips” (Gissing 106, 108. Future references to this edition).

Dickens’ Twemlow has a secret concerning his financial affairs: “he had had a deceased friend, a married civil officer with a family, who had wanted money for change of place on change of post, and . . . he, Twemlow, had ‘given him his name,’ with the usual, but in the eyes of Twemlow almost incredible result that he had been left to repay what he had never had.” Similarly, “In an evil moment,” Gissing’s Tymperley has “listened to Mr. Charman, whose familiar talk was of speculation, of companies, of shining percentages” (111). As in the case of Twemlow (both names connote a gentle if vaguely absurd harmlessness), the greed of the age is not here at issue: Tymperley’s simple ambition is to help his sister, “married to an unsuccessful provincial barrister,” and her six children (111). Gissing’s brief sketch has no interest in anything like *Our Mutual Friend*’s celebrated jeremiad against the power and evils of speculative capitalism:

Where does he come from? Shares. Where is he going to? Shares. What are his tastes? Shares. Has he any principles? Shares. What squeezes him into Parliament? Shares. Perhaps he never of himself achieved success in anything, never originated anything, never produced anything? Sufficient answer to all; Shares. O mighty Shares! (118)

Tymperley will later accuse himself of “a foolish speculation” (123) but not even this delicately scrupulous gentleman will level against himself the charge of greed.

Both men, then, have placed themselves in dire financial straits through lack of worldly experience and unwise trust in a friend. Both men behave well after their losses, although often finding themselves in difficult circumstances as a consequence of them. By pinching himself Twemlow manages to meet quarterly payments of interest and even make slight inroads on the principal but suddenly a demand is made for repayment of the whole. He is obliged to “confess judgment,” explained in the endnotes

of the Penguin edition as “A term used in actions to recover debts or property, which shortened legal proceedings.” His life is assured by money-lenders, who see Twemlow’s relation the fierce Lord Snigsworth (whose pensioner our timid Twemlow is) as a reliable security (558; 831, n. 3 to Book the Third, Chapter 13). Twemlow’s sufferings at the sudden calling in of the whole sum are exacerbated by two naïve misapprehensions. First he believes that the real creditor Fledgeby, who has secretly bought his debt and whose machinations against an innocent young woman Twemlow is very conscious he has helped thwart, is genuinely sympathetic to him. Secondly, he thinks that Riah, the apparent creditor, really is as merciless as depicted by Fledgeby, who is taking advantage of anti-Semitic stereotypes of the Jewish money-lender and using Riah as a front. But by the end of the novel Twemlow will have escaped the clutches of Fledgeby; the virtuous Riah, secretly acting at the instigation of the novel’s central character John Harmon, now restored to his wealth, will inform him that mere payment of interest will again suffice (782-3).

Tymperley is so chivalrous as to hide from Mrs. Charman her husband’s role in ruining him when the businessman’s death quickly follows upon what is a relatively minor loss for Charman but a disaster for his friend. Uncomplainingly Tymperley takes himself off to Islington and a single room “eight feet by seven and a half” (110) to live a lonely life in poverty. A later chance meeting with Mrs. Charman leads to an invitation to a dinner party, the good lady still having no idea of Tymperley’s true state of affairs. To the astonishment of his conscious self, Tymperley tells his hostess and fellow guests that he lives obscurely in order to be able to do social work amongst the poor. When a dinner-party acquaintance sends him a cheque for £5 to be used to alleviate the sufferings of “two or three of your most deserving pensioners” (118), Tymperley is tempted to spend the money on himself. Honour, however, wins out in the end: he causes the money to be spent on the poor and writes a letter to the donor accusing himself of untruthfulness and nearly “something still worse” (123).

Gissing would write in his *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* that he could not “fall in with the common judgment that Dickens never shows us a gentleman.” He discusses John Jarndyce, Mr. Crisparkle, Sir Leicester Dedlock, and Cousin Feenix, with regard to the last of whom he writes, “However incapable of walking straight across a room, however restricted in his views of life, Cousin Feenix has the instincts of birth and breeding” (85-6). Gissing does not mention Twemlow in this regard but one could

surely claim as much for him. Indeed, both Twemlow's "birth and breeding" and the "instincts" that should, and in his case do, go with them are acknowledged by those who have dealings with him. Veneering manages at least snobbishly to recognize Twemlow's social background in his speech to the men of Pocket-Breaches (he had earlier asked Twemlow to request the support of Lord Snigsworth and been politely rebuffed). Mrs. Lammle, perhaps not *quite* the most morally exalted character in the entire novel, goes further and enlists his help when finally goaded by her conscience to warn Podsnap of the plot against his daughter. She says to Twemlow, "You have the soul of a gentleman, and I know I may trust you" and asks for his promise that he will not betray her confidence. Twemlow's response is, "Madam, on the honour of a poor gentleman—" (this is one of the two occasions Gissing's title is used in *Our Mutual Friend*), to which Mrs. Lammle replies, "Thank you. I can desire no more" (408-9). Later, when the Lammles have gone bankrupt and are preparing to leave the country, she requests that Twemlow not spoil their chances of any future alliance they are able to make by repeating the story of the scheme against Georgiana Podsnap ("you have no right to use against us the knowledge I intrusted you with, for one special purpose which has been accomplished. . . . It is not a stipulation; to a gentleman it is simply a reminder.") If she reacts with "relief" when Twemlow agrees then that selfish emotion has as foundation the confidence that Twemlow will keep his word (607). And the virtuous Riah refers to Twemlow as "the poor gentleman" (the second use of the phrase) when lamenting that Twemlow believed Fledgeby's misrepresentations about the true owner of his debt and his character (708).

But it is Dickens himself, in the course of that very scene in which Twemlow's innocence is taken advantage of, who authorially praises "the mild little elderly gentleman," the "little dried gentleman," "the gentle Twemlow" as "The chivalrous Twemlow, Knight of the Simple Heart" who over-scrupulously thinks he has, "for the first time in his life . . . done an underhanded action" in revealing Fledgeby's designs on Georgiana Podsnap. "Good childish creature! Condemned to a passage through the world by such narrow little dimly-lighted ways, and picking up so few specks or spots on the road!" (557). It is Twemlow who is one of the moral touchstones of the novel: he makes in its final pages the necessary point about the marriage of Eugene Wrayburn, a gentleman, to Lizzie Hexam, the daughter of a Thames-side boatman who robs the drowned bodies he finds:

"I am disposed to think," says [Twemlow], "that this is a question of the feelings of a gentleman."

"A gentleman can have no feelings who contracts such a marriage," flushes Podsnap.

"Pardon me, sir," says Twemlow, rather less mildly than usual, "I don't agree with you. If this gentleman's feelings of gratitude, of respect, of admiration, and affection, induced him (as I presume they did) to marry this lady—"

"This lady!" echoes Podsnap.

"Sir," returns Twemlow, with his wristbands bristling a little, "*you* repeat the word; *I* repeat the word. This lady. What else would you call her, if the gentleman were present?"

He goes on to make the distinction with which today we are so familiar between "gentleman" in its purely class sense and the same word in its democratised meaning of a man who behaves honourably: "I beg to say, that when I use the word, gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man" (796).

Twemlow and Tymperley both exemplify Newman's definition of a gentleman: "he is one who never [deliberately] inflicts pain." Indeed, Gissing reports the reticent Tymperley as concealing the nature of his life from Mrs. Charman and her friends because "A gentleman will not, if it can possibly be avoided, reveal circumstances likely to cause pain" (115). Mrs. Charman speaks more truly than she knows when she exclaims at "A noble life!" (107), as does Mrs. Weare when she writes to Tymperley of "your beautiful life of self-sacrifice" (118). The title of Gissing's story appears three times within the text (112, 116, and 123), as he plays on the dual meanings of "poor": "impecunious" or "unfortunate," or both, the second because of the first. But in addition to the borrowing of its central situation of a scrupulous gentleman behaving according to a code in a tawdry world, Gissing's short story betrays its origin in other incidental touches. Twemlow's and Tymperley's style of speech is similar in its hesitant and pedantic courtesy. It is Tymperley, but it might be Twemlow, who "spoke in a thinly fluting voice, with a preciseness of enunciation akin to the more feebly clerical, and with smiles which became almost lachrymose in their expressiveness as he dropped from phrase to phrase of embarrassed circumlocution" (109). More substantially, neither man has been able to find a mate. Twemlow thinks with regret of an early amour: "the poor little harmless gentleman once had his fancy, like the rest of us, and she didn't answer (as she often does not)" (121-22. See also 401). Of Tymperley we are told, "His thoughts turned once or twice to marriage, but a profound diffidence withheld him from the initial step; in the end, he knew himself born for

bachelorhood, and with that estate was content” (111). Nor has either man been able to choose a profession, that is, to find productive work. Twemlow thinks of his past and “the days when he hoped for leave from the dread Snigsworth to do something, or to be something, in life, and before that magnificent Tartar issued the Ukase, ‘As he will never distinguish himself, he must be a poor gentleman-pensioner of mine’” (401); Tymperley “had meditated the choice of a profession until it seemed, on the whole, too late to profess anything at all” (111).

Finally, the germ of the story may be Dickensian but “A Poor Gentleman” is typical Gissing on more than one page. It is Gissing, not Dickens, who insists on the demoralising effects of poverty on the sensitive and who decries a sentimental attitude to the working classes. The former viewpoint is to be seen first in Tymperley’s surprised discovery of his helpless isolation in a vast metropolis (“London is a wilderness abounding in anchorites—voluntary or constrained” [113]) and secondly in his shocked realisation that he had almost become a thief (“the moral crisis through which he had been living [had] taught him one more truth on the subject of poverty” [122]). The latter is illustrated by Gissingite sardonic vignettes of working-class coarseness: Mr. Suggs shows himself graceless indeed and the crass vulgarity of the woman serving in the shop where Tymperley habitually buys his food is tellingly portrayed. Gissing, who had lived long and resentfully in poor areas of London, does not show himself sympathetic to the “suffering” of “the lower classes”:

In a sense, all the families round about were poor, but—he asked himself—had poverty the same meaning for them as for him? Was there a man or woman in this grimy street who, compared with himself, had any right to be called poor at all? An educated man forced to live among the lower classes arrives at many interesting conclusions with regard to them; one conclusion long since fixed in Mr. Tymperley’s mind was that the “suffering” of those classes is very much exaggerated by outsiders using a criterion quite inapplicable. He saw around him a world of coarse jollity, of contented labour, and of brutal apathy. It seemed to him more than probable that the only person in this street conscious of poverty, and suffering under it, was himself. (120-21)

Apparently Gissing did not think very highly of “A Poor Gentleman” (*Diary*, 30 January 1899). Here, as elsewhere, he sells himself short. As one would expect of the mature Gissing, it is intelligently and cleverly written, showing from paragraph to paragraph the hand of the accomplished professional writer. In addition to his seasoned competence, it reflects two other life-long aspects of Gissing: first, his innate conservatism (plainly the

ethos of the gentleman wins his sympathetic adherence) and secondly his life-long engagement with the works of Dickens. From, at the latest, 1880, when *Workers in the Dawn*, a far more thoroughly Dickensian work than has yet been acknowledged, appeared to, at the earliest, 1903, when *Ryecroft* was published, Gissing's works use, rewrite, respond to, filch from the novels of the man he grew up thinking the archetypal great English novelist and great man, the writer in whose footsteps, presumably, in the innocent and terrible early London years he aspired to follow. In 1882, a couple of years after *Workers*, he "like[d] very much" *Our Mutual Friend*, regarding it as inferior only to "that unsurpassable novel" *David Copperfield* (*Letters* 2, 93); in his *Critical Study* of Dickens (1898), he regrets the "tedious superfluity" of the novel: "on many a page dialogue which is strictly no dialogue at all, but mere verbosity in a vein of forced humour, drags its slow length along in caricature of the author at his best" (54). Gissing's opinion of individual novels would change. His regard for their author as a titanic figure did not.

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A Model for the Typing Office in Gissing's *The Odd Women*

LAWRENCE RAINEY

“The office today is a female ghetto,” announced Mary Kathleen Benét in the first sentence of her book *Secretary: An Enquiry into the Female Ghetto*, published in 1972. A précis on the book’s back cover reiterated the claim, adding: “Of the millions of women working in offices, the great majority are in menial and subservient positions. Coffee-making, filing, placating the boss—all add up to a life of interminable drudgery.”¹ Such assertions were taken as self-evident by feminist readers and critics of the day. But a reader who encounters them after reading George Gissing’s novel *The Odd Women* (1893) may find them puzzling. For Gissing’s novel depicts an office that offers young women instruction in typewriting—and is run by feminists! Did feminists of the 1890s not know that they were training women for “menial and subservient positions” and “a life of interminable drudgery”? Or did they think they were doing something quite different? And the question can be reversed to bear on our understanding of Gissing. Was his fictional account of the school directed by Rhoda Nunn merely a product of imagination and fancy, perhaps laced with irony, or did it correspond to a real historical institution, albeit an unusual one?

The broader historical background to Gissing’s title has long been known. Since the census of 1851, it had been noted that there were more marriageable young women than men in Britain, making it inevitable that a certain number of women (500,000 was one figure that was bandied about) would have to remain single: they were called “redundant,” “surplus,” or “superfluous” women.² The heroine of Gissing’s novel, Rhoda Nunn, has taken their plight to heart. “My work and thought,” she explains at one point, “are for the women who do not marry—the ‘odd women’ I call them.”³ In her private nomenclature, they are “odd” strictly in the sense that they will never find husbands with which to pair and so make even numbers. But this broader demographic background also led to specific historical developments more directly relevant to Gissing’s novel.

The imbalance in numbers was especially pronounced in the middle classes and posed a dilemma. If a young and single woman did not receive a substantial inheritance, how could she support herself or earn a livelihood, given that universities and professions were uniformly closed to her? Addressing this issue became the concern of a small number of middle-class women known to historians as the Langham Place group, so called because the journal they published from 1858 to 1864, the *English Woman’s Journal* had its office at 19 Langham Place, London. One mem-

ber of the group was Jessie Boucherett (1825-1905), who took special interest in women's employment and the difficulties encountered by middle-class women, particularly of limited means, in obtaining work that would let them be self-sufficient. In 1859, together with two other women, she established the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (with the unfortunate acronym, SPEW), which soon began training women as book-keepers, clerks, and cashiers. While it could help only a few women of the middling classes, it set a pioneering example that prepared the ground for future change. Boucherett's other contribution to the Victorian women's movement was her founding of *The Englishwoman's Review* in 1866, a journal that lasted for more than forty years (till 1910) and briskly surveyed contemporary developments affecting women.⁴ Boucherett edited it till 1883, when she was succeeded by Caroline Briggs. It was under Briggs's tenure that the Society announced its intention to start a new project, detailed in the issue of 16 June 1884:

TYPE WRITING.—The introduction of the new type-writer, with small as well as capital letters, seems to promise a new field of employment to educated women, and though the Committee are scarcely as sanguine as to the amount to be earned by means of it as the writers of some recent articles in the newspapers appear to be, still it seems to them that an intelligent woman, who is energetic and punctual, ought to be able to make a fair income by it. They have, therefore, decided to establish an office in the City, where four or five ladies may work under an experienced superintendent, who is willing to undertake the responsibility of the office when it is started, and who has a large connection among lawyers, publishers, &c.

The committee then launched an appeal:

The cost of a type-writer is £21, and each worker must have a machine for her own use. The Committee, therefore, desire to raise a sum of £63 to purchase three machines, as the office cannot be self-supporting unless four, *at least*, are working in it. Donations for this purpose will be thankfully received.⁵

Alas, no donations were received at all until Jessie Boucherett, nearly sixty years old now, stepped into the breach.⁶ Yet less than four months later the new office was open for business:

We are glad to be able to record the commencement of a new and probably fairly well paid employment for women in the Ladies' Type-writing Office, Lonsdale Chambers, 27, Chancery Lane. On the 1st of October an office was opened under the above name, and in connection with the Society for the Employment of Women, in which women will be exclusively employed.... To all who take an interest in the welfare of women this office must commend itself; for it not only affords a means of earning a livelihood but also tends to educate, as every manuscript must be

thoroughly studied before being copied.... Specimens of type-writing may be had on application to the Secretary, Miss Ethel Garrett, or to the manager, Mrs. Marshall.⁷

The structure of the office described here corresponds *grosso modo* with that described in Gissing's *Odd Women*. There is a "manager," Mrs. Marshall, whose role as principal might correspond to that of Mary Barfoot (age forty in the novel), and a "secretary," Miss Ethel Garrett, who might correspond loosely with Rhoda Nunn (age thirty-one in the novel). But the parallel is loose, and amounts only to a relationship between a principal and an assistant. Moreover, the correspondence of these people to those in the novel is hardly exact. For while nothing is known about Mrs. Marshall, enough is known about Ethel Garrett to show that she could not have been a direct model for Rhoda Nunn.

Ethel Garrett (1861-1946) was born on 28 January in Dum Dum, East Indies. She was the daughter of Newsom Garrett, the ne'er-do-well brother of celebrated Victorian feminists: her aunts included Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, first woman to become a doctor in Britain, and Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, the first women to open an interior design business. In 1884, when the Ladies' Type-writing Office opened in Chancery Lane, Ethel was twenty-three years old, and for the next two years she worked as the office "secretary" and assistant to Mrs. Marshall. In 1886 she married, becoming Mrs. Comyns. Marriage brought her three children, Alexander, Ethel, and Olive, and her husband died in 1890. For the next six years she remained a widow, but in 1896 married again to Sidney Herbert Lewer. In the 1901 census she is described as an "editor and newspaper owner," while her husband is listed as a "manager to publisher." In the 1911 census she becomes a "newspaper proprietor" and he a "newspaper editor." The newspaper repeatedly mentioned is *The Feathered World*, a weekly journal about birds and raising poultry.⁸ In any case, it is clear that Ethel, married at twenty-five and widowed at twenty-nine, was not a model for Rhoda Nunn, single and unmarried at thirty-one. Yet that does not detract from the broader relevance of The Ladies' Type-writing Office to the fictional institution that Rhoda guides.

The Society's laconic accounts of the school are complemented by a more extensive essay written four years later in 1888 by Anne Beale, one also accompanied by a contemporary woodcut that gives a vivid sense of what the office looked like (see illustration). In the intervening years, it had moved from Lonsdale Chambers, 27, Chancery Lane, to 126, Strand, and expanded from the four machines first purchased to a "cheerful room where

a dozen girls are seated before these marvellous machines.” At first glance the woodcut shows something slightly smaller. Two rows, each with two typewriters, face the viewer; while a third, with three or four typewriters, is arranged perpendicularly to those and faces the wall to the viewer’s right—in total, seven or eight typewriters. But if the space where the supervisor (evidently Mrs. Marshall) is standing constitutes an aisle that divides an equally sized group of rows to the left and so outside the frame of the picture, there would be another four machines, matching the “dozen girls” the article describes. Beale also calls it “a pretty room adorned by pictures, fans, and artistic workmanship,” and makes clear that it comprised the main office, complemented by an “outer chamber” or second room—a modest establishment.⁹ (The woodcut, one notes in passing, is signed by John Henry Bacon, 1868-1914, a late Victorian artist who gained notoriety four years later when William Lever, the soap king, purchased his painting “The Wedding Morning” and replaced the clock on the mantelpiece with bars of Sunlight Soap to make an advertisement; it was, he reportedly said, “only a very moderate picture, but very suitable for a soap advertisement.”)

Rhoda Nunn directs the day-to-day operations of a typing school that plainly resembles the Ladies’ Type-writing Office. It teaches typing and other business skills; it attempts to earn money by taking in various copying jobs; and it is also a philanthropic enterprise that attempts to shape the character of its students, inculcating them with the virtues of independence and self-sufficiency. Its operations are small in scale, consisting of an office with only two rooms. When Mary Barfoot, the institution’s principal, gives one of her weekly lectures, the audience numbers thirteen, made up of “girls already on the premises and a few who came specially” (*OW*, 151). When the business cycle is slow, the girls numbered only six (*OW*, 324). If Gissing borrowed features from the Ladies’ Type-writing Office that the Society launched in 1884, these consisted of a certain size and scale, a mixture of different occupations and preoccupations, and a philanthropic founder figure, Mary Barfoot, with a loose resemblance to Jessie Boucherett, though much younger than her. But Gissing may have borrowed something more as well, something that derived as much from Beale’s essay as from the Ladies’ Type-writing Office itself, or from the moment in time that Beale’s essay captures and represented.

Shortly after the Society's venture was established on 1 October 1884, or nine months later, in June 1885, it was being reported that the enterprise "has had very fair success."¹⁰ In August that year, when a contemporary

essay surveyed “Type-Writing as an Employment for Educated Women,” it could identify only two institutions in London where it was being taught: the office run by SPEW and another, more commercial office, headed by one Lisé Monchablon.¹¹ But in early 1886 the Society noted that a third typewriting office was being opened, another one exclusively for women: “We hear that with the object of employing women in type writing in the City, an office has been opened at 20, Bucklersbury, Queen Victoria Street, E.C., by two ladies. It is their intention to form a large staff of female clerks.”¹² Later that year, it was reported, another school was being opened in Oxford.¹³ Back in London, meanwhile, the firm Wyckoff, Seamans, and Benedict opened their own office and school for Remington typewriters, also in 1886. By then such schools were beginning to mushroom. In 1891 the Yost Typewriter Company, which manufactured the Caligraph, followed suit, and by year’s end it had one hundred and fifty pupils enrolled.¹⁴ By 1894, only ten years after SPEW had opened its office, it was reported that there were 120 typing offices and schools in London alone.

The Odd Women is situated in the middle of this decade of rapid growth: its principal actions transpire from the spring of 1888 to November 1889 (ch. 2 to ch. 30). When the novel was published in 1893, in other words, it described a historical moment that had already vanished, or was just vanishing, a moment of utopian aspirations partly inflated by a limited sense of how the new technology would interact with contemporary business needs. The Ladies’ Type-writing Office was intended to teach middle-class young women an occupation that would ideally meet the needs of an equally middle-class, professional clientele (“a large connection among lawyers, publishers, &c.”). Beale, describing it in 1888, was clear on this point. She noted the “scientific as well as amusing works” that were brought in to be typed. “One-third of the MSS. printed [i.e., typed up] are medical, many are polemical, most are abbreviated or written illegibly, and some have quotations even from the Greek and Latin.” To meet the demands posed by such works, the typist had to be “a girl of education.”

But such clients formed only a tiny part of that much larger pool of agents seeking to accelerate the production, and improve the legibility, of documents. Firms in the financial, banking, and insurance sectors were the first to adopt the new machine and the young women who operated it. But their aim was to process the masses of data, textual and numerical, that resulted from increasingly large, complex, and globalised transactions—not to alleviate the economic distress of young, middle-class women who could

not marry. They sought to recruit as many typists and secretaries as possible, and were unconcerned whether they came from impeccably middle-class backgrounds.

By 1891 contributors to *The Englishwoman's Review* bemoaned the mushrooming of commercial schools that accepted applicants from backgrounds less fortunate than those deemed "middle-class." Typewriting, one urged, was "distinctly a profession and not a trade, requiring education, energy, and the other characteristics which make it essentially work for educated women," or middle-class ladies. Yet far too many commercial schools were taking on "uneducated common-class women," and it was the "ignorant common-class woman" who was "doing harm to the profession," turning it into a mere trade. The market was "being overstocked with illiterate" and "incompetent workers," and the only way to stop it was to ensure that schools accept "only such *gentlewomen* as can show some evidence of being well educated." (The writer proposed forming an "Association for the Advancement of the Profession of Type-writer Copyists" that would police admissions to typing schools.)¹⁶ Alas, philanthropic feminism could pry open the gates to the marketplace for women, but not control what happened there.

This tension, between middle-class feminism bent on helping middle-class women enter the workplace and commercial institutions bent on meeting the burgeoning demand for female clerical labour, resurfaces in the novel's discussions of class, which can otherwise seem odd. When Mrs. Smallbrook visits Mary Barfoot, the philanthropic director of the typing office in Gissing's novel, to recommend a potential pupil, she soon learns just how stringent Mary is about the social background of her charges. "'Is she an educated person?' Miss Barfoot was heard to ask." Mrs. Smallbrook hesitates for a moment, but her niece pipes up: "'She never was a lady.'" Mary Barfoot doesn't hesitate for an instant: "'Then I fear I can be of no use.... In the uneducated classes I have no interest whatever'" (*OW*, 58). Gissing here deftly recapitulates the logic and even the rhetorical terms found in *The Englishwoman's Review*. Anyone who is not a lady, or of middle-class background, is by definition "uneducated" and therefore unsuited to learn typing, which is "essentially work for educated women," with the term "educated" being a coded term that means "middle-class in origin."

Gissing's account of the typewriting office and school coincides in so many ways with the Ladies' Type-writing Office begun by SPEW, and

with the rhetoric in which its project was defended, that it is difficult to believe he was not acquainted with it, either directly or indirectly through Anne Beale's account of it. Yet he later claimed quite explicitly that his account of the school was "an original idea" of his own, though conceding: "Probably something of the kind is going on somewhere."¹⁷ That tardy concession may be a backhanded way of acknowledging that his claim to have invented the office entirely on his own was a trifle exaggerated. That he based his fictional office and school on a real one in no way diminishes the magnificent achievement that is *The Odd Women*.

¹Mary Kathleen Benét, *Secretary: An Enquiry into the Female Ghetto* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972), 7 and back cover.

²The debate was started by an essay, "Female Industry" by Harriet Martineau, which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* in April 1859, which was then contested by an essay from W. R. Greg, "Why are Women Redundant?" in the *National Review*, 14 (1862), 434-60. Martineau's essay is reprinted in Susan Hamilton, ed., *Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors: Victorian Writing by Women on Women* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 1995), pp. 29-70. See also Judith Worsnop, "A Reevaluation of 'The Problem of Surplus Women' in 19th-Century England," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13.1/2: 21-31.

³George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (London: Penguin, 1993), 164; hereafter reference to this edition is made within the text, using the abbreviation *OW*.

⁴Anne Bridger and Ellen Jordan, *Timely Assistance: the Work of the Society for Promoting the Training of Women, 1859-2009* (Ashford: Society for Promoting the Training of Women, 2009).

⁵Anonymous, "Society for the Employment of Women," *Englishwoman's Review* (new series), vol. 15, no. 134 (16 June 1884): 287-92, here 290.

⁶Suzanne Dohrn, *Die Entstehung weiblicher Büroarbeit in England, 1860 bis 1914* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1986), 46, citing SPEW, 26th Annual Report, 1885, 13.

⁷Anonymous, "Type Writing," *Englishwoman's Review* (new series), vol. 15, no. 138 (15 October 1884): 480.

⁸Information about Ethel Garrett comes from census records and the indefatigable researches of Elizabeth Crawford, author of *Enterprising Women: the Garretts and their Circle* (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 2002). I am grateful to her for sharing her unrivalled knowledge of the Garrett family.

⁹Anne Beale, "Finding Employment for Women," *Quiver*, vol. 24, no. 61 (January 1889): 113-16. All quotations are from 113, 114 and the woodcut is found on 113. It has not been previously reproduced in its entirety.

¹⁰Anonymous, "Employment for Women," *Englishwoman's Review* (new series), vol. 16, no. 146 (15 June 1885): 273.

¹¹J. A. Y., "Type-Writing as an Employment for Educated Women," *Work and Leisure: A Magazine devoted to the Interests of Women*, vol. 10, no. 8 (August 1885): 226-27.

¹²Anonymous, "Miscellaneous," subtitle "Type writing," *Englishwoman's Review* (new series), vol. 17, no. 156 (15 April 1886): 189.

¹³"A type-writing office has been opened in Bocardo Chambers, Oxford, by a lady, Miss Burnblum. She has very good recommendations, and the quality of her work is highly

spoken of by all who have employed her. We hope that the office will continue to be a success." Anonymous, "Type Writing at Oxford," *Englishwoman's Review* (new series) vol. 17, no. 163 (15 November 1886): 514.

¹⁴Anonymous, "Stenographers and Type-writers: A Pioneer Typewriter Operator, Mrs. M. A. Saunders," *American Magazine*, vol. 4, no. 7 (1892): 291.

¹⁵Dohrn, *Die Entstehung weiblicher Büroarbeit*, 47, citing SPEW, *35th Annual Report*, 1894, 13.

¹⁶R. V. Gill, "Is Type-Writing a Successful Occupation for Educated Women?" *Englishwoman's Review* (new series), vol. 22, no. 209 (15 April 1891): 82- 88.

¹⁷Letter to Algernon Gissing of 1 March 1894, *Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Volume V (1994), ed. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas: 188.

The Privately Published Editions of Gissing's Works

PIERRE COUSTILLAS

As a rule when book collectors focus their attention on one particular author, they attach special value to first editions, at least to start with, for they rarely resist the temptation to cross the border of the original publication of the major works. However, if contagion proves irresistible they soon discover that there is a category of books or more frequently booklets of variable bibliographical or textual significance that few people care for: de luxe reprints on special paper like those that readers associate with the Tragara Press, founded and kept alive for years by Alan Anderson of Edinburgh, or special editions such as those with which Thomas B. Mosher successfully tried to flood the American market in the early twentieth century. "Treasures" of that kind now infrequently appear in second-hand catalogues or on the net and few collectors desperately look for copies. In some cases, like the *Letters of George Gissing* [to Clara Collet] *1899-1903*, which Miss Collet asked A. H. Bullen to print for her at the Shakespeare Head Press, appeasing collectors' hunger for scarcities was not her aim as six copies could not possibly satisfy any definable readership beyond herself, Gabrielle Fleury and a very few of their friends and relatives.

The reasons which prompted the initiators of these small editions of Gissing's writings were many. Vanity publishing, as the phrase went in Victorian days, was hardly the main motivation which lay behind all these initiatives. The notion of profit is nowhere perceptible. In most cases we sense the presence of Gissing enthusiasts who wished to pay homage to a writer they admired and whose fame among an elite of readers of their time and future ages they were anxious to increase. The originality of their inten-

tions certainly counted for something in the case of the earliest examples. "An Heiress on Condition" may have been acquired straight from the Gissing family by the member of the Pennell Club who published it, and "A Yorkshire Lass," when it was privately printed in 1928, was virtually unavailable except in some libraries which held a file of *Cosmopolis*, the tri-lingual weekly, which published the story in August 1896. As for the poem "Hope in Vain" issued as a pamphlet in 1930, only readers who had a copy of Edward Clodd's *Memories* on their shelves could claim to have ever seen it in print.

If we except *Six Sonnets on Shakespearean Heroines*, which I published in 1982 under the imprint of Eric and Joan Stevens, obviously a special case which materialized because the publishers-booksellers approached me, all the other privately printed editions consisted of selections from the published work, selections reflecting the tastes of some devoted readers desirous of sharing their admiration for Gissing with their literary friends. Most of the extracts in these pamphlets came from *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, the favourites being passages in which Gissing discusses books, the others, especially in recent decades, reviving one or several short stories culled from the many anthologies with which the reading public has been gratified since the second decade of the twentieth century. If anything, the choices made, notably by John Michell and Richard Adams, are an index to the popularity of some remarkable bits of Gissing's short fiction. Frequently in recent years these booklets served as vehicles for Christmas and New Year's greetings. The most moving of them, only one copy of which has been seen, may well be that in which *By the Ionian Sea* is celebrated. Elizabeth M. Chamberlin, the publisher, selected six passages from Gissing's travel book tastefully at a time when the author, in the darkest days of the Second World War, was being forgotten by English and American publishers. The hundred copies of the booklet were "privately printed by The Leonard Printing Company of Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Christmas 1943."

By definition the publishers of such pamphlets were modest printing houses, amateurish rather than strictly professional, but their importance varied greatly. We have received from Mr. Kenneth W. Faig Jr., of Glenview, Illinois, an authority on H. P. Lovecraft and a faithful subscriber to the *Gissing Journal* for years, some detailed information on one of them, the fine printing Prairie Press, which was operated in Muscatine, then in

Iowa City, Iowa by Carroll Coleman (1904-1989), of whom an excellent biographical sketch on line can be found at:

<http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/Bai/harrison.htm>

The Prairie Press has been exhaustively studied in a pamphlet by L. O. Cheever which can also be found on line, *The Prairie Press: A Thirty-Year Record*, at:

<http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/Bai/cheever.htm>

In his 1965 Record Cheever describes the two Gissing booklets published by the Prairie Press as follows: for the year 1937 no. 18 is “*On the ownership of books*, by George Gissing. 4 3/8 x 7 1/2; 10 p.; Bulmer Roman, hand-set; black, blue and brown; 100 copies on Worthy Brochure; wrapper. *Printed for private distribution.*” For the year 1938 no. 24 is “*George Gissing Contemplates his Ancient Penholder...* 4 1/8 x 6; 12 p.; Bulmer Roman, hand-set; black and red; 110 copies on Worthy Brochure; wrapper. *Printed for private distribution.*” The two booklets are listed and fully described in *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*.

The frontier between commercial publications and private publications is not always easy to locate. So, placing a large-sized booklet like Gissing’s *Letters to an Editor* [C. K. Shorter], issued in 1915, or Clara Collet’s edition of Gissing’s (selected) letters to her, the aim of which was to establish authoritatively the role played by Gabrielle Fleury in her partner’s later life, is a task which cannot fully satisfy reason. Short of that perhaps the criterion which is most likely to strike the fortunate collectors who have succeeded in acquiring copies of all the items listed below is the bindings and their variety. The diversity flatters the eye. *A Yorkshire Lass*, with its spine and boards covered with fancy blue and white paper, is a mere prelude to some unpredictable splendours and the collector was chary of information concerning his identity. *Christopherson* owes its originality to the excellent illustrations by a friend, Michael Of, whose vision of the book collector is matchless and would have deserved to be reproduced in some English edition. The two Prairie Press booklets described above, respectively in light orange and pale green, show how tastefully the printers and binders of the Press presented their pamphlets to their friends at Christmas time. The Christmas greetings tendered by Belle Aran and Charles Alfred Smith in their attractive blue and green covers constitute a touching homage to Shakespeare, Gibbon and Lamb, whom Gissing never tired of reading and rereading. One of the most attractive of these mini-publications which undoubtedly earned Gissing new readers that the French would call

rats de bibliothèque, is a curiosity on at least two accounts—*Stray Leaves from The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* contains a prefatory note of some five pages on what we may harmlessly call the Ryecroft fiction, which was so frequently recalled by early reviewers of the whole book, and pictorial boards with a brown quarter spine. It is also bound like a book. The title page informs us that the booklet was published by the Redcoat Press of Westport, Connecticut in 1942. The limitation statement with which the forty-four numbered pages close adds that the bookworms to whom we should be grateful for this genuine collector's item were Betty and Ralph Sollitt. The glassine dustjacket is as exceptional as the high number of copies printed—175!

Chronologically, and provisionally it is hoped, the last of these items must be *The Fate of Humphrey Snell* to which the late John Michell added a preface preceding my introduction. The beautiful illustrations of the City of Wells by Edward H. New make this booklet a very special item. It was sent out by John Michell and Richard Adams at Christmas 2008.

Checklist

The references are those given in *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography* (2005)

- A29 *An Heiress on Condition*, Philadelphia: Pennell Club, 1923
- A34 *A Yorkshire Lass*, New York: Privately printed, 1928
- A36 *Hope in Vain*, no place, E. H. Blakeney, 1930
- A44 *Six Sonnets on Shakespearean Heroines*, London: Eric and Joan Stevens, 1982
- A45 *3 Stories by George Gissing* (A Poor Gentleman, Under an Umbrella, The Prize Lodger), London: John Michell and Richard Adams, 1984
- A46 *A Victim of Circumstances*, London: John Michell and Richard Adams, 1986
- A47 *Fate and the Apothecary*, London: John Michell and Richard Adams, 1987
- A56 *Christopherson*, La Madeleine, France: Pierre and Hélène Coustillas, 1998
The Prize Lodger, London: John Michell and Richard Adams, 2007
The Fate of Humphrey Snell, London: John Michell and Richard Adams, 2008
- G1 *Letters to Edward Clodd from George Gissing*, London: Printed for Thomas J. Wise for private circulation, 1914
- G2 *Letters to an Editor* [C. K. Shorter], no place, privately printed, 1915
- G3 *Letters of George Gissing* [to Clara Collet] 1899-1903, Stratford-upon-Avon, privately printed, 1916

- G6 *Autobiographical Notes* [Letters to Edward Clodd], Edinburgh: Dunedin Press. This booklet was printed for Thomas J. Wise in 1930
- H3 *Ragged Veterans*, no place, privately printed for the friends of Belle Aran and Charles Albert Smith, Christmas 1930
- H4 *On the Ownership of Books*, no place, Prairie Press, printed from hand-set type by Carroll D. Coleman for private distribution, Christmas 1937
- H5 *George Gissing Contemplates his Ancient Penholder*, Muscatine, Iowa: Prairie Press, privately printed, Christmas 1938
- H6 *Stray Leaves from The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Westport, Connecticut, Redcoat Press, 1942
- H7 *By the Ionian Sea*, passages selected by Elizabeth M. Chamberlin, Bartlesville, Oklahoma: The Leonard Printing Company, Christmas 1943
- H8 *The Day I granted to my Better Genius*, London: The Imperial Alliance for the Defence of Sunday, 1944
- H12 *Rejection*, London: John Michell and Richard Adams, 1998

Reviews

Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Rarely do societies see the reading of fiction as an unalloyed good. The essential egotism of reading, and of reading fiction in particular, is a little-discussed, guilty secret of our profession, but Nicholas Dames finds where this has been acknowledged in the Victorian period of literary criticism's history. During the nineteenth century, and, as all Gissing scholars will know, especially in the years following the 1870 and 71 Education Acts, the arguments intensified about whether reading novels was good for you or not. What no one has investigated before Dames, however, is the Victorian effort to try to discover this scientifically. His absorbing study of Victorian "physiological criticism" of the novel draws on practitioners such as George Henry Lewes, Alexander Bain and E. S. Dallas to read work by William Thackeray, Vernon Lee, and George Eliot and George Meredith as well as George Gissing.

While Dames draws extensively on Victorian medical, psychological and neurological discourses, *The Physiology of the Novel* remains essentially a literary critical study, in particular one that concerns itself with the

relationship between the novel in its different Victorian forms and the practice of reading. His introduction notes that the sheer amount of time it takes to read a Victorian novel is dealt with by different schools of theory at differing levels of adroitness. In the twentieth century, for instance, Russian Formalism is able to cope better than Anglo-American New Criticism with the fact that reading novels takes place in and over time; and indeed Dames ends his story with I. A. Richards's giving up on including the novel within the scope of his *Principles of Literary Criticism*. For all his interdisciplinary interests, perhaps Dames's greatest strength as a critic is his attentiveness and sensitivity as a formalist himself. He is very acute, for instance, in noting the significances of the structural repetitions in *Daniel Deronda* (in a chapter on Wagner and the leitmotiv that seems to have very little to do with "physiology" except in the very broadest sense). Nonetheless, the original research in this area displayed in *The Physiology of the Novel* will be an asset to literary scholars, as Dames adjudicates the ways Victorians conceptualised the practice of reading stories, as escape or as absorption, as distraction or as the pursuit of knowledge. He skilfully connects the novel with such topics as the nature of "attention" (Théodule Ribot, with whose work Gissing was familiar, is mentioned here), the length of the working day, and nineteenth-century attempts to unify the particles of sensory experience with the wave-form of consciousness. (Since the period under discussion is pre-Einstein, the metaphor is anachronistic, but it proves useful.) Reading a Victorian novel is not a unified or even coherent experience: it is a gradual accumulation of interpretations of barely perceptible differences, and it is interrupted by forms of mental drift as reflection or daydreaming, and indeed by all the experience of everyday life that do not involve looking at a book. Dames's exploration of the "ethical hierarchies (...) of kinds of novel-consumption" (3) shows that notions of even cognition itself are historically contingent: if we have the idea that to read at sustained length is serious and to read in fragments is trivial, then that idea has to have come from somewhere...

The first passage of extended literary analysis is an entertaining exegesis of scenes of reading in Thackeray. The section on Eliot is followed by an unpicking of the ironies in George Meredith, perhaps the least read of the great Victorian novelists – although, for myself, I am less than fully convinced of the deliberateness of the irony that Meredith's notorious difficulty forces on the reader the supposedly low-cultural habit of fragmentary reading.

The discussion of George Gissing's fiction comes towards the end of the work, in the context of the acceleration of reading. Towards the end of the century, novels (if not Gissing's) become shorter, reading becomes faster; both Alfred Yule and Jasper Milvain burn themselves out prematurely by, respectively, reading and writing too much too quickly. Jasper is allied with *New Grub Street's* steam trains in both their modernity and their velocity; the train's value and its working day in time and space is governed by the timetable – and so are Jasper's, as in his account to his sisters of how many hours of writing produce how many inches, and guineas, of text. Dames's context for reading Gissing is new, even if his image of Gissing is not, portraying him as “stubbornly” backward-looking in his adherence to the three-volume structure even after its abandonment by Mudie's and W. H. Smith's in novels such as *The Whirlpool*. A discussion of Gissing's experiments in the shorter form would throw new light on texts such as, in particular, *Eve's Ransom*, given its preoccupations with technology, value and labour. Attention to short stories such as “Spellbound” or “Christopherson” would have been welcome, perhaps; but Dames is acute on what and how characters are reading throughout *In the Year of Jubilee* – and I have never before read a critical discussion of the size and layout of the type in Gissing's books. In spite of some over-ambitious special pleading in the earlier sections, and the occasional opacity in the prose, Dames's fresh and invigorating thesis compels our attention, and is well worth the time taken to read it.—Simon J. James, Department of English, Durham University

Age of Arousal, Stellar Quines Theatre Company, Script by Linda Griffiths, Directed by Muriel Romanes, Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, 18 February-12 March 2011.

When Michael Meyer adapted *The Odd Women* for a play that premiered at the UK's Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre in 1992, I recall the carps about possible anachronisms: especially the mentions of birth control. Well, that is small beer compared with *Age of Arousal*, performed by Scotland's Stellar Quines Theatre Company. In this new adaptation of Gissing's novel it is not long before: Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn have enjoyed a lusty lesbian kiss and skip off to the bedroom for more; Everard Barfoot has performed a speculum-assisted vaginal-cervical examination of his cousin Mary, with Rhoda in attendance; Mary Barfoot has exclaimed, “bollocks,”

“arse,” and “shite”; and Virginia Madden has returned from Berlin as a cross-dresser (which has cured her alcoholism).

Edinburgh’s Saturday matinee Lyceum half-full audience of mostly women beyond a certain age—and more used to safer plays than this self-confessed “wild” adaptation of Gissing’s book—was uncomfortable to start with; but they settled, and then went with it, and enjoyed it. As I did. My friends who were there spent too much time worrying what I, as a Gissing fan, would make of this play. If I were to sum up the adaptation, it is one that had intentions of travelling far from the book, but actually arrived quite close to it.

Most of the main characters are there and recognisably so: Mary Barfoot (Ann Louise Ross), Rhoda Nunn (Clare Lawrence Moody), Everard Barfoot (Jamie Lee), and Virginia (Molly Innes), Alice (Alexandra Matthie), and Monica Madden (Hannah Donaldson). The main plot lines and themes are retained, though some are dropped, such as Monica’s important relationships with Widdowson and Bevis. The writing is aimed at a 21st century audience looking back at the late 19th century, so we are all in-the-know with respect to the anachronisms. There are moments of didacticism in the play: we get short demography lectures on the excess of women over men; thus, the “odd” women, a word that maybe appears just too often. There are also clever styles in the writing too. One of the problems of any adaptation is how to convey the internal thoughts of the characters. Linda Griffiths manages and solves this by having the characters both speak their dialogue lines and—to themselves alone on stage, and to us, of course—what they actually think and feel. This works: it is revealing, and poignant and funny as appropriate. And frustrating too: we see and feel for the happiness that Rhoda and Everard could just about have, if they could cut the Gordian knot that Gissing tied for them.

Men’s sexual feelings, and also tenderness, are well conveyed in Jamie Lee’s convincing and mostly sympathetic Everard. But the main themes are women’s sexualities, bodies and their place in society. And here they are close to Gissing’s narrative and messages. One test of this play is whether we believe in and care about the female characters and their plights. We mostly do. We understand Mary Barfoot’s dilemma between being rebellious and conventional; and consensual and autocratic. We care about the Madden sisters’ dealing with genteel poverty, and Monica’s misuse by men. We are dealt a very even-handed account of Rhoda versus Everard, and we want them to find a truce and happiness together, and are frustrated that

they don't. We concur when Alice sums up a woman's new annoyance during the menopause, "We bleed and then we burn!" A small item of limitation is that Virginia, throughout, is given lines that need to be played for laughs—which Molly Innes does consistently and well—and her "Cabaret"-style re-emergence, back from Berlin, in distressed gentleman's togs is maybe a personal and costume change too far.

The Director (Muriel Romanes) and the design team offer a range of visual treats in *Age of Arousal*. The huge stage and backstage area of the Lyceum are mostly on show. There is a framed curtain half way downstage on to which surtitles are typewritten in light to introduce each scene. This gives a structure to the play, as if it is being done in sketches. The furniture of the play is office-cum-hospital in style; actors lock and unlock the footwheels into place and off again as they bring in and remove the pieces for each scene. Three Remington typewriters on metal-framed pedestals—hardly desks—are objects of wonder, frustration, liberation and devotion as the play progresses. The women's clothes—in shades of grey—are remarkable for their lace-tied bodices and their rears, the latter resembling larger and differently shaped versions of those wire-spiral-supported hoses that emerged from older-style clothes dryers. When not onstage, the actors sit in our full view, at the side, watching the action, and sip from plastic bottles of water.

Mostly, *Age of Arousal* should be celebrated by Gissing's fans. In this enjoyable new setting of *The Odd Women*, look at what has stood up. His strong characters, their personal and social issues, and the overall plot hardly needed changing; quite a series of compliments. The tone is far from Gissing's but the essentials are not. If only the programme—apart from its stating quietly on the cover that it is, "Wildly inspired by *The Odd Women* by George Gissing"—had said something more about the book. The background essay by Ajay Close is about the process of female emancipation in Scotland, never mentioning Gissing's book. It is never sufficiently disclosed to the audience that this play is, in fact, a rather faithful account of this well-worth-reading book.

After the Edinburgh run, *Age of Arousal* tours in Scotland until 16 April 2011.— Ian J. Deary, Department of Psychology, University of Edinburgh

[There is no accounting for tastes, an English proverb says. Indeed the critical response to *Age of Arousal* is fresh evidence of it. On two occasions, in our numbers for October 2008 and April 2009, we referred to hostile judgments passed on this play as a transmutation of Gissing's remarkable novel. Recently a

correspondent echoed these judgments when he reported a friend's view: "We saw a truly awful play in Edinburgh on Saturday—'Age of Arousal'—wildly based on George Gissing's *The Odd Women*."—Ed.]

Notes and News

The reception of Gissing's works in Continental Europe is very imperfectly known. France and Germany did not overlook his death. But what about Switzerland for instance? The *Journal de Genève* mentioned Gissing's death in its number for 1 January 1904, p. 5, under the title "Grande-Bretagne." The digitization of some Swiss newspapers has also led to the discovery of some articles worth adding to the list of reviews and critical assessments contributed to the Swiss weekly, *La Semaine littéraire*. *La Gazette de Lausanne* published a long three-column review of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* on 3 August 1903 ("Variétés: George Gissing," p. 3). About its author, M. de Montet, we have failed to find any information in reference works. His piece begins as an assault on John Bull and his like, but justice is eventually done to several major aspects of *Ryecroft*.

Christina Sjöholm, the author of *The Vice of Wedlock*, has come across a Swedish anthology edited by Ingrid Olausson, *Trädgårdsentusiasterna* — that is, *The Garden Enthusiasts*—(Hagaberg, 1986), which contains 23 short pieces by well-known authors on gardening, among them Bacon, Strindberg, Dickens, Vita Sackville-West, Alice B. Toklas...and Gissing (in translation). In his case the long quotation is one from the *Ryecroft Papers* (Summer XXIV and Autumn I).

Eliane Keller, a local historian living in Arcachon, in south-western France, published in 2001 one more volume on the town whose past cultural life she has done so much to promote. It is entitled *Arcachon: Ses quartiers, ses villas, ses hôtes illustres*, and published by Equinoxe. She devoted a paragraph to Gissing on p. 105. One of his portraits taken by Elliott and Fry in 1901 is reproduced together with one of the Anglican chaplain, the Irish clergyman Samuel Radcliff, who was better known locally for his love of golf than for his strictly professional activities.

Rachel Cooke recently published an article on the ten best neglected literary classics in the *Observer* ("*South Riding* [by Winifred Holtby, 1936]

is not the only lost novel worthy of a BBC1 slot,” 27 February 2011). The ten novels selected were *The Real Charlotte* (Somerville and Ross), *The Vet's Daughter* (Barbara Comyns), *The Rector's Daughter* (F. M. Mayor), *School for Love* (Olivia Manning), *The Wife* (Meg Wolitzer), *A Way of Life, Like Any Other* (Darcy O'Brien), *The Odd Women* (George Gissing), *The Blank Wall* (Elisabeth Sanxay Holding), *Ann Veronica* (H. G. Wells), *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* (Marghanita Laski). Under a photograph of Gissing in 1901 Rachel Cooke wrote: “I love all these books, but *The Odd Women* is the one I wish everyone would read. Virginia and Alice Madden, impoverished by the death of their father, are growing old together in a genteel boarding house, a fate their younger sister, Monica, has been spared thanks to a loveless marriage. All are desperate. But then the Maddens meet the daring feminist Rhoda Nunn. Will her example encourage the Maddens to escape their rhetorical and emotional prisons, or is Rhoda, having fallen suddenly in love, soon to bow out of the great struggle herself?”

Hazel Bell tells us that Robin Nelson has written for Methuen Drama a book due to appear next month, *Stephen Poliakoff on Stage and Screen*, from which we learn that in his 1999 play *Remember This* Poliakoff has a character who is writing a PhD on Gissing, then gives it up after a few years as he feels it will not get him anywhere.

The *Wakefield Express* for 28 February published a large photograph of Stoneleigh Terrace, where Mrs. Gissing and her daughters lived in the 1880s. It will be remembered that about a hundred years later the terrace was converted into a hotel called the Stoneleigh Hotel. Unfortunately it did not pay its way and stood empty for a number of years. We now hear that a Mr. Abdul Hussein was recently given permission to convert the hotel into 27 apartments. Mr. Hussein also hopes to obtain permission later to build 8 semi-detached houses on the car park to the rear. The *Express* article opens with the sentence: “A hotel that was the setting of a classic novel will be transformed into apartments.” The last paragraph reads: “The hotel was originally built as a terrace of houses in 1880, which were home to the mother of literary legend George Gissing. It was while visiting her that he found inspiration for his novel *A Life's Morning*.”

In memory of Dott. Francesco Badolato his relative Vincenzo Misiani of Reggio Calabria organised a ceremony on 22 January 2011 at his Studio Medico, Via N. Bixio (Galleria Zaffino sc. C). The speakers, successively

Luisa Catanoso, Stefano Mangione and the architect Rocco Gangemi, dealt from different angles with Gissing and his masterpiece *Sulla riva dello Jonio*. As on previous occasions it appeared that Gissing and his works, in particular *By the Ionian Sea*, are much liked in southern Italy. Margherita Guidacci and her successors, notably Dott. Badolato, have done much to keep his name green among the intelligentsia of their country. The good, ingenious, advertisement of the first English edition published by Chapman and Hall in 1901, drawing on a number of critical reviews, was one that Italian admirers could have turned to some account. The travel book was praised as being: “Eloquent, dainty, charming, delicate, vivid, fascinating, attractive, poetical, delightful, beautiful, valuable, elegant, refined, learned, shrewd, enthusiastic, distinctive, powerful, joyous.”

Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *Diari Napoletani*, Nocera inferiore: Viva Liber Edizioni, 2011. Pp. 95. Translation and introduction by Vincenzo Pepe. Preface in Italian by Pierre Coustillas. Pictorial Paperback, with front cover picturing an anonymous view of the bay of Naples with Vesuvius in the background. The volume consists of the passages on Naples in Gissing's diary (1888, 1889-90 and 1897). € 11.00. ISBN 978-88-97126-04-1.

George Gissing, *Demos*, Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2011. Pp. 480. Edited by Debbie Harrison. Pictorial paperback. The volume contains a preface by P. Coustillas, an introduction, a note about the author, a chronology of George Gissing, a select bibliography, acknowledgments, a note about the editor, a note on the text and the novel's history, the novel (pp. 35-465), explanatory notes, an appendix on the Politics of *Demos*. The text has been reset. The published price is £14, which is considerably less than that for *Workers in the Dawn*. ISBN 978-1-906469-17-7.

George Gissing, *Three Novellas*, Grayswood, Surrey: Grayswood Press, 2011. Pp. xxxi + 318. Edited by Pierre Coustillas. Hardback with dust jacket. The volume contains a preface, an introduction and the texts of the three short novels published by Gissing in 1895-96, *Eve's Ransom*, *Sleeping Fires* and *The Paying Guest*. Each novella is followed by a

bibliographical note, reviews of the first edition, articles and later comments. Only *Sleeping Fires* is annotated. The texts of the novellas have been reset. £30. ISBN 978-0-9546247-7-4.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Richard Tames, *London: Literary and Cultural History*. Foreword by Nigel Williams. Oxford: Signal Books, 2006. For Gissing see pp. v, 29, 121, 127, 129 and 213.

Elizabeth Hardwick, *The New York Stories of Elizabeth Hardwick*, selected and with an introduction by Darryl Pinckney, New York: New York Review of Books, 2010. Occasional mentions of Gissing and *New Grub Street* occur on pp. 179-93.

Wulfhard Stahl, “‘Verlieren Sie nur nicht die Geduld mit mir.’ Wanda von Sacher-Masoch in ihren Briefen,” in *Haskala*, Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen, Band 45, edited by Marion Kobelt-Groch and Michael Salewski, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York, Georg Olms Verlag, 2010. A long contribution which covers pp. 286-322. The text is preceded by a photograph of Wanda, the original of which is held by the editor of this journal. It was originally given by Wanda to Gabrielle Fleury. The article quotes from her correspondence with various people including Eduard Bertz. The nine letters to him, written in 1909, which offer a slanderous picture of Gabrielle and her mother, are quoted in full. Wanda did try the patience of subsequent generations.

Wulfhard Stahl would like readers of this Journal to know that Bertz was homosexual.

Christine Hugué, “Comptes rendus,” *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, October 2010, no. 72, pp. 201-04. Review of Debbie Harrison’s edition of *Workers in the Dawn*.

D. J. Taylor, “Wells’s golden age,” *Guardian Review*, 12 March 2011, p. 3. The opening paragraph concerns Gissing’s death at Ispoure, near St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. Taylor’s article accompanies a longer one by David Lodge entitled “The History of Mr Wells.”

Tailpiece

The following is an extract from the introductory chapter of William Stott Banks's *Walks about Wakefield* (1871), a volume which appeared one year before the author's death. Banks was a solicitor, a very active man and a friend of Thomas Waller Gissing. As George knew well, Banks was also an antiquarian and a historian. He was greatly interested in the cultural life of his home town, and when Gissing in the mid-1890s was requested by the editor of *Cosmopolis*, a prestigious tri-lingual magazine, to contribute to it a short story which was to have the place of honour in the August 1896 number, he asked his friend Henry Hick—Banks's nephew—to check the presence of the phrase “get agate” in Banks's *List of Provincial Words in use at Wakefield*. The phrase occurs in “A Yorkshire Lass.” Another link between the Banks family and the Gissing family was provided by a friend of Ellen Gissing, Banks's daughter Dorothy, whose husband Canon T. A. Lacey wrote a preface to Ellen's second book, *Angels and Men* (Faith Press, 1928).

Wakefield lies at the foot of the hilly district of this part of West Yorkshire; and as we go westward we find the valleys gradually become deeper and the elevated lands higher. We also find the manners of the inhabitants to vary as much as the surface of the ground. Those who live westward speak more forcibly than the people who dwell immediately to the east and south, and their several dialects are distinguishable from each other. Horbury, Ossett, Dewsbury, and Batley have a far rougher and more vigorous speech and manner than the agricultural parts of the neighbourhood of Wakefield have. The people of the manufacturing districts are, in manner, as hard and sharp as the machines with which they earn their bread; but I do not know that they are, at bottom, less kind than persons who lead a quieter life. They certainly are as industrious; and I think they are as good fathers and mothers and sons and daughters. They are much more independent, and that is a matter of considerable importance as assisting in the formation of national character. Speaking generally, we may say that liberal politics and dissent from the established church are the rule in these districts, as conservative politics and conformity with the church are in the agricultural; but in no part do conservatives and churchmen work with more earnestness than in manufacturing parishes. In fact stout assertion and activity are essential to the existence of any party, political or religious. For one reason, because whatever the people do their native character impels them to do it with all their might; and for another, that if they were to stand still they would be, as one may say, run over by their equally active opponents. Speaking with the allowance of a natural partiality for my own district, I think no other part of the kingdom exhibits more force, more fruitful energy, than this part of West Yorkshire. Without pretending to put it absolutely

first it seems safe to say that there is perhaps no county to which it is clearly second. But it is not here meant to assert that the town and neighbourhood of Wakefield are entitled to pre-eminence in West Yorkshire, for whilst there is not much of which the inhabitants are now compelled to be ashamed but a great deal to be proud of, both with regard to the people and the trade and institutions, the more wonderful expansions in all directions of many other places in the Riding would put such a claim out of all countenance. There once was, however, a time when this might have been made good; but that has passed long ago. Before the development of the Woollen and Iron trades of West Yorkshire it was, as already mentioned, relatively far more noteworthy than it is now. Compared with the great towns of Leeds and Bradford, or even with Batley and Dewsbury, its manufactures in our day are small, though it does of course considerably more business of this kind than it previously did; but still it is behind the above and many other, even secondary, places lying in the great manufacturing district. There is no reason for this in the state of its capabilities for being a town of extensive industrial pursuits. Good fuel is obtained *in* the town at a cheap rate. Water for business purposes is abundant—the means of carriage by railway, river and canal, and common road are very convenient. In fact I know of but two causes that can be alleged why Wakefield does not thrive as much and grow as large as Bradford, Halifax, or Huddersfield; and the chief of these is the circumstance before alluded to, that the town stands at the edge of the great West Yorkshire manufacturing district and not in the midst of it. The second cause I have heard set up is the comparative difficulty of procuring land for Factories and other works, and there probably has been warrant for the assertion; but this kind of obstruction cannot last long anywhere. One large manufactory brings another, and in the end landowners must find it best for their own interests to sell their estates to the new comers. I do not wish to be looked upon as complaining of the small size of my own town when compared with others; but only to make note of the fact. Probably none of the inhabitants would be better, wiser, or happier if it were ten times as large.

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