

# The Gissing Journal

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

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## George Gissing and Edgar Allan Poe

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At first glance it seems an incongruous pairing. The 19<sup>th</sup> century’s greatest fantasy writer and master of the macabre coupled with the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s greatest master of unremitting realism: Edgar Allan Poe and George Gissing. Despite the incongruity, closer inspection elicits a number of points of contact and can help the reader to see beyond the typecasting of authors so beloved of the educational establishments.

The superficial similarities can first be enumerated. Poe was born in Boston in 1809 and died in Baltimore in 1849 at the age of 40 – six years younger than Gissing at his own early death. Yet in his short life he left a large legacy of works: like Gissing he was extremely productive. His first works like those of Gissing were in the world of poetry. *Tamerlane and Other Poems* was self-published in 1827 reminding the reader of Gissing’s later self-published first novel *Workers in the Dawn*. Like *Workers*, *Tamerlane* made virtually no impact. Although both authors started out with the intention of becoming poets, Gissing soon abandoned this literary form. Poe continued off and on, eventually achieving popular success (although not financial) with his poem “The Raven.” Both authors experienced hardships and poverty whilst trying to earn a living through full-time writing and both authors at different times in their lives were prepared to adapt their writing to suit the market. Poe initially turned to the writing of Gothic stories as a form popular with the public, while in later life Gissing laid aside his preference for writing novels to penning short stories which he was able to market more easily and which guaranteed a better income.

In 1845 Poe published an article<sup>1</sup> in the *Broadway Journal* on the hand to mouth existence of many authors and the difficulties of securing payment from editors and publishers – sentiments with which Gissing would have heartily concurred. Poe argued that these authors turned to magazine writing for the higher levels of remuneration, although the delays in payment could be soul-destroying. He encountered financial pressures from the

outset, which would continue throughout his career. Albeit he wrote tongue-in-cheek Poe showed in this article that he understood the real hardships that many authors experienced:

Why (since pay they must) do they not pay with good grace, and promptly. Were we in an ill humor at this moment, we could a tale unfold which would erect the hair on the head of Shylock. A young author, struggling with Despair itself in the shape of a ghastly poverty, which has no alleviation – no sympathy from an everyday world, that cannot understand his necessities, and that would pretend not to understand them if it comprehended them ever so well – this young author is politely requested to compose an article, for which he will “be handsomely paid.” (1037)

The author is flattered by the proposal and although already in great need completes the article and sends it with a covering letter to the editor expecting the promised payment:

A month (starving still), and no reply. Another month – still none. Two months more – still none. A second letter, modestly hinting that the article may not have reached its destination – still no reply. At the expiration of six additional months, personal application is made at the “editor and proprietor”’s office. Call again. ... (1038)

Eventually after numerous attempts to procure his payment the author dies of starvation and the “fat editor and proprietor is fatter henceforward to the amount of five and twenty dollars, very cleverly saved, to be spent generously in canvas-backs and champagne.” (1038)

Both Poe and Gissing would also allude to their sorrows and woes in their poems. In this excerpt from his early poem “Dreams” Poe laments the “chaos” of his childhood:

Oh! That my young life were a lasting dream!  
My spirit not awak’ning till the beam  
Of an Eternity should bring the morrow:  
Yes! tho’ that long dream were of hopeless sorrow,  
’Twere better than the dull reality  
Of waking life to him whose heart shall be,  
And hath been ever, on the chilly earth,  
A chaos of deep passion from his birth!<sup>2</sup>

Gissing, in his March 1876 “Beauty’s Exile,” with premonition, already hints at future sorrows:

More bitter are the pangs of woe,  
The pains with which our hearts are holden,

Than all the lovers' tears that flow  
In rhymèd legend olden.<sup>3</sup>

Five months later, after the calamitous events of the summer and one month's imprisonment, his poem "To Sleep" written in August 1876 strikes a more forbidding tone:

Sleep thou hast a brother stern,  
Rest he gives, but takes the breath;  
Shall I to thy brother turn,  
Faithless sleep, and call on Death?<sup>4</sup>

Just four weeks later in September 1876, Gissing, after sailing as an exile from England arrived at Poe's birth town of Boston. His five-month stay included a brief spell as an assistant teacher at the local high school at Waltham, ten miles from Boston. In March 1877 after moving to Chicago he began writing and submitting short stories to various local newspapers. A number of these early stories are indicative of the strong influence of Poe on his thoughts and writings:

And my soul, from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor,  
Shall be lifted – nevermore!

This couplet – the last in Poe's poem "The Raven" – can be found as an introductory quotation to Gissing's short story "The Death-Clock."<sup>5</sup> This would seem to be the first direct reference to Poe in Gissing's works and one can reasonably assume that he became closely acquainted with his works in America.<sup>6</sup> Gissing would have had access to Poe's works at the Boston and Chicago public libraries which he visited frequently and he would surely have had recourse to his writings when teaching English at Waltham. His familiarity with Poe's writing is borne out by the frequent allusions to recognisable themes in a number of the short stories published in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in the period March to August 1877. The trilogy of short stories "The Death-Clock", "The Serpent-Charm" and "Dead and Alive" is particularly instructive in this respect.

Like many of Poe's short stories "The Death-Clock" has embedded within the text fugitive pieces of poetry. Apart from the lines from "The Raven" already quoted, there are fragments of "Prometheus Unbound" and "The Lotos-Eaters" by Shelley and Tennyson respectively – two of Gissing's favourite poets. There are three other additional poetic fragments that have a Poe-esque flavour. There is evidence that earlier researchers of Gissing's writings tried to source these three fragments. An example can be

found in the 12 December 1920 issue of the *New York Times Book Review and Magazine* where we have this query from G. E. Hastings:

I am trying to find out what stories were contributed to the Chicago Tribune by George Gissing while he was on the staff of that paper during 1876 and 1877. I have identified four stories, but have several more which must be tested by internal evidence. One of these, a melodramatic affair, contains a lot of poetry. There are three quotations which I cannot identify. They are as follows:

The hero in one place says,

“Far into the dreamy land of song  
My soul did float, as a bird storm-tossed, –  
Lashed, and beaten, and all but lost,  
Reaches a haven safe at last  
From the hungry waves, and the biting blast;  
Reaches a haven, to drift along  
With half-closed eyes, nor fear, nor care,  
From dangers past, to come, or where.”

The hero takes a trip,

“Among the Isles of Antilles, that southward stretch away  
In one long emerald chain of beauty gay.”

Again he says, that the heroine’s voice,

“Was like a chime of silver bells  
Whose sweet, sad music floats upon the air,  
Whose plaintive soothing melody ebbs and swells  
In one low song, harmonious, rich and rare.”

A check through subsequent issues of the weekly *New York Times Book Review and Magazine* has failed to elicit any reply to G. E. Hastings’s enquiry.<sup>7</sup> Later researchers also failed to locate any source for these poems. As Gissing had already shown an aptitude for writing poems at Owens College, Boston and Waltham it is reasonable to assume that these three fragments were penned by himself in imitation of Poe. Indeed the whole story with its supernatural and doom-laden content is recognisably Poe-esque. Here we have Dr. Henry Vargrave recounting how he recovered from a threatening fever:

“I shall not weary you with the details of my recovery; it was complete, and I was soon able to walk out and enjoy the novelty of my position. During my sickness I had been cared for at the residence of Don Roderick Morales,

a high-born Spaniard, who resided on the island, an old friend of my father's, and it was owing to his attentive care I had recovered. Don Roderick was a widower with one child, Virginia." (50)

The mention of Virginia reminds the reader of Poe's wife – his young cousin Virginia Clemm. In the story of "The Death-Clock" we learn that Virginia as a young girl had a "snake-charm" spell cast on her by her native nurse and this results in the fateful encounter between Dr. Vargrave and Virginia leading to the young girl's death. However the restless spirit of Virginia casts its own spell on Vargrave which leads to his own dramatic death at the end of the story. The second story in the trilogy "The Serpent-Charm"<sup>8</sup> was published in the *Tribune* on April 28. The reader here is apprised that Dr. Vargrave did not actually die but only entered a death-like cataleptic state from which he finally emerges. This device is a favourite of Poe and is central to such tales as "Berenice," "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Premature Burial." In "The Serpent-Charm" Dr. Vargrave describes how he felt the first stirrings of returning consciousness – and his escape from his premature burial – in a passage as close to Poe as can be found in any of Gissing's early writings:

Gradually there grew upon me an impression of living presence to which my sense of sight was sealed. I heard, as in a dream, soft, thrilling, wordless strains of song. I drank, with languid bliss, the sweet inspiration of a subtly-perfumed breath; I felt, with stirring life, the fanning of cold electric currents of air, as of hands floating in mesmeric waves over my head. Though consciously in the body, all power of motion seemed suspended, or rather under the control of a will outside my own, which was wholly dormant. Suddenly, without warning or effort, my eyes opened on a vision of womanly grace and beauty bending over me with a smile of fascination that drew my soul like lightning from the cloud which had imprisoned it. Involuntarily I rose up, gazing with the entire absorption of every faculty of my being into the deep lustrous eyes which held me by some subtle charm I had no care to analyze nor wish to resist. (59-60)

Readers familiar only with Gissing's novels would not guess that this was penned by the same author. This is a very effective pastiche of Poe and completely alien to Gissing's later more famous works.<sup>9</sup> Supernatural stories have always been popular with readers and one can speculate that Gissing after reading Poe's stories used them as inspiration for his own tales in this area. Furthermore, we know that Gissing in his youth was an avid reader of supernatural and fantastic tales which may well have included some of those by Poe.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, his earliest surviving story, "The

Grandfather's New Year's Story" is an original fantasy written three years earlier by the sixteen-year-old youth.<sup>11</sup> Gissing would have been aware that supernatural tales would sell well to the papers as did Poe's original stories fifty years earlier. The fact that he extended the stories into a trilogy would seem to confirm their popularity. Gissing also re-used the device of the cataleptic state in *The Warden's Daughter* which was printed the very same day, April 28, as "The Serpent-Charm," but in the rival *Chicago Evening Journal*. In this story a young prisoner, Aymer Preston, is pronounced dead by the prison doctor and moved to the dissecting room. During the night he recovers from his cataleptic state and escapes the prison with the help of the warden's daughter.<sup>12</sup> In the third story of the Valgrave trilogy "Dead and Alive"<sup>13</sup> we also have a character – Marie Munroe, the heroine, who, in a cataleptic state, is buried alive. However, here she is only drugged to appear dead – and later released by the perpetrators who were hoping to achieve a financial gain through their crime.

The first mention of Poe in Gissing's correspondence is in a letter to his brother Algernon dated 20 August 1879, two years after his return from America. Interestingly he mentions another American short story writer in the same paragraph:

Have you read any Bret Harte ever? I have just bought his poems, & a vol. of his best short tales; pub<sup>d</sup> new at 1/- each by Routledge. There is admirable matter in these; I wish you could see them. One of these days, if you do not know them, I will drop them by post for you to read. I have also bought Poe's Tales lately, admirable things.<sup>14</sup>

As already outlined Gissing undoubtedly became acquainted with many American writers during his time in both Boston and Chicago. The evidence from his earlier stories points to a good knowledge of Poe and mention of these American writers after his return would seem to confirm this. The next reference to Poe is in another letter to Algernon four months later on January 2, 1880 where he mentions him *apropos* his latest story "Cain and Abel":

I have to-night finished a horrible story – "Cain and Abel," the writing of which has made me shiver. It is rather in Poe's style, be it said. It is a tale of two brothers. The elder is christened Abel after his father; & the younger, through a curious circumstance, receives the name of Cain. The name haunts him like a Fate, & he ends as the convicted murderer of his brother Abel. Rather horrible this, eh? But I assure you it is dreadfully effective.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike most of Gissing's other stories this one is written in the first person narrative typically employed by Poe.<sup>16</sup> From his letter we can see that

Gissing had a high opinion of this story and it clearly affected him deeply when writing in this, unusual for him, personal style. Although it has a strong narrative drive the story is rather wordy and its title forewarns the reader of the outcome. The earlier stories in the Dr. Vargrave trilogy have a more youthful spirit about them and remain more inventive and atmospheric.

However, Poe's influence on Gissing continued over the succeeding months as evinced by a more effective and better-constructed story, written eighteen months later. "The Quarry on the Heath"<sup>17</sup> is a dramatic, brooding, and tragic tale, and one of the most powerful amongst Gissing's earlier works. Although there are genuine Poe-esque overtones, they are now masked in a tale that is no longer pastiche. Here, Gissing has found his authentic realistic voice in combining a tale of illegitimacy with an original reworking of Poe's classic tale "The Fall of the House of Usher,"<sup>18</sup> which he has effectively transposed to an industrial 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape. The opening scene depicting the dreary South Yorkshire landscape,<sup>19</sup> immediately captures echoes of Poe:

"Drearier country than that around the village of Wastell Heath it would not be easy to discover in England. Flat, woodless, unwatered save by muddy little becks, such features in it as owe their origin to the hand of man only aid to render it uglier and more depressing ..." (242)

Compare this to Poe's well-known opening lines:

"During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country ..." (317)

The long introductory paragraphs to both stories describe bleak and oppressive landscapes, effectively setting the scene for the ensuing events. In the *House of Usher* Poe sets his decaying building with the bleak, crumbling walls and vacant eye-like windows by the side of a "precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre ..." (318)

In Gissing's story, the village of Wastell Heath is situated by the side of a small heath, in the middle of which is found "a small stone-quarry, long since abandoned, and the hollow at the foot of the rugged wall of rock now converted into a species of dismal swamp, one or two deep black pools marking themselves out among the foul mud-shallows, their surface at times sluggishly stirred by the wind. On the edge of this quarry stood a rude shed, built of rough-hewn stones, the roof of planks half crumbled

away, and the single aperture, on the quarry side, much widened by dilapidation ...” (243)

Note how effectively Gissing’s transforms Poe’s imaginary Gothic “mansion” into a dilapidated workman’s “shed” situated by a black water-filled quarry. The contrast between romantic Gothicism and 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial realism could hardly be greater. It is this crumbled, broken-down shed that serves as a lovers’ tryst for the ill-fated couple, Bertha Lashmore and Harold Cuthbertson.

Gissing’s introduction at this point of the main protagonist, the Rev. Edgar Lashmore, returning across the heath from the death-bed of a remote parishioner, extends the dismal Poe-esque setting:

The day had been throughout gloomy, and at present the darkening sky with its one short rift of pale red in the west, the low piping of the wind through the ragged bushes, the absence of any sound from living creature save the dull splash of the walker’s footfall on the muddy ground, seemed to harmonize well with the state of Mr. Lashmore’s mind. ... Perhaps it was the impression of the scene he had just left which gave his face such a fixed look of gloomy brooding. (243)

Gissing’s choice of the Rev. Lashmore’s Christian name is hardly accidental. In his early draft of the story Gissing tries out two alternative names: the Rev. Hilton Lashmore and the Rev. Benjamin Lashmore.<sup>20</sup> In the final draft the revised name is coupled with the more elaborate and atmospheric Poe-esque landscape, suggesting that Gissing, at some point, between the first and final draft, consciously elaborated the story to present an updated reworking of Poe’s tale. Another suggestive clue is in the origins of the title. Gissing’s original choice was “Visited Upon the Children” in imitation of a similar theme in his first published story “The Sins of the Fathers.” This was then shortened to the simpler one word “Fate” before metamorphosing into the final more prosaic choice.<sup>21</sup>

Poe’s writing of course, when compared to Gissing’s more factual descriptions, remains distinctly more poetic, dreamlike and romantic, yet the overall effects are not dissimilar. The story of the doomed and incestuous love of Harold Cuthbertson and Bertha Lashmore echoes the suggested incestuous relationship between Roderick and Madeline Usher – although Gissing’s characters are initially wholly unaware of their blood relationship. The first descriptions of Harold and Bertha are worth noting. Here the scene is again the broken-down shed at the side of the quarry where the lovers are discovered by Bertha’s father, Edgar Lashmore:



The lovers were pale as death, the girl holding her hand pressed upon her heart, and not daring to raise her eyes, the young man ... was tall and nervously made, with features far from regular in outline, but open and nobly eloquent, the dark eyes full of passionate fire. She beside him was very young and of slight, childish figure. Her countenance showed clearly the struggle between bodily weakness and spiritual energy, the plaintive, tremulous lips contrasting with the vivid exaltation which glorified her eyes and brow. (244)

The description of Bertha as a pale, thin, child-like figure is characteristic of many of Poe's tragic heroines. Harold has the noble visage of the typical Poe character allied to a nervous disposition. Roderick Usher is described by Poe as with "an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison ... with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten." (321)

Gissing adds a fine descriptive passage to the scene which emphasises the physical precariousness of the hut, isolated on the stormy heath and again evoking its decaying Gothic counterpart:

It was darkening in the hut, and the cold, rain-presaging wind from the heath whistled through the crevices drearily; a piece of stone or earth loosened itself from the edge of the quarry, and fell with a hollow splash down into the black pool. (245)

A characteristic of many of Poe's tales is the descent into madness of one of his protagonists. In "The House of Usher" it is Roderick who descends into madness at the supposed death of Madeline: eventually leading to the physical destruction of the House of Usher. In Gissing's tale the roles are reversed and here it is Bertha who descends into madness at the death of Harold. In a dramatic scene – worthy of Poe – the Sunday Communion service read by the Rev. Edgar Lashmore, at the local church in Wastell Heath, is cut short:

His voice was interrupted by a loud, wild laugh, such a laugh as chills the blood with sudden horror. Looking down into the church, he saw his daughter Bertha standing at the entrance, her eyes wandering in the meaningless glare of madness, and her features distorted with a ghastly mirth. Peal followed on peal of laughter, ringing with a horrible echo through the bare aisle. (257)

Although Harold does not fully descend into madness, his fate, as already indicated, is equally sealed:

Leaving the parsonage in a state of mind not far from madness, he had rushed forth ... And so at length chance had brought him to the edge of the

quarry. The wild storm beat in his face; he neither saw nor thought of what was in front of him; and only a hollow splash of water, a brief cry, told that he had perished in the darkness. (258)

The ending of Gissing's tale bears comparison with that of Poe's tale:

From that chamber, and from that mansion, I fled aghast. The storm was still abroad in all its wrath as I found myself crossing the old causeway. Suddenly there shot along the path a wild light ... I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder ... and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "House of Usher." (335-336)

Harold's death coupled with Bertha's subsequent madness ends the House of Lashmore as effectively as Roderick's madness and his and Madeline's death end the House of Usher. Gissing's more factual rendering together with his third party narrative, including flash-backs of scenes, effectively distances the reader from the more recognisably personal and linear narrative of Poe's tale; but sufficient clues remain embedded in the text.

"The Quarry on the Heath" is the last-known Poe-esque tribute by Gissing and future stories would typically shift to realistic depictions of poverty and strife of contemporary London life. However, Gissing's admiration of Poe and his writings would stay with him as borne out by his later letters and diaries. Apart from his early purchase of the *Tales* we know that Gissing also owned the 1885 edition of *The Poetical Works of Edgar Allan Poe* edited by Joseph Skipsey.<sup>22</sup> Entries in his *Diary* from February 1896 record that he bought and read John Henry Ingram's laudatory *Life of Poe* (1891), while in October 1898 he records that he was "reading Tennyson and Poe with Gabrielle."<sup>23</sup> Thus we return full circle to two of the poets who graced one of his very first stories "The Death-Clock." Gissing's interest in and appreciation of Poe, which began early in his career, remained to the end. Had his circumstances been different he might well have written more tales in the Poe-esque vein: his early short stories show that he was adept at imitating the master's style and later just as effectively fusing that style with his own developing realism.

At heart George Gissing was a romantic. His interest in poetry and specifically of poets such as Tennyson, Shelley and Poe indicates as much. Future biographers and critics need to take into account this aspect of his personality if they wish to fully appreciate his works and especially his earliest works – such as his poetry and early short stories. His life, notably his hopes and dreams of a future together with Nell Harrison confirm him as a completely unworldly romantic. That he ended up as a celebrated realist author resulted from circumstance – not design.

<sup>1</sup>Edgar Allan Poe, "Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House," *Broadway Journal*, 15 February 1845. Reprinted in *Poe: Essays and Reviews*, New York: The Library of America, 1984, pp. 1036-1038. Page numbers in text refer to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Edgar Allan Poe, "Dreams" in *Poe: Poetry and Tales*, New York: The Library of America, 1984, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>Bouwe Postmus, *An Exile's Cunning: Some Private Papers of George Gissing*, Wormerveer, The Netherlands: Stichting Uitgeverij Noord-Holland, 1999, p. 313.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>5</sup>George Gissing, *Collected Short Stories: Volume One*, Grayswood, Surrey: Grayswood Press, 2011, pp. 45-53.

<sup>6</sup>Gissing was already familiar with this poem during his student days at Manchester as evidenced by a letter he received from his fellow student John George Black, dated 26 March 1876, who quotes Poe in the postscript "Quoth the raven, 'Never more.'" See Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Volume One: 1863-1880*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1990, p. 43.

<sup>7</sup>G. E. Hastings was Professor George Everett Hastings of Arkansas University. In 1931 he was co-editor along with Vincent Starrett and Thomas Ollive Mabbott of *Brownie*, in which were reprinted seven of Gissing's Chicago stories, including the Dr. Vargrave trilogy. It is interesting to note that in the story "Brownie" – another eerie piece unambiguously attributed to Gissing – there are also a few lines of verse undoubtedly written by Gissing himself. In his original magazine query Hastings was under the mistaken impression that Gissing was actually a staff member of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*.

<sup>8</sup>*Collected Short Stories: Volume One*, pp. 59-63. Page numbers in text refer to this edition.

<sup>9</sup>Some Gissing scholars have registered their doubts as to the authorship of the Dr. Vargrave trilogy. These include Vincent Starrett and Thomas Ollive Mabbott in their introductions to *Brownie* (1931) and more recently Robert L. Selig in "Unconvincing Gissing Attributions: 'The Death-Clock', 'The Serpent-Charm', 'Dead and Alive,'" *The Library: Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* (1987) s6-IX(2):169-172. However, doubters of Gissing's authorship of the trilogy have still to provide alternate suggestions for the identity of the fine author who has a lively imagination allied to a deep knowledge of the stories and poems of Poe and also the poems of Tennyson and Shelley and who is also able to compose competent verse. In addition we need to know why we hear no more from this author or his relatives or why they did not respond to Everett Hastings' query in the *New York Times Book Review and Magazine* and indeed why they never came forward to dispute the authorship on the publication of the trilogy in *Brownie*. A literary genius such as the later Gissing may have been content to dismiss and forget all his earlier works but any other author would have been justly proud of these works and highly unlikely to discard them in such a cavalier fashion.

<sup>10</sup>Pierre Coustillas, *The Heroic Life of George Gissing, Part I: 1857-1888*, London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011, p. 118.

<sup>11</sup>Originally printed in the *Gissing Journal*, April 2003, pp. 1-5. First book publication in *Collected Short Stories: Volume One*, pp. 3-6.

<sup>12</sup>*Collected Short Stories: Volume One*, pp. 64-67.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 150-156.

<sup>14</sup>*The Collected Letters of George Gissing: Volume One, 1863-1880*, p. 197.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>16</sup>Pierre Coustillas gives a detailed account of the many Poe-esque allusions to be found in this story in George Gissing, *Essays and Fiction*, The Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore and London, 1971, pp. 43-48

<sup>17</sup>*Collected Short Stories: Volume One*, pp. 242-258. Page numbers in the text refer to this edition.

<sup>18</sup>Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Tales*, New York: The Library of America, 1984, pp. 317-336. Page numbers in text refer to this edition.

<sup>19</sup>For further details on the locale see Clifford Brook, "The Quarry on the Heath – When and Where," *Gissing Newsletter*, July 1977, pp. 22-26.

<sup>20</sup>Mentioned in the footnotes in *Essays and Fiction, op cit.*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>22</sup>*The Collected Letters of George Gissing: Volume Nine, 1902-1903*, p. 260.

<sup>23</sup>Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, Hassocks, East Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978, p. 503.

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## Gissing Reviewed on Amazon

[Finding one's way through the electronic jungle of Amazon is almost as complicated an affair as finding it in a tropical jungle. We have in hand a batch of Customer Reviews, as they are called, published on Amazon, and they are generally well worth reading. We are not invariably told which edition it was that the reviewer had on his desk when he wrote his piece, but it hardly matters. Very few of Gissing's novels were revised—only *The Unclassed*, *Thyrza* and *The Emancipated*. So the publisher's name is not of crucial importance.

Our informants are Martha Vogeler, who came across Gissing's name on the Amazon website by chance, and Robin Friedman, who has reviewed a large number of Gissing's works, most of them available new, some from Oxford University Press and Penguin, others far more remarkably from Victorian Secrets which, after *Workers in the Dawn* has given *Demos* a new lease of life and will soon publish a new edition of *Thyrza* (three volumes reset in one).

We are now able to reprint, with grateful thanks to Mr. Friedman of Washington D. C., his recent article on the *Gissing Journal*, followed by other reviews of Gissing's works, principally by him but also by some unknown contributors to "Amazon Customer Reviews."

We follow the order of publication of Gissing's work from *Workers in the Dawn* to *Ryecroft* and we safely promise several instalments of such reviews.

Let us hope that, if this selective reviewing is to go on, it will include a few enlightened assessments of Gissing's short stories based on an anthology like that issued by Dent in 1993 or in the *Collected Short Stories* (Grayswood Press). Two corrections must be made. In his review of *Born in Exile*, Robin Friedman says he read *Born in Exile* in a Harvester edition, introduced by Gillian Tindall. The truth is that it was to the Hogarth edition that Gillian Tindall contributed a very short

introduction. The Harvester edition of the novel was edited by the present writer in 1978.

Nor should the title of the other review of *Born in Exile* be allowed to stand. Godwin Peak is not a new Tartuffe. H. Schneider should reread Molière's play either in the original French or in a reliable English translation. He would realize how inadequate the comparison is! But we emphatically approve his suggestion that either Penguin or Oxford World's Classics should publish a new edition.— P. Coustillas]

“A Magazine for Lovers of Gissing,” 2 December 2011

George Gissing (1857-1903) was a late Victorian British novelist who remains unfamiliar to many readers. I have been reading him for many years and, a few years ago, began rereading his books and posting reviews here on Amazon. When I did so, I found a relatively small number of other reviews of Gissing's better-known titles by other readers of his. Then, something unexpected happened. Several readers whom I had come to know here on Amazon saw my reviews and began reading Gissing for themselves. The result has been a surprising number of good reader reviews on Gissing books. The reviews have covered Gissing's more famous works such as *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women* and *The Nether World*. But highly worthwhile lesser-known books including *Eve's Ransom*, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, *Born in Exile*, and *Will Warburton* have also received perceptive reviews from my friends here. (My own reviews include these and other titles.) I was happy and a little surprised to see readers take to Gissing and to see other readers enjoy the reviews.

I thought about the growing interest in this author again during the past week as a result of a review posted by a good friend of Gissing's novel *The Whirlpool*. This novel, written late in Gissing's career, is unusual in that it is set in London's upper-middle class. Gissing generally writes about the urban poor and struggling middle class. *The Whirlpool* explores Gissing's favourite moods such as pessimism and themes such as the impact of industrialisation and commercialism on urban life, the creation of an alienated class of urban, generally male, intellectuals, and the rise of a spirit of political jingoism and social Darwinism. Most of all, *The Whirlpool* is about men and women and about the nature and difficulty of what today is described as companionate marriage. *The Whirlpool* may not be the best of Gissing's books, but it is the most modernistic in tone. My friend's fine review of this book has attracted a spirited 120 reader comments here on Amazon and the number is still growing.

I don't want to explore the source of the fascination with Gissing in this review. Rather, readers might want to read the reviews under the titles mentioned above, as well as others, and see for themselves. In addition, I wanted to call readers' attention to this fine and unusual periodical, the *Gissing Journal*. This is a small publication which appears quarterly with a charcoal drawing of its subject on a salmon colored cover. The *Gissing Journal*, which succeeded in 1991 the *Gissing Newsletter* (1965-1990), is published by the Gissing Trust, founded in 1978 by the Wakefield (Gissing's home town) Civic Society "to further the establishment of the Gissing Centre, the preservation of properties associated with George Gissing, the acquisition, care and display of objects connected with George Gissing and the literary history of Wakefield, and the pursuit of research relating to George Gissing and the literary history of Wakefield." The journal is edited by Pierre Coustillas, a French scholar who doubtless knows more about Gissing than anyone ever has. Most recently Coustillas has written a three-volume biography, *The Heroic Life of George Gissing*. The first volume has been published and is, alas, expensive.

Most scholarly journals devoted to a literary figure are dry, specialized, and expensive. The *Gissing Journal* is unique in that it is none of these things. The contributors tend to be academics and other readers with a great knowledge and love for Gissing's writings. But the articles are well-written and accessible and offer wonderfully perceptive writing on Gissing's books and on the story of his unusual life. Each issue includes several articles, a book review section, a list of new books, and notes on various aspects of Gissing studies. I feel in reading this periodical that I am in the company of people who share a common passion rather than in a circle of academics.

The most recent issue of the *Gissing Journal* includes a panel discussion taken from a recent Gissing conference held in York. A group of four scholars from the United States and Britain discuss "Teaching Gissing in the Twentieth Century." The group includes three Professors of English together with a Professor of Geography who is interested in depictions of space and of Victorian London in Gissing. One of the contributors writes of his experiences in teaching Gissing at a small two-year junior college in rural Wisconsin. Another contributor describes his experiences with graduate students. In light of the review of *The Whirlpool* and the many comments it received, I found it interesting that this panellist focused on the novel. He teaches the novel in a course exploring concepts of masculinity in fin-de-siècle literature. The author, Professor Simon James, writes:

This course mediates across issues of sexuality and masculine identity, to heredity and child-rearing, to imperialism and violence. In this case, the difficulty of aligning *The Whirlpool* clearly among such diverse writers as Wilde, Forster, Conrad, Stevenson or Conan Doyle is very much a part of its interest. The complexity of the text dialogic responses to themes such as mass culture—morally repugnant but economically necessary for the hero—or imperialism—also deplorable but perhaps a better path to masculine self-expression for men such as Hugh Carnaby than marriage to the urban siren Sibyl—requires students to engage in detail with the modulating ironies and, in this novel in particular, the obliquities and ellipses of Gissing’s later narrative mode. We always engage in class in a lengthy analysis of the novel’s strikingly prescient final chapter ... this passage usefully encapsulates many themes of the course as a whole—and is also a painful reminder that the children of so many writers studied for it, Gissing included, fathered sons who would die in World War One.

Among other features, this issue also includes a study of *Eve’s Ransom*, a short novel which has attracted reader reviews and praise on Amazon and a review of the first volume of the Coustillas biography.

I enjoy pursuing my interest in Gissing through the *Gissing Journal* and I thought other readers of the novelist would at least like to be aware of it. Back articles from 1991 to the early 2000s have been digitized and are available on the internet. Gissing will never be a popular writer in the nature of the case; but his readers tend to be devoted. I am pleased that Amazon has provided a forum for the spread of knowledge about Gissing. Subscriptions to *The Gissing Journal* for those that may be interested are available through Amazon at a surprisingly modest price.— Robin Friedman

“Far, Far Away,” 3 June 2010

When the 22-year-old George Gissing (1857-1903) published his first novel in 1880, he was in the midst of a troubled life. A scholarship student at Owens College, Gissing had been expelled and served a month in prison after he had been caught stealing to support a young prostitute, Nell. Gissing then lived in the United States unhappily for a year. He returned to England and married Nell. With Nell’s alcoholism, illnesses, and prostitution and the couple’s repeated moves from one dreadful apartment to another, the marriage was deeply unhappy. Gissing wanted to support himself as a writer. He worked feverishly on his novel during 1879. It is, in part, a fictionalized account of his relationship with Nell.

Gissing first called his book “Far, Far Away” after a street-song of the London slums quoted during the story. He later adopted the more evocative title *Workers in the Dawn*. The novel was rejected by several publishers before it was accepted on condition that Gissing pay the publication and printing costs. Gissing did so using the proceeds of a small inheritance. The book sold poorly and was not reprinted until an American edition appeared in 1935. The book was reissued in 1985 and has now been reissued again in this new edition published by Victorian Secrets, edited and introduced by Debbie Harrison, and with a preface by the leading scholar of Gissing, Pierre Coustillas. [...]

With all its faults, I would not part with this book. It is the first of a series of novels in which Gissing examined the lives of the London poor. The work is written in a tone of seriousness. It is in part a novel of ideas with broad reference to religious and social issues. It captures a degree of rootlessness and restlessness in its characters that has a modernistic tone and that Gissing would develop in his subsequent works. The book deals frankly with issues of sexuality. It is the story of people who are essentially loners. Gissing explores the tensions between a life devoted to art as compared to a life devoted either to social causes or to commercial success. The novel is deeply pessimistic. All told, it was a good effort by its struggling young author.

The novel tells the story of a young man named Arthur Golding from the death of his dissolute father in the London slums when the boy was 8 until Golding’s suicide by throwing himself into Niagara Falls at the age of 23. When Golding’s father dies, a friend, a country minister named Edward Norman of sceptical tendencies, accepts responsibility for the boy and attempts to educate him in a peaceful rural setting. But Arthur escapes and runs back to London to search for the grave of his father. He becomes irremediably involved in low life. Consumptive and weak, Edward Norman dies young without finding Arthur again, but he leaves Arthur a subsequent bequest in his will which the boy is to receive upon turning 21. After returning to London, Arthur is rescued from a life on the streets by a poor printer named Tollady. Samuel Tollady, who essentially adopts him, teaches him a trade, educates him and encourages the boy in his obvious artistic gift. Arthur ultimately studies art with a friend of Edward Norman, Gresham, who is a successful society painter and the guardian of Norman’s daughter Helen.

There are two primary women in Golding’s life. The first is Helen Norman, a wealthy, idealistic social reformer, and the second is Carrie Mitchell,



a working girl and a young prostitute. Early in the book Helen and Arthur develop a romantic interest but they lose track of each other following Tollady's death. Arthur meets and becomes involved with Carrie while she is carrying a child out of wedlock who soon dies. Arthur saves Carrie's life and marries her, but the two do not get along. Arthur cannot resist trying to improve Carrie by educating her and Carrie turns inexorably to alcohol and to prostitution. When Carrie leaves Arthur, Helen and Arthur begin a relationship which Helen ends abruptly when she learns that Arthur is married. A broken man at the age of 22, Arthur sails to the United States where he wanders aimlessly for a year before killing himself at Niagara Falls.

Gissing is at his best in this novel when he writes of what he knows well: the streets of the London slums and their people, some of the characters, and the plagued relationship between Arthur and Carrie. Gissing has a feel for the life of the poor in London in the 1860s and 1870s. In this book, he describes their lives with passion. In *Workers in the Dawn* Gissing seems to advocate education, of the type Helen Norman tries to carry on, and social activism as a slow but possibly effective cure for the evils of slum life. Arthur's suicide is told dramatically and effectively. The scenes when a young Helen Norman studies philosophy in Germany and develops her social idealism also are presented well and effectively. Helen's ideals of a life of moral activity without religion are central to *Workers in the Dawn*. The sections of the book set in rural England outside London and upper-middle class areas of London tend on the whole to drag. The love affair between Helen and Arthur, and Helen's moral probity and rigidity, tend to be awkward and unconvincing.

This is a book that demands a devoted reader eager to work through it. It will be of most interest to readers with a passion for Gissing: those who have read several of his better-known books and who know something of his life and preoccupations and who wish to see him at his literary near-beginning. Although the book is in a class by itself in some ways, many of Gissing's themes are stated in *Workers in the Dawn*. I would not willingly have passed by this book and new edition.

Following *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing would not publish his second novel, *The Unclassed*, for four years (1884). The latter book is also set among the London poor and includes among its main characters a struggling young man with literary ambitions who is torn between his feelings for a prostitute and for a prim woman. But the tone of the book differs significantly from the earlier novel. Gissing would proceed with a series of

several additional proletarian novels before moving to other social settings later in his life.

The publication of *Workers in the Dawn* by Victorian Secrets making it easily accessible to current readers was an event. This small publisher will be issuing several other rare early novels by Gissing and other neglected Victorian writers in the next few years. Besides the prefaces and notes, this book includes a useful chronology of Gissing's life. The book also includes a map called "Arthur Golding's London" which shows the reader the places Gissing mentions in his story. Many of the landmarks of the London poor quarters were demolished after Gissing wrote. The map is a valuable addition to a volume I will treasure.— Robin Friedman

"Thanks Victorian Secrets," 27 January 2010

First, a thank you for publisher Victorian Secrets for publishing hard to find Victorian novels. I was impressed by the foreword by Debbie Harrison, extensive notes and the over all quality of this book. Purchasers of Broadview Press, Zitlaw and Valancourt books will welcome this new publisher of Victorian novels. I don't feel I can review Gissing's novel [*Workers in the Dawn*] with any sort of expertise. I just know what I like and this novel had all the tragedy and melodrama that make Victorian novels so enjoyable. There are no tea parties, no grand room balls, just the gritty, dirty streets of London's poor. If you enjoy the greats, Dickens, Eliot, Collins, try George Gissing, in my opinion an overlooked master.—R. Burke, "bob from twinsburg"

"A Rare Late Victorian Novel," 15 October 2009

Although little-known today, George Gissing's (1857-1903) second published novel *The Unclassed* deserves to be read and remembered. The book was written in 1884 and published as a three-decker novel for which Gissing received the paltry sum of £30. In 1895, when he had received some recognition as a novelist, Gissing edited *The Unclassed* by cutting about one-third of the initial text and writing a short Preface. Although it seems the weaker of the two versions, the second edition of *The Unclassed* is virtually always used when the book is reissued.

The novel was an ambitious effort for a young struggling writer of 26, with broad themes of love, friendship, social alienation, and urban life. It includes powerful scenes of the slums of Victorian London and a treatment of prostitution which, for its days, was frank and explicit. Much of the

novel is autobiographically based, but the reader new to Gissing would be well advised to approach it simply on its own ground. The two primary male characters, Osmond Waymark and Julian Casti, are young, bookish and aspiring writers. They are both lonely and meet through a personal ad for companionship that Waymark had placed in the paper. The men led a bohemian type of life, spurning and yet envying middle-class security, stolidity and respectability. Casti has ambitions of writing a long poem about ancient Rome while Waymark wishes to describe the life of the poor around him. Waymark had begun as a radical and an advocate for social change but, in part under the influence of Schopenhauer, had abandoned any form of activism. Waymark aspires to write solely for the beauty of art. As are many people today, Waymark is sceptical of established values and a relativist.

With all this, *The Unclassed* is primarily a love story. Waymark is torn between two women, the conventional, prim and religious Maud Enderby and Ida Starr. Ida is working as a prostitute when Waymark meets her. The two establish a friendship as Waymark brings her books and encourages Ida in educating and uplifting herself. Casti is manipulated into marriage by a woman named Harriet Smales, who is a cousin of his. She ultimately destroys both Casti's manuscripts and his life and bears false witness to send Ida Starr for six months in prison. With his terrible marriage, Casti also falls in love with Ida, one of the love interests of Waymark, provoking both Waymark's and Harriet's jealousy.

The novel is at its best in the portrayals of the squalid parts of London, where Waymark takes work as a collector of rents to support himself while he writes his long novel, including the filthy tenements and the sordid bars. Gissing also has a sense for portraying viciousness in the persons of Harriet and Smiley, a denizen of the slums. The book also shows bohemian literary life as it describes long conversations into the night between Waymark and Casti on art, philosophy, and literature. Both Waymark and Casti are inveterate walkers at all hours of the London streets, and Gissing captures their endless ramblings through the city. Although restrained to meet Victorian expectations, there is much discussion in this book about middle-class sexual standards and expectations and about prostitution in the persons of Ida and some other women. In the best-known scene of *The Unclassed*, Ida Starr immerses herself in the sea on a dark night during a brief holiday in the hope of cleansing what she sees as the stain of her way of life and beginning anew.

The book is frequently criticized for its idealistic, romanticized portrayal of Ida Starr. Gissing seems all too ready to assume her ability to rise in a short time to a high emotional and intellectual level given the life in which she finds herself. The book also appears conflicted between its apparent goal of taking a realistic, dispassionate look at slum life on the one hand, and the preaching, didactic, and idealistic elements which permeate the story. It moves uneasily between a realistic novel and a novel of ideas. But these conflicts are also part of the book's, and the author's, unique strength and character. This form of divided sensitivity is still prevalent for many and is a source of fascination and passion that a group of readers still has for Gissing.

In 1884, under pressure from his publisher, Gissing rewrote the final volume of his novel, following suggestions made by the publisher's reader, George Meredith. Then, in 1895, Gissing shortened the book. In his Preface, Gissing wrote that it "was written and sent forth a long, long time ago" and that the themes and attitudes which had so troubled the book's early readers had become reduced in significance with time. Gissing also explained the term "unclassed": "Male and female, all the prominent persons of the story dwell in a limbo external to society. They refuse the statistic badge—will not ... be 'classed and done with.'"

Readers who become fascinated with Gissing or with *The Unclassed* will want to read the work in the original 1884 edition which, for all its prolixity, tells a fuller, more convincing story. But it is fortunate that this work, in either edition, remains available to be read and savored by those readers wanting to engage with Gissing.— Robin Friedman

"A New Edition of Gissing's *Demos*," 4 May 2011

It is an event when a new edition of a rare novel of the late Victorian writer George Gissing (1857-1903) becomes available. *Demos* was Gissing's third novel and was first published anonymously in 1886. It is one of a series of Gissing's early novels that deal with the lives of the London Poor. As its subtitle, "A Story of English Socialism," suggests, *Demos* has an overtly political theme. The novel appeared and drew much attention during a period of substantial socialist agitation in England, including the Haymarket riots of 1886. This new edition of *Demos* is published by a small press, Victorian Secrets Ltd, which has the goal of making accessible unjustly forgotten works of Victorian fiction. Victorian Secrets earlier published Gissing's first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, and has followed it with this important work. Debbie Harrison, an Honorary Research Fellow

at the University of London, has edited the volume together with an Introduction, background notes, and an Appendix summarizing “The Politics of *Demos*.” The preeminent Gissing scholar Pierre Coustillas has written a Preface to the volume. *Demos* is the only novel of Gissing that was made into a movie. Titled “Why Men Forget” in its 1921 American release, the film featured Milton Rosner and Evelyn Brent in the two leading roles. The movie has become as obscure as the novel on which it is based and does not appear to be available on DVD.

The unthinking, irrational mob, personified in the title *Demos*, is the main character in the novel. Gissing deeply distrusted the mob together with democracy in general. George Orwell offered a more particularized description of the novel’s subject. He wrote that the book told “a story of the moral and intellectual corruption of a working-class Socialist who inherits a fortune.” The novel moves in its setting between the London slums and a fictitious village called Wanley, located in a peaceful rural setting. Wanley is about to become the site for extensive mining and manufacturing operations which will destroy its idyllic character while providing jobs to many workers.

The main individual character in the novel is Richard Mutimer, a worker who is an active speaker in the Socialist movement. When a distant relative, also named Mutimer, dies apparently without a will, Richard Mutimer appears to inherit his entire extensive estate which centers on Wanley and the mineral resources that the elder Mutimer had just begun to exploit. When he learns of his windfall, Mutimer decides to continue the mining and manufacturing at what he calls the New Wanley. He proposes to turn the project into a model socialist community run for the benefit of the workers. Mutimer’s elderly mother is sceptical about the project from the beginning. She does not want to leave her poor rooms or her children. In addition to Richard the family includes a daughter, Alice, known aptly as the “Princess,” and a young son, Harry or ‘Arry, who shows all the makings of a wastrel.

Richard has been engaged to a poor working girl, Emma Vine, who adores him. With his new fortune and project, Richard callously jettisons Emma in favour of a girl from a middle-class family which has fallen upon hard times. At the urging of her mother and brother Alfred, Adela Waltham reluctantly agrees to marry Richard Mutimer. She tries to be a dutiful wife but can find no love for Richard. As the story continues, Adela comes to detest her husband before a measure of reconciliation towards the end.

As Richard Mutimer proceeds with the faltering New Wanley, Adela accidentally finds that old Mutimer died leaving a will after all. Richard wants to destroy the hidden will, but Adela insists on honouring it. With a visit to the Solicitor, all the property reverts to one Hubert Eldon, 22, a protégé of old Mutimer. Hubert and Adela had been romantically involved but Adela's mother stopped the relationship due to Hubert's apparent impoverishment and some unseemly behaviour. The story has a long, tragic dénouement as Richard Mutimer tries to regain his position in the Socialist movement together with a semblance of affection from Adela.

In scenes of public meetings and London streets, *Demos* offers a portrayal of the life of the London poor. The Socialist movement, in its many factions also receives detailed description. The figures of the movement range from workers such as Mutimer to intellectualized and removed upper-middle-class supporters, to radicals who aim to destroy the social order, to communists. Many of the characters in *Demos*, particularly Richard Mutimer, his mother, Adela, and a vicar in Wanley named Wyvern who appears to be the closest character to Gissing's own understanding of his story, are well-presented. The novel is difficult because of its length and depth and because of Gissing's own ambivalence towards his subject matter. The writing is uneven and includes long, tangled subplots. Gissing has sympathy with the lives of the urban poor and shares their criticism of unfettered capitalism. The dominant tone of the book is pessimistic as Gissing rejects Socialism and denies that class distinctions between people can be forcefully overcome during a short period of time.

*Demos* includes many striking individual passages, including its portrayal of Richard Mutimer's hands (shown on the cover of the book), Adela's realization during a train ride to London of her feelings toward her husband, and many of the reflections of Wyvern on modernity, the poor, and the developing class of restless, educated individuals with little to do and less in the way of thought or commitment. The most famous scene in *Demos* occurs after the death of Emma Vine's sister, Jane. Gissing's describes the desolate scene upon Jane's burial (p. 233):

Here on the waste limits of that dread East, to wander among tombs is to go hand in hand with the stark and eyeless emblem of mortality; the spirit fails beneath the cold burden of ignoble destiny. Here lie those who were born for toil; who, when toil has worn them to the uttermost, have but to yield their useless breath and pass into oblivion. For them is no day, only the brief twilight of a winter sky between the former and the latter night. For them no aspiration; for them no hope of memory in the dust; their very children are wearied into forgetfulness. Indistinguishable units in the vast throng that

labours but to support life, the name of each, father, mother, child, is as a dumb cry for the warmth and love of which Fate so stinted them. The wind wails above their narrow tenements; the sandy soil, soaking in the rain as soon as it has fallen, is a symbol of the great world which absorbs their toil and straightway blots their being.

A complex, passionate book written on the whole in a gray style, *Demos* is not for every reader. The book remains rewarding and deserves to be remembered. Victorian Secrets Ltd has done a great service in making the novel available in this excellent new edition.— Robin Friedman

“The Nether World,” 16 October 2010

In his novel *The Nether World*, Gissing offers an unsentimental, grim, and uncompromising portrayal of life in the London slums in the last third of the nineteenth century. Gissing (1857-1903) was a late Victorian English novelist who deserves to be better known. As a promising young student, Gissing fell in love with and stole to support a prostitute, Helen Harrison (“Nell”). After a prison term and a subsequent stay in the United States, Gissing returned to England and married Nell in what proved to be a stormy and unhappy relationship for both parties. Nell died in 1888 after she and Gissing had been separated for six years. When Gissing saw the conditions of the foul room in which Nell lived, he vowed to write a book in her memory to expose the abysmal character of London slum life. The result was *The Nether World* (1889). It is Gissing’s seventh novel and his fifth and final book set in the London slums. Together with *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*, and *Born in Exile* it is among Gissing’s best novels. Unlike most of his books, it is generally in print and accessible.

Although Nell’s death moved Gissing to write this novel, little in it is autobiographical. Gissing had lived in the slums of London he describes after his return from the United States. He was a compulsive and inveterate walker of city streets and a detailed observer of what he saw. He also did a great deal of reading, both of novels and of studies of the urban poor, that found its way into *The Nether World*.

The book is lengthy and densely plotted. It is set in its entirety in a small area called Clerkenwell with few scenes outside the slum. On first blush, the novel can be read as a series of scenes and episodes of slum life and of characterizations of the varied residents of Clerkenwell. The elaborate plot initially appears hazy but emerges as the book proceeds. The novel includes an extended group of characters who are carefully delineated. It centers on a young man, Sidney Kirkwood, and a younger woman, Jane Snowdon. As

with other male lead characters, Kirkwood has a degree of artistic and intellectual interests that makes him restless. He has a steady job setting jewelry which places him on the higher levels of the nether world. Jane Snowdon is a young girl of 13 when the story begins and suffers from abusive treatment from the owners of a cheap rooming house, Clem Peckover and Clem's mother. Jane is rescued from the worst of the abuse by John Hewett, an aging and struggling worker who rooms with his large family in the Peckover house.

The plot centers upon the appearance of an aged man, Jane's grandfather, Michael Snowdon, and separately upon the appearance of Jane's father, Joseph Snowdon, a wastrel who abandoned Jane when she was young to the cruelties of the Peckovers for whom she works as a scullion. Michael Snowdon has lived in Australia and rumors, which prove to be well-founded, circulate throughout the nether world that he has become wealthy. The plot revolves around Michael's wealth and his will, as Joseph Snowdon and the Peckovers scheme, together and against one another, to take the old man's money upon his death. Their attempts are vicious and low in the extreme. As Jane reaches the age of 16-17, she and Kirkwood fall in love. Kirkwood plans to marry her but backs off because he does not wish to be seen as scheming for Michael's money and because Michael has planned to use his money for charitable purposes only to be administered by Jane and by Sidney. Sidney marries the daughter of John Hewett, Clara, who had spurned him years earlier. Talented, ambitious, and selfish, Clara has run off from Clerkenwell in the hopes of becoming an actress. A rival had thrown acid in Clara's face permanently disfiguring her, and Clara had returned to her father in Clerkenwell because she had no other place to go. Largely out of a sense of duty, Sidney marries Clara in a relationship that proves depressingly unhappy.

Scenes of Clerkenwell, the streets, the garment factories, the fetid, crowded and unsanitary dwellings, the criminality, the hopelessness, and the venality of the residents are tightly drawn without a hint of sentimentality or idealism, such, for example, as we find in Dickens. The descriptive scenes include a chapter called "Io Saturnalia!" which is a description of the poor masses during a bank holiday. Another chapter, "The Soup Kitchen," describes the response of the Clerkenwell residents to attempted charity.

Among the many characters in the novel is a young woman named Pennyloaf Candy who marries Bob Hewett, the rootless and ultimately criminal son of John. Pennyloaf is submitted to endless abuse which she



endures unstintingly. Another figure from Clerkenwell is Mad Jack who functions as a prophetic figure. In a chapter, “Mad Jack’s dream,” late in the book, Mad Jack exclaims: “This life you are now leading is that of the damned; this place to which you are confined is Hell! There is no escape for you! From poor you shall become poorer; the older you grow, the lower shall you sink in want and misery; at the end there is waiting for you, one and all, a death in abandonment and despair. This is Hell—Hell—Hell!”

Gissing’s portrayal of the nether world is bleak and grim. From this novel, he sees no hope of redemption, either in the form of education, charity, or social change. His attitude towards his characters is a difficult mixture of sympathy and hopelessness. *The Nether World* is Gissing at his harshest and most pessimistic. A difficult novel, *The Nether World* succeeds in capturing the world of a woman Gissing loved, Nell Harrison.—Robin Friedman

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### **Private Tuition: A Burdensome Phase in Gissing’s Life**

PIERRE COUSTILLAS

Gissing’s writing career was a relatively short one and it is by now fairly well documented, but no in-depth enquiry into another, far less exciting, career of his has ever been attempted—his teaching activities which, for about a decade, were his main source of income, the only rampart he could think of against starvation. “Has he starved?” he would ask on hearing of some tyro in the trade of letters who still badly needed to make his way to authentic success. To him the school of penury, doubtless because he was influenced by the romantic lives of some French writers of the early and mid-nineteenth century, was an almost compulsory element of any respectable artistic career. Part of Gissing’s dislike of Andrew Lang, not a very likeable man by any standards, can surely be accounted for by his inherited wealth and his facile pen. He certainly never had to give lessons, the proceeds of which would keep him from physical need.

Gissing’s family watched him from afar and hardly realised, partly because he refrained from complaining, to what degree of extreme poverty he was condemned by his unflinching desire to make an honourable literary career. Years later, that is when her eldest son had made a name for himself, his mother regretted her show of indifference to an achievement, one could say, which gave the Gissing family a public name, a place in the history of English literature. And we have the testimony of some of Margaret and

Ellen's pupils before the sisters left Wakefield for Leeds, that Mrs. Gissing would sometimes speak proudly before the boys (we know of H. B. Webster, John Horsfall, John E. Kilburn and Robert Levens) of her famous son, whose portrait was to be seen on the wall of the family's dining-room (see "Recollections of Margaret and Ellen Gissing," compiled by P. Coustillas with the assistance of Clifford Brook, *Gissing Newsletter*, January 1976, pp. 1-12).

The aim of the present article is not to lead to a reconsideration of Gissing's capacities as a tutor, though once more the Harrisons, who confused superior social standing (their own) with cultural superiority, must again be told off, but to review as exhaustively as the sources available allow, the activities of a poverty-stricken teacher who aspired to become a self-supporting novelist whose merits would be acknowledged by the more respectable portion of the intelligentsia. My aim is also to offer a factual account that he would not have wished to reject.

One cannot help feeling that even as a boy, Gissing dumbly passed judgment on his teachers. Alfred Gissing made fun of the poor mental equipment of Miss Milner, his father's first teacher, because she acknowledged when George was still very young that she had taught him all that she could, evidence of her limitations but more significantly of her honesty. As an adult he never had a word to say about her that might smack of criticism, but with Joseph Harrison's military leanings and offensive religious practices he had no patience and he recorded his boyish dislike of his master's intolerance and narrow-mindedness.

Gissing's teaching began early, at a time when the figure of James Wood, the principal of Lindow Grove School, loomed large in his life. Wood had no degree such as B.A. or M.A. to put after his name in official correspondence or in the advertisements through which he hoped to recruit more pupils, but he cleverly, a little too cleverly, got his best pupils, William Summers and some time later Gissing himself, to assist him as teaching auxiliaries. In doing so he could not claim to have invented a new system, however financially profitable it was to him and however welcome it could be as it meant saving both time and money. He was merely applying a system which has been described by historians more or less sarcastically. Sir Llewellyn Woodward analysed it in his volume on *The Age of Reform 1815-1870*, first published in 1938. The monitorial system had been devised by two men of earlier generations, Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838) and Andrew Bell (1753-1832) who were actuated by material profit at a time when respectable teaching, as Dickens could have con-

firmed, was still in its infancy. After 1872 when he scored a brilliant success which gave him prematurely the air of a made man, Gissing became in James Wood's eyes a walking advertisement for his school. Andrew Bell, whom Woodward described as a domineering and conceited man, with a great love of money, had summed up his method in striking words which must have rung out like a recipe in Wood's ears: "Give me twenty-four pupils to-day, and I will give you twenty-four teachers to-morrow." There was no such bragging propensity in Gissing, who indeed never divested himself of his propensity for understatement. Whatever he attempted to do he did with all the mental vigour of which he was capable. "During several years of his career at Owens," a former schoolfellow of Gissing's, T. T. Sykes, remembered, "he resided at Lindow Grove, where in his spare time he frequently took the more advanced classes in such subjects as Greek, Latin, French, German, and higher mathematics." A general statement to which he added an anecdote likely to raise some eyebrows among later generations: "I well remember hearing my brother grumble at what he considered a very difficult lesson Gissing had set them, namely, to turn Gray's *Elegy* into elegant Latin verse."

The next period of teaching comes after the dramatic Manchester episode which altered for ever the course of his life. Gissing was now, thanks to disinterested American friends, Dr. Marie Zakrzewska and Miss Julia Sprague, teaching in a high school at Waltham, Massachusetts, and he gave private lessons to a young student who was preparing the entrance examination to Harvard, George A. Stearns. This pupil appears nowhere in Gissing's correspondence and private papers but, by great good luck half a century later and over two decades after Gissing's death, Stearns shared his reminiscences of his late teacher, whose career he had followed with commendable curiosity. In his article on "George Gissing in America" (*New York Bookman*, August 1926, pp. 683-86) Stearns remembered that his young tutor had been briefly in charge "of the department of modern languages, with classes in French, German, and English literature." As we know, the chairman of the school committee at the time was the Rev. Benton Smith, a retired Universalist clergyman whose house, which for two months was Gissing's home, can be seen in Bouwe Postmus's edition of Gissing's *American Notebook* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1993). "I recall distinctly Gissing's first appearance in school as he sat on the platform with the other teachers at devotional exercises," Stearns wrote. "He disclosed a tall, broad-shouldered figure with a shock of light brown hair worn rather long, dull light blue eyes and a full sandy beard that had evidently never

known a razor. He sat with slightly rounded shoulders, hands clasped in his lap, and his thoughts plainly far afield." It matters for us to know that in Stearns's opinion Gissing's "classes were well conducted" and that "he was most competent in directing them."

It is his recollections as private pupil that are most precious. "The Harvard requirements of the period," he explained, "demanded the *Bucolics* of Virgil, a study not included in the curriculum of the school, which then had few college preparatory students. Accordingly, Gissing was engaged as tutor for me in the subject, and it was in the closer association of a private pupil that I came to know him. Neither before nor since that time have I come in contact with anyone who showed so keen a grasp of Latin. It was to him a living language; apparently he thought in it. [...] The *Bucolics* do not offer the same opportunities for expression that Horace or Cicero or even the *Æneid* presents, but Gissing made the most of them. He would roll out the lines with the zest of an actor on the stage, striving by intonation to bring out the meaning. I remember that on one occasion he halted at the end of a line and, repeating it, exclaimed: 'There, that's a fine example of onomatopœia.' I had never heard of the term, so he explained it, and then illustrated at length. Leaning back in the chair, his ordinarily dull eyes aglow with interest, he quoted from memory couplet after couplet of English verse that I was to recognize later as choice bits of Keats and Shelley, each illustrative of the figure. 'But the Germans do it best,' he said. 'Do you know Heine's "Die Grenadiere?"' With but a few months of German behind me I had not progressed that far, so he quoted '*Bis einst Ich höre Kanonengebrüll*' (Till one day I hear the cannon's roar), with such vigor that the meaning was clear." To some aspects of Gissing's cultural personality Stearns did what justice he could, but unfortunately, as he was writing in 1926, that is at a time when very few letters of his hero had been made public and only a small portion of his shorter fiction (he stopped at *The Sins of the Fathers*) been made available, some of his judgements were inadequate, and his own personality and culture have become shrouded in the mists of history. It is to be regretted that to what, with Gissing in mind, he called the habitual reticence of the cultured Englishman, Stearns added his own reticence, and no tangible evidence has been preserved of contacts he may have had with English or American scholars about the time he wrote his valuable piece. Gissing's solitude at Waltham was somehow prolonged by that of his successful pupil for five decades—"successful" because Stearns convinced himself that his passing the Harvard examination was partly to be ascribed to Gissing's stimulating tuition.

Organically linked with the return to England in the autumn of 1877 was his quest for a remunerated occupation, and the only viable opportunity that presented itself to him was teaching as he would not have to produce any reference to possible employers. In actual fact, as is well known, finding his first pupil and obtaining a reader's ticket for the British Museum reading room were two difficulties that were overcome jointly when Captain Charles Mercier (1834-1901) and his son St. Vincent (b. 1857) came to his rescue. The application form for securing a reader's ticket signed by Captain Mercier is dated 23 November 1877, the day after Gissing turned twenty, and by then he may already have had St. Vincent Mercier as a pupil although the young man, whom his father employed as secretary at St. John's Hospital, does not explicitly appear in the correspondence until February 1878. The father was an intriguing personality. He had two occupations of the combination of which it would probably be impossible to find an equivalent at any other time. He was treasurer at St. John's but also a portrait painter of some acknowledged talent, the author of portraits of Disraeli and Lord Napier for instance, who had begun to exhibit his works at the Royal Academy in 1863. He lived at Chatham House, Knightsbridge, where a building had been reconstructed for his use by the architect Alexander Payne. Sometimes in those early days, Gissing acted as clerk at the hospital, but he never alluded to the captain's artistic activities which are attested by the entry on him in Bénézit's dictionary of artists, where it appears that 70 of his paintings were once on show.

Of his pupil St. Vincent, who was his age, and whom he was preparing for his London matriculation, Gissing had little to say except that, in order to be at Knightsbridge at the appointed time he had to get up at an unearthly hour and was not infrequently told on arriving by the young man's servant that his master was too tired to get up! Fortunately, whether he gave his lesson or not did not affect his income as he was given his fee ungrudgingly after a full hour's walk from the vicinity of Tottenham Court Road. Yet he had wasted his time and once when Mercier failed to rise for his lesson on six days in succession he became furious. However, when he recalled in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* such humiliating anecdotes (Summer XI) he bore his "employer" no grudge, nicely justifying his well-known statement that the book was more an aspiration than a memory. Mercier was soon to vanish from his tutor-cum-clerk's orbit. A letter of 2 December 1879 from William to his elder brother implies as much. "I suppose it would have been in any case impossible to have gone to him from where you are now," that is 5 Hanover Street. Mercier's life had become quite

comfortable. A London Directory for 1881 gives two addresses for him: Leicester Square, and Cambridge Terrace, Southend-on-Sea. Whether or not he was, as William wrote, “a fine character,” has not been ascertained.

Gissing’s early letters, from 1878 onwards, bristle with allusions to teaching, lessons, pupils and income. We read in a letter to Algernon of 1 November 1878 that he got another pupil, making three in all, who brought him in 18s.6d a week. All subjects were suitable that helped to boil the pot, for the prospect of some literary income still partook of wishful thinking. He taught Latin, English and would teach German and Greek if he was given a chance. His pupils, as was only natural, were of various capacities. He could be sarcastic on the question of their intelligence. “Would you believe it?” he asked Algernon on 15 November 1878. “I have three pupils in Latin, all above twenty-one, and each one of them finds the most insuperable difficulty in understanding that mysterious trinity of concords (1) That a verb must agree with its Nom. (2) That a transit. vb governs acc. case. (3) That adj. must agree with its noun. After several weeks steady perseverance one of them is at length acquiring a dim perception of the meaning of No. 1!”

Another picturesque figure that appeared in Gissing’s life in late 1878 and was for him a source of amusement was Thomas Hamer Dolbey (c. 1847-1918), a clerk who was Gissing’s senior by ten years and the father of three children. Despite these handicaps he contemplated becoming a barrister, an ambition which filled Gissing with doubt first echoed by his brother William in a letter of 4 December 1878: “Your would-be *barrister* must be a strange specimen. A man getting that idea into his head must either have *money* or *brains*. Which has he? If neither, who, in an evil moment, dissuaded him from being a grocer, or other honest trade.” Contrary to all expectations Dolbey did succeed. Two years later Gissing admitted his surprise in a letter to Algernon dated 15 November 1880: “I think you know *Dolbey*, alias Brown. The man sat for his prelim. Exam at the Middle Temple last Saturday, and actually passed—to my amazement. But certainly he will never become a barrister, for all that.” Gissing was still coaching him in 1881. The end of the story must be read in no other reference book than *Who Was Who III*, where his second son Robert Valentine Dolbey (1878-1937), a distinguished surgeon, described himself as a son of T. H. Dolbey of the Middle Temple, barrister-at-law.

To all appearances it was then, that is in December 1878, that a new pupil unexpectedly turned up. On the 10<sup>th</sup> he wrote to Algernon: “I rejoice to say I have another pupil: this makes four. He is a Greek, who speaks and

writes English perfectly well, but wants lessons in the elegancies of English composition. I visit him three hrs a week, and get 1/4 an hour. He lives in most luxuriously furnished apartments in Paddington.” After the 14<sup>th</sup> the rare bird had flown away. However, off and on a new pupil ran across his path, but William, who was in Wilmslow in a situation comparable to his brother’s, heard George’s news with some scepticism. Thus on 21 July 1879 his comment was double-edged: “I am delighted you have another pupil if she will only pay well.” Considering that no other reference is made to this mysterious *she*, it seems to be a safe bet that she was a mere will-o’-the-wisp. And so was undoubtedly the boy lodging in the house (38 Edward Street) whose “delicate mind” he tutored “in the abstruse principles of English Grammar for, and in consideration of, the sum of 2/- per three hours.” “Well, he concluded with a *blasé* pen, “it pays for one’s tobacco, at all events.”

Gissing’s silence on the question of private teaching for months is easily explained. For one thing the share of “aunt Emily”’s legacy which he belatedly received reduced the urgency for him to increase his income with miscellaneous remuneration from odd jobs. For another he still hoped to make some money by his pen. A first novel, completed in the summer of 1878 had been rejected by a publisher under circumstances of which nothing is known. But the worse-than-failure of *Workers in the Dawn* obliged him to review his expectations and the quasi-systematic rejection of the shorter fiction he wrote for periodicals during the next few years, because of the rampant Grundyism that prevailed among publishers, made him realize that making a living by his literary work would remain impossible as long as his reputation was not solidly established and supported by influential critics whose opinion mattered more than that of anonymous reviewers in dailies and weeklies.

More than anyone else, Frederic Harrison, the Positivist leader in Britain, was instrumental in launching Gissing again in his career as a private tutor. This new development stemmed from the budding novelist’s desperate attempt to draw the attention of a nationally known reader to his novel after he had reached the conclusion that Remington and Co. would not make a serious attempt to promote his work. In late 1880, after he had become a member of the Positivist Society, and been recruited through Edward Spencer Beesly and Turgenev as contributor to the progressive Russian monthly *Vyestnik Evropy*, he was engaged for two hours every morning in teaching the two eldest sons of the Harrisons, Bernard (1871-1956), who became a painter, and Austin (1873-1928). Bernard never wrote anything

on Gissing, but Austin, a future journalist and editor, notably of the *English Review* from 1910 to 1923, wrote on his former tutor on several occasions. His three main contributions to Gissing studies were “George Gissing,” *Nineteenth Century*, September 1906, pp. 453-63; “Memories of Gissing: London Rambles with my Unconventional Tutor,” *T.P.’s and Cassell’s Weekly*, 24 April 1926, p. 23; and *Frederic Harrison: Thoughts and Memories* (1926). Martha Vogeler devoted a book to Austin entitled *Austin Harrison and the “English Review”* (2008). Frederic Harrison did his best in those early days to find among his numerous friends and acquaintances families which could employ Gissing as a tutor. Harrison himself kept him in his employ for four years.

Pride of place must be given to the daughters of Vernon Lushington, Q. C. (1832-1912), a Positivist who had been secretary to the Admiralty from 1869 to 1877 and was judge of the county courts for Surrey and Berkshire. Gissing was enthusiastic. “I give them an hour twice a week, and have 5/- an hour,” he wrote to his brother Algernon on 13 January 1881. Catherine, the eldest, was thirteen and her sisters, Margaret and Susan, respectively twelve and ten. “They might each be taken for at least three years older than they are,” he told his sister Ellen on the 30<sup>th</sup>. “I find them rather clever; we do English History and Geography together. One of them is always reading Homer, and she tells me she would give anything to learn to read it in the original Greek.” He taught them, with some interruptions, over a couple of years. Catherine was destined to become famous in English letters considering that she served as a model for Mrs. Dalloway in Virginia Woolf’s novel. References to her are fairly common in studies of the writer, but Kitty as she was called by her familiars was later to be snubbed by her friend Virginia in her correspondence.

About a year later a new name appeared. “This afternoon,” we read in a letter to Algernon dated 19 January 1882, “I had a lesson at Le Marchant’s—that is, should have had. When I came home to dinner, I found the usual symptoms of absolute irresponsibility, and it was only after much debate that I made up my mind to go to Pont Street. I put on my hat, and had got to the bottom of the stairs, when an inward certainty that something was wrong called me back. I returned, and of course found her [his wife, Nell] dressing to go out—Heaven knows whither. I abandoned the lesson, and got her away as soon as possible [to be cared for by two respectable old ladies]. At the last moment she refused point blank to leave the house unless I first went and bought her a pair of kid gloves—she had a pair quite good enough. I rushed to the nearest haberdasher’s, and so got



her off, happily without other adventure.” This painful anecdote only to show under what circumstances he had to work until Nell was compelled to leave him for good.

Soon it was two sons of Sir Henry Le Marchant that he had to teach and he was not at all impressed by these poorly gifted boys grossly spoilt by riches that had not been earned. One of them, Denis, became the third baronet (1870-1922). Sir Henry Denis Le Marchant (1839-1915) was a familiar figure in upper social circles. Together with his sons, Gissing taught a nephew of the 3rd Duke of Sutherland. Not so much to impress his elder sister as to refer to the vanity of aristocratic titles, he commented apropos of the latter on 8 March 1882: “By marriage the boy is also nephew of *four* other Dukes. [...] The queerest part of the business is that I find them no whit better or wiser than other people. Perhaps I was not without suspicion of the fact even before.” To his younger sister he added on the 14th: “That nephew of the Duke of Sutherland [...] is a very noisy and unprofitable youngster. Such young aristocrats cannot understand that they should be made to do anything which is in the least disagreeable to them.” The boy was Frederick Neville Leveson-Gower (1874-1959), the son of Lord and Lady Albert Leveson-Gower. Reference books tell us that he became Liberal Unionist M.P. for Sutherland from 1900 to 1906, and having married in 1916 at the age of forty-two, settled on the French Riviera at Cannes. Before long, Gissing was to take the social injustices that reigned in England more placidly. There was no remedy, and anyway, he quickly came to think dejectedly, injustice was bound to renew itself indefinitely.

At about the same time a more sympathetic youth, George Digby Pepys (1867-1957), the son of a barrister, who had brought him some welcome fees probably the year before, but whose name never appears in previous correspondence, wrote to him from Winchester College in February 1883. Gissing would have liked to keep up the connection but the renewed contact was ephemeral. In its wake, in mid-March and for a very short period, he had as a pupil the grandson of Sir Stafford Henry Northcote, a noted statesman who was currently leader of the opposition in the House of Commons. However, in matters of chronology and teaching, the correspondence is not an infallible guide, and commitments were often subject to sudden changes. For instance, sometime in late November 1882 he was led to give lessons to two Giffard boys, apparently Henry Walter (b. 1868), and Alexander William (b. 1872). He taught them at 1 Southwell Gardens, the

home of their father Henry Alexander Giffard, barrister, Q. C. of Lincoln's Inn, but like many others, these children were mere birds of passage.

The last few years of Gissing's part-time occupation as a tutor are better documented though all mysteries do not vanish round the names of the few new pupils that emerge from his more and more exclusively literary activities. The circumstances under which Gissing met Montague Cookson are well known through letters to Frederic Harrison and Algernon of the summer of 1884, but they contain no references to Hubert Crackanorpe (1870-1896), who is remembered as a short story writer, and his brother Dayrell. (Montague Cookson, 1832-1913, a close friend of Harrison, changed his name to Crackanorpe in 1888 as a condition of inheriting Newbiggin Hall, the family estate. See also David Crackanorpe, *Hubert Crackanorpe and English Realism in the 1890s*, published in 1977). According to some writers whose sources are unclear, Gissing was for a time tutor to the two brothers, a statement which is confirmed by Gissing's listing of the Cookson boys in his *Commonplace Book* among the sons of aristocrats he tutored. The Crackanorpes tried to renew their contact with him in February 1888 but their invitation was declined. Years later, during a visit to the Harrisons at Blackdown Cottage, near Haslemere, Gissing heard from Austin that "young [Hubert] Crackanorpe ('Wreckage etc') apprenticed himself for a year to *George Moore*—to learn English style! His father paid £200 for the privilege!" As Gissing had no respect for Moore, the first exclamation mark needs no gloss.

Early in 1885, one day he was in a jocular mood, he let off steam in a way which time has partly obscured: "I am giving lessons to a boy called Studd, the younger brother of some individuals, who, I am assured, rank next to the Graces in the cricket field,—I don't mean Aglaïa, Euphrosyne and Thalia, but the other Graces," that is once famous cricketers. "This boy lives in a gorgeous mansion,—Hyde Park Gardens. The people are about as commonplace as one could come across" (31 January 1885). In the same letter to Algernon he alluded to another pupil he taught for two hours daily, the son of Charles Cheston, a solicitor who paid him five shillings per hour. The Grahames, a family with which he was in touch for several years, also appeared for the first time in Gissing's correspondence on that day. At least off and on the sweating he suffered was done gracefully. He recorded with gratitude having had dinner with Cheston, and being invited to dinner by the Grahames the following week, a pleasant change from the Crosse and Blackwell tinned soup with which he had to be content at the time.

By then, that is by the mid-eighties, his teaching experiences would seem to have become more tolerable. Interestingly he was now given a chance to compare notes on the subject with his elder sister and Margaret's misfortunes with her own pupils led him to reconsider the worst phases of his past teaching spells. In the autumn of 1884 his becoming acquainted with the Gaussens was probably a humanising factor in the development of this process. Mrs. Gaussen was kinder, more humane, more liberal than any of his previous "employers," certainly more amenable than the rather stiff-lipped Harrisons who, although very generous to him, were fundamentally conventional. The student of human behaviour he was professionally was bound to draw lessons from his own shrewd observation. Jem Gaussen was an intelligent, peaceful and obedient boy and Gissing, as he was to do with Walter Grahame, took pleasure in watching the boy's steady progress. So his sincerity cannot be doubted when he wrote to Margaret, as he did on 14 February 1885: "I wish you had been as fortunate as I always have in the matter of pupils. The occupation is hateful to me, yet not so bad as it would have been had I not found exceptionally docile boys. I have at present a boy called Grahame who is the most interesting I have known yet." The way he was received by the Grahames also inclined him to greater tolerance. "I think," he explained on the same day to his brother, "I have not told you about the dinner party at the Grahames. There were twelve guests, and most of them musical. We had excellent music: one girl played the violin really well. But you would most have enjoyed the Scotch songs, admirably sung. They are capital people, and I enjoyed myself greatly."

One of the last commitments he accepted concerned two sons of the bishop of Hereford, James Atlay (1817-1894). The two sons most likely to have been Gissing's pupils (two out of nine children) were Hugh Wordsworth (born 1873) and Harold Trevelyan (born 1874), and they are never mentioned in the correspondence after January 1886. They must have been almost forgotten by their tutor by the time he said good-bye for ever to teaching in the summer of 1888, when he was mentally preparing his first journey to Italy. His last and best pupil remained Walter Grahame, whom he taught for over three years, and with whom—with the exception of the eldest Harrison boys—he had some correspondence after the last lesson he gave him. Grahame became a student at Oxford but did not distinguish himself there. His respect for his tutor and probably his interest in his works were not altogether obliterated by geographical distance. As appears in Gissing's diary tutor and former pupil met again and for the last time at Exeter in 1893.

No exhaustive census of Gissing's private pupils listed in chronological order will ever be compiled. Only occasionally did he refer to his tutorial duties; nor is dating them always possible. If, as must sometimes have happened, his thoughts wandered back to the years when private tuition was his sole or main source of income, he must have rejoiced in 1888 when on leaving for the Continent he felt able to say "good-bye to all that." However, he still had to learn the truth of the German saying: "*Dort, wo du nicht bist, dort ist das Glück.*"

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### Notes and News

The subscription to this journal has remained unchanged for many years, though there has been a considerable increase in postal charges during the last decade. Could subscribers kindly note in consequence that from January 2013 onwards the rates will be as follows:

Private (Europe) £12	Institution (Europe) £15
Private (Rest of the world) £15	Institution (Rest of the world) £18

Tom Ue in Canada, as well as other readers, informed us that a recently published Sherlock Holmes novel, *The House of Silk*, by Anthony Horowitz, approved by the Conan Doyle estate, has connections with Gissing which might pass unnoticed. Gissing's name occurs in the Acknowledgements among other contemporary writers from whom Horowitz "borrowed liberally" and twice on page 74 of the novel. When Tom Ue interviewed the author for the *Baker Street Journal* and asked him to what extent Gissing informed the setting and subject matter of his story which takes place in London in 1890, Horowitz identified Gissing as one of his favourite authors: "He provided the social conscience of the book—missing, to an extent, from Doyle. If you want to experience the hardship and misery of nineteenth-century life, I can't think of a better source."

In another interview, by Anna Metcalfe (*Financial Times*, 5 and 6 November 2011), Horowitz, who is 55 and has published over 50 books and written for television, film and the theatre, answered the interviewer's question about the literary character whom he thought he resembled most: "Gordon Comstock in George Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, a novel which some twentieth-century critics have called a remake of *New Grub Street*." And Horowitz named Dickens, Gissing, Ian Fleming and Hergé as his literary influences.

A most unexpected discovery made in the last few months is the French translation of Gissing's 1883 poem "Hope in Vain" in an anarchist periodical we had never heard of, *L'Unique*, August-September 1945, of which this was the third number. The title chosen by the translator, Manuel Devaldès, pseudonym of Ernest-Edmond Lohy, a well-known anarchist writer (1875-1956) was "Espoir vain." A pacifist, Devaldès refused to join the army in 1914 and crossed over to England where he was granted the status of conscientious objector. We assume that while in England or later he read Gissing's poem in Edward Clodd's *Memories* (1916) where it was printed for the first time. Devaldès was a free-thinker, and although Gissing described himself as an agnostic, he might have savoured the fact that one of his poems had been read and translated by a writer who, when barely 20 years old, had founded his own periodical, *La Revue Rouge*, to which Verlaine, among others, had contributed.

Christine Huguet has drawn our attention to the long interview, on 18 October 2011, by Jasper Rees of Claire Tomalin, on the occasion of the recent publication of her biography of Dickens. "George Gissing wrote a great book," she remarked about Gissing's pioneering work on the author of *David Copperfield*. The interview appeared on The Arts Desk site ([www.theartsdesk.com](http://www.theartsdesk.com)) which claims to be the first professional arts journalism site launched, updated daily, with overnight reviews, news and in-depth interviews.

Among recent or forthcoming reviews of Vol. I of *The Heroic Life of George Gissing* we can mention one by M. D. Allen in *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* (formerly the *Victorian Newsletter*), a review to be followed or preceded by M. D. Allen's review of *Demos* (Victorian Secrets, 2011) edited by Debbie Harrison.

D. J. Taylor has reviewed Vols. I and II of *The Heroic Life of George Gissing* in the December 2011 *Literary Review* (Edinburgh), but no copy of it has been received so far.

In his foreword to the latest number of the *Dickens Magazine*, Series 6, Issue 4, which is devoted to *David Copperfield*, George Gorniak expresses his agreement with Gissing that Dickens's "sincerity and gusto are beyond measure delightful; most of the characters excite a mirthful or a tender sympathy; good heart and good-humour illumine every page; and the tale

moves to its close on a full flood of genial optimism, which lands us in the haven of great content.”

We are grateful to Wulfhard Stahl and the Moravian Brothers for permission to reproduce the portrait of Plitt, Gissing’s travelling companion in 1888-1889. For information about him see Gissing’s diary and correspondence.

Several friends—Matthew Woollard, John Spiers, Roger Dobson and Tom Ue—have come across, at Waterstone’s, the bookshop’s stamp card which, when filled, allows customers to get a £10 gift card. The card, which we reproduce below, bears a slightly inaccurate quotation from *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Gissing wrote “scent” not “smell.”

Tony Petyt has sent us an elegant, illustrated booklet entitled *Wakefield History and Heritage 2012* which contains several pages on Gissing and places associated with him: Sandal Castle, the Theatre Royal, the Orangery, the Cathedral, and Walton Hall, the home of the traveller and naturalist Charles Waterton.

## Recent Publications

### Volume

Pierre Coustillas, *The Heroic Life of George Gissing*, Volume II, 1888-1897, London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012. £60. The best way of purchasing copies consists in ordering either from the publishers, 21 Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 2TH or 2252 Ridge Road, Brookfield, Vermont 05036-9704, USA or from Idle Booksellers, 7 Town Lane, Idle, Bradford BD10 8PR, UK. ISBN 13: 9781848931732.

### Articles, reviews, etc.

Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor (ed.), *The Victorian Comic Spirit: New Perspectives*, Aldershot/Brookfield VA: Ashgate, 2000. Gissing on pp. 176, 221, 222-24, 230-31 (see Ch. 12, Margaret Stetz, "The Laugh of the New Woman," pp. 219-241).

Anne Stiles (ed.), *Neurology and Literature, 1860-1920*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Gissing on pp. 102, 141, *The Whirlpool*, pp. 146, 152-53 (see Ch. 6: James Kennaway: "Singing the Body Electric: Nervous Music and Sexuality in Fin-de-Siècle Literature," pp. 141-60).

Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton, *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature*, Aldershot : Ashgate 2007.

Roger Dobson, "A Trade of the Damned," *Faunus* (The Journal of the Friends of Arthur Machen), No. 24, pp. 34-51. With a photograph of Gissing in 1895.

Christine Huguet, "Book Reviews," *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, Vol. 74, October 2011, pp. 230-35. Reviews of the Grayswood edition of *Isabel Clarendon* and of *New Grub Street*, the 1901 revised text.

D. J. Taylor, "Books of the Year," *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 December 2011, p. 17. A few lines on Vol. I of *The Heroic Life of George Gissing*.

J. C., "NB. Fifty bob a week," *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 December 2011, p. 36. Paragraph in praise of *Thyrza*, of which James Campbell found a copy of the 1927 Nash and Grayson edition in the well-known London bookshop Any Amount of Books.

Ernst Konrad Plitt (1854-1928), c. 1890



