

THE GISSING NEWSLETTER

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

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A View of A Life’s Morning from Wakefield

Clifford Brook

Wakefield is my home-town and so allusions to it by Gissing add to my interest in his writings. Most of them occur in *A Life’s Morning* and I think that I have identified nearly all of them. Wakefield is a small city and it is relatively easy to pinpoint a particular building or street; for example Regent Street in Chap. V is one of half a dozen streets in an area bounded by a cemetery, a football ground and Doncaster Road. In considering how to present the information I realised that there are several passages in which he described local scenes at length and so on these occasions I have inserted my comments within extended quotations.

Chap. V, p. 63 (of all one-volume editions). The house which was the end of Emily’s journey

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was situated two miles [one mile] outside the town of Dunfield [Wakefield], on the high road going southward [Doncaster Road], just before it enters upon a rising tract of common land known as Heath [Heath Common and, at the far side, the village of Heath]. It was one of a row of two-storied dwellings, built of glazed brick, each with a wide projecting window on the right hand of the front door, and with a patch of garden railed from the road [135 to 155 Doncaster Road], the row being part of a straggling colony which is called Banbrigg [Locals use the names of Agbrigg and Belle Vue with fine discrimination and it would appear that these houses are in Belle Vue]. Immediately

opposite these houses stood an ecclesiastical edifice of depressing appearance [St. Catherine's Church, Belle Vue], stone-built, wholly without ornament, presenting a corner to the highway, a chapel-of-ease for worshippers unable to go as far as Dunfield in the one direction or the village of Pental [Sandal] in the other. [Both the row of houses and the church can be identified by their descriptions, their relative positions and the alignment of the church to Doncaster Road: but it is obvious when other references are taken into account that Gissing moved the site 200 yards further along Doncaster Road to his mother's house, a stone-faced building, 2 Stoneleigh Terrace, now called 213 Doncaster Road. This house can be said to be in Agbrigg, and Gissing gave his address in a letter to Bertz on 25.5.90 as 2 Stoneleigh Terrace, Agbrigg. An entry in White's Directory of 1887 reads: Rev. Edward Rowlands, Curate, St. Catherine's Church, Belle Vue, no. 4 Stoneleigh Terr., Agbrigg.] Scattered about were dwelling-houses old and new; the former being cottages of the poorest and dirtiest kind, the latter brick structures of the most unsightly form, evidently aiming at constituting themselves into a thoroughfare, and, in point of fact, already rejoicing in the name of Regent Street [Regent Street, crossed by Oxford Street]. There was a public-house [The Graziers' Arms], or rather, as it frankly styled itself in large letters on the window, a dram-shop; and there

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were two or three places for the sale of very miscellaneous articles. . . The stretch of road between it [Banbrigg] and the bridge by which the river [River Calder] was crossed into Dunfield had in its long hard ugliness something dispiriting. Though hedges bordered it here and there ...; though fields were seen on this side and on that.... [It is no more than half a mile from the bridge over the river to St. Catherine's Church and for much of the distance the road passed between houses and malt kilns. Only after crossing a canal was there open land and that included the cemetery where his father was buried in 1870. Later in Chap. XIX, p. 264, it appears that Gissing had forgotten this passage: "Half-way between Banbrigg and Dunfield lay the cemetery: there she [Emily] passed a part of every morning, sometimes in grief which opened all the old wounds...." Is it only coincidence that Gissing's father was buried, and Emily's mother died, on the last day of the year?]

Chap. VII, p. 112. Brilliant sunlight made the bare garret, with its outlook over the fields towards Pental, a cheerful and homelike retreat [Both the garret and the view link the house with Stoneleigh Terrace, which was the last row of houses before the open country].

Chap. V, p. 68. As a child she [Emily] had once walked in her sleep, had gone forth from the house, and had, before she was awakened, crossed the narrow footing of a canal-lock....

Chap. V, p. 72. "Well, I thought we might have a turn over the Heath," said Mr. Hood.... Shortly after three o'clock the two started for their walk. Not many yards beyond the house they passed beneath a railway bridge, then over a canal, and at once entered upon the common. The Heath formed the long side of a slowly rising hill; at the foot the road divided itself into two branches, and the dusty tracks climbed at a wide angle with each other. The one which Emily and her father pursued led up to stone quarries ... and skirting these, to the level ground above them, which was the end of the region of furze and bracken. Here began a spacious tract of grassy

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common; around it were houses of pleasant appearance, one or two meriting the name of mansion. [It is only 200 yards from Stoneleigh Terrace to the railway bridge, and another hundred yards to

the point where Doncaster Road passed over the now filled-in Wakefield and Barnsfield canal – a different canal from the one mentioned earlier. There are now two railway bridges near together; one of them has been erected since 1945. I would have expected the couple to cross the canal by the “narrow footing of the canal-lock” and use a path to the village keeping to the left of all the roads, but Gissing caused them to walk on the road which branches twice within a few yards. The direct route by road to the village is the one taking the left fork each time, and it passes the quarries on its right-hand side. In the novel, it appears that Gissing ignored the second fork and that Emily and her father continued on the Normanton road with the quarries near to the left hand. There are several paths above the quarries leading to the village. It would seem important to Gissing that he should mention the quarries at this stage in order to prepare for James Hood’s suicide in one of them in a later chapter. Another example of this kind occurs in the first chapter where Emily says to Wilfrid Athel: “I cannot imagine any sacrifice which my father could ask, that I should refuse.”

The following is from Nikolaus Pevsner’s book *Yorkshire: the West Riding*: “Heath Common is a surprise, not much more than a mile from the centre of a town the size of Wakefield. The common is large and rough, large enough for the houses which surround it to be taken singly and not all together. There are three houses [now only two] every one of them enough for any village to regard it as its major work of architecture.... The impression of size of its common is greatly helped by the few cottages on island sites – often an effective, if rarely a self-conscious, means of composition.”]

Chap. V, p. 73. At the head of the quarries the two paused to look back on Dunfield [The canal was about 80 feet above sea-level and Heath village is at 175 feet, with Tarry-By-It Hill rising to

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250 feet behind it]. The view from this point was extensive, and would have been interesting but for the town itself. It was seen to lie in a broad valley, along which a river [River Calder] flowed; the remoter districts were pleasantly wooded, and only the murkiness in the far sky told that a yet larger centre of industry [Leeds] lurked beyond the horizon. Dunfield offered no prominent features save the chimneys of its factories and its fine church, the spire of which rose high above surrounding buildings [Wakefield Parish Church, raised to the status of a cathedral in 1888, has the tallest spire in Yorkshire, 247 feet high. It is noteworthy that a second landmark, the town hall with its tall clock-tower, was started in 1877 and completed in 1880. Gissing mentions no dates in the book, written in 1885, though there is a seven-year interval between the occasion of this description of the view from Heath Common and the events in chapter XX.]

Chap. V, p. 74. They pursued their walk, across the common and into a tree-shaded lane.... And behold, what creatures are these coming along the lane where only earth-stained rustics should be met? Two colliers, besmattered wretches, plodding homeward from the “pit” which is half a mile away.... p. 77. Their walk brought them around to the top of the Heath.... As they walked across the smooth part of the upper common looking at the houses around, they saw coming towards them a gentleman [Dagworthy] followed by three dogs.... “I believe that he keeps twenty or thirty [dogs] at the house there.” ... “Just come and look at the kennels.” ... and the three walked together to Dagworthy’s house which was not more than fifty yards from where they were standing.... p. 79. The dwelling was neither large nor handsome but it stood in a fine garden.... p.80. Dagworthy led the way round to the back of the house. Here had been constructed elaborate kennels. [Emily and Mr. Hood would cross from the quarries through the village and then walk along Kirkthorpe Lane where there are some of the few trees in the neighbourhood except for those planted in the larger

gardens. Further, it is possible to walk on a parallel path, a few yards to the left of the lane, which

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can be called a woodland track. There are several coal mines near Heath and, in particular, St. John's Colliery, now closed, is less than a mile from Heath along this lane. After half a mile, opposite Kirkthorpe Church, an old and beautiful church, very different from the one in Gissing's short story "The Quarry on the Heath," Green Lane turns off to the right, so by following it and turning right again near the highest spot, it is possible to return to the village, after rounding Tarry-By-It Hill, in a direction at right angles to Kirkthorpe Lane. At the edge of the common the path separates the gardens of two houses; one, the Manor House, has unusually a block of kennels like small stables, easily seen from the path. There were at that time five houses more imposing than it, the most recently built.]

Chap. XII, p. 176. On reaching the quarry, she stayed her feet ... then resumed her walk to the upper part of the Heath. Reaching the smooth sward, she made straight across it for Dagworthy's house. [This implies that the house was on the side near the quarries as is this and one other. To get to any other of the sizeable ones she would have had to circle some of the collections of cottages. In the 1880s the Manor House was occupied by Col. E. A. Mackie, brother of Mr. R. B. Mackle, M.P., who lived at St. John's House, which I have identified as the Baxendales' home.]

Chap. V, p. 66. She had a passionate love of learning; all books were food to her. Fortunately there was the library of the Mechanics' Institute.... The strange things she read. Histories of Greece and Rome, translations of old classics, the Koran, Mosheim's "Ecclesiastical History," works of Swedenborg, all the poetry she could lay her hands on, novels not a few.... [Gissing's father was Honorary Librarian of Wakefield's Mechanics' Institution, referred to locally as the Mechanics' Institute, from 1867 until his death in 1870, and it can be expected that his thirteen-year-old son George made good use of a library only a hundred yards from his home. In 1863 the fee for "First Class" membership was twenty shillings for which the member could use the library of 5791

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volumes and "the holder of this card can introduce Two Persons under Sixteen Years of age to all the privileges of Fourth Class Members, Free of Charge." Membership for those "Under Eighteen Years of Age" was three shillings. In 1869 a 162-page catalogue was issued under Mr. Gissing's name, price one shilling, in hard covers. "The great labour that has been necessary to obtain the information in this catalogue will, it is hoped, be sufficient apology to the Members for the delay in its publication." It contains titles of books of poetry, novels, a translation of the Koran, Greek history and literature, but neither Swedenborg nor Mosheim; and no copy of "Gymnoblastic Hydroids," a book Emily asked for because "the amazing title in the catalogue had filled her with curiosity."]

Chap. X, p. 149. It has been mentioned that a railway bridge crossed the road a short distance beyond the Hoods' house. On the embankment beyond this bridge ... was a cluster of small trees and shrubs.... Here ... Dagworthy placed himself ... from this position he had a complete view of the house he wished to watch... At eleven o'clock Emily came forth.... At the gate she hesitated a moment, then took the way neither to the Heath nor to Dunfield, but crossed to the land which led to Pandal. From his hiding-place Dagworthy could follow her so far, and with ecstasy he told

himself that she must be going to the Castle Hill [Sandal Castle Hill]... It was with difficulty that he climbed to the top of the embankment. Thence he could see the whole track of the lane which went, indeed, almost parallel with the railway line. He walked in the same direction, keeping at some distance behind Emily. [From the railway embankment there would be a clear view of Stoneleigh Terrace. It is only fifty yards from the front gate to the junction with Agbrigg Road, which runs in a straight line for half a mile and has Sandal Castle on the horizon beyond the end of it. But Gissing allowed himself poetic licence in that although there is a second railway bridge at Sandal station, where Agbrigg Road twists under it to Barnsley Road, the bridges are not connected, and belong to two different lines. So Dagworthy ought to have come down from the embankment and used the road.]

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Chap. VI, p. 86. Not much more than a mile from Banbrigg ... is the village of Pental, where stand the remains of an ancient castle [Sandal Castle]. Very slight indeed are these relics, one window and some shapeless masses of defaced masonry being alone exposed; but a hill close beside them is supposed to cover more of the fabric.... The circle of the moat is still complete ... Pental Castle Hill, as the locality is called, is approached by a rustic lane leading from the village... "When was this castle destroyed?" he asked. [Sandal Castle has been excavated in the last ten years, unearthing more low ruined walls around the window and the other piece, said to be a wall of the main hall. When I was a child, the site was a natural adventure playground with a fine view over Wakefield from the hall of the central keep. Now there are no shrubs and it is only an historical curiosity. The castle is the location of Shakespeare's Henry VI, Part III, Act I, Scenes 2, 3, 4 and was destroyed by Cromwell's men. – There are several ways to the castle: Emily would cross Barnsley Road to Pinfold Lane and then, after walking a few yards along Castle Road, see the castle ruins a hundred yards further up Manygates Lane (past my home). Wilfrid would drive up Manygates Lane from its junction with Barnsley Road, nearer Wakefield]. There had been no train to Pental at the right time; he [Wilfrid] had taken a meal at Dunfield station and then had found a cab to convey him to the village.... p.94. From Pental to Dunfield there would be a train in a quarter of an hour. They stood together under the station shed. [It is strange to realise how important railways were as a means of local transport in those days. In a letter to his sisters he wrote "It is hoped that you have a good pavement to walk on to Sandal Station." The station has been closed for many years, since it lost its usefulness as a result of the growth of motor transport. Even in 1895 *Sandal Parish Magazine* contained horse omnibus time-tables for routes from Wakefield to Sandal and to Agbrigg).

Chap. V, p. 67. [Mr. Hood] obtained a place in the counting house of a worsted-mill, under the

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firm of Dagworthy and Son.

Chap. VII, p. 108. Dagworthy's mill stood at one end of the cattle-market.

Chap. VIII, p. 120. [Dagworthy] was standing at the window of his private room, which was on the first floor of the mill, with a large field-glass at his eyes. The glass was focussed upon the Cartwrights' garden.... [These details and the longer description of the garden in chap. VII so limit

the position of the mill that, from a map of that period, it can be seen that the only one there was a corn mill. Of course most of the mills in Wakefield were engaged in spinning wool ; and two of them were within two hundred yards from the garden, but out of sight of it at the other side of the viaduct.]

Chap.V II, p. 98. Mrs. Cartwright and her five grown-up daughters, together with a maid-servant, lived, moved and had their being in an abode consisting of six rooms, a cellar and a lumber closet. A few years ago they had occupied a much more roomy dwelling on the edge of the aristocratic region of Dunfield; though not strictly in St. Luke's [St. John's] – the Belgravia of the town [there is no Belgravia Road in St. John's] – they of course spoke of it as if it were. A crisis in the fortunes of the family had necessitated a reduction of their establishment; the district in which they now dwelt was humbler, but then it could always be described as “near North Parade, you know”; North Parade [South Parade] being an equivalent of Mayfair. The uppermost windows commanded a view of the extensive cattle-market, of a long railway viaduct, and of hilly fields beyond. [Mr. Gissing's shop in Westgate stands directly opposite the junction with Market Street and so, from the living rooms above the shop, George would have had a unique, narrow view between the buildings in that street, past the cattle-market and viaduct to the edges of the Pennines.] p.107. The garden which was to be the scene of study was ten minutes' walk away from the house. To reach it they had to pass along a road [Market Street] which traversed the cattle-market.... [This, too, places the house in or close to Westgate, and so to say that it was near South Parade, a hundred-

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yard-long row of Georgian houses by the cattle market but separated from it by Market Street, sounds like an esoteric joke: more a matter of scorn, by hearers, than laughter. The size of the Cartwrights' accommodation was typical of many houses in the town, but none had the view and position.] Beyond the market, and in the shadow of the railway viaduct ... lay three or four acres of ground divided up by hedges into small gardens, leased by people who had an ambition to grow their own potatoes and cabbages, but had no plot attached to their houses. [My grandfather who was born in 1878, could remember when there were gardens on the land, now built upon, which is separated from the cattle-market by Ings Road. It is also bounded by Denby Dale Road, a continuation of Market Street; and along the hypotenuse of the triangle by the so-called Ninety-Nine Arches. There was no garden attached to Mr. Gissing's shop and Morley Roberts, in *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, implies that the Gissings had one of these gardens.]

Chap. XIV, p. 205. The Baxendales lived in St. Luke's which we already know as the fashionable quarter of Dunfield. Their house stood by itself with high walls about it, enclosing a garden: at the door were stone pillars.... [St. John's is a district built around St. John's Church and was the most fashionable residential part of Wakefield until the suburbs were developed. St. John's House, St. John's Square, then the home of R. B. Mackie, fits this description except that although it appears to be a detached house when approached from the front, through the walled garden, it is in fact the end house of a terrace in St. John's Square, but is built at right angles to the terrace and its front is wider than the depth of the other houses. The only other house of a size able to have a library, and a sitting-room for the son, has its front door on the roadside. Further it is possible that Gissing visited St. John's House with his father. Mr. Gissing was a Liberal councillor for St. John's Ward from 1867 until his death as well as Honorary Librarian of the Mechanics' Institution; and

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R. B. Mackie was Liberal M.P. for Wakefield in 1880 and a Vice-President of the Mechanics' Institution, leaving a thousand pounds to its library at his death in 1885.]

Chap. XIV, p. 209. "Mr. Baxendale, when particularly angry, offers to hire the hall in the Corn Exchange, that I may say my say." [The Corn Exchange was opposite Mr. Gissing's shop, on the corner of Market Street and Westgate. It had a 98 feet by 45 feet saloon on the upper floor, let "for dancing and other entertainment".]

Chap. XVII, p. 240. Wilfrid did not go straight to the Baxendales' [after leaving Emily].... Turning from the main road at a point just before the bridge over the river, he kept on the outskirts of the town, and continued walking till he had almost made the circuit of Dunfield. [The river can be crossed by only one other bridge. That is upstream and I find it difficult to believe that a stranger would realise that he must turn away from the river, walk towards Sandal, and then cross fields to the bridge on Denby Dale Road. However there is a path following the river downstream and ending at Heath. I am sure that the young Gissing would have been taken along it to the annual Easter fair on Heath Common; and later he may have used it as an alternative way to Agbrigg, meeting Doncaster Road again at the canal bridge beyond Stoneleigh Terrace.]

Chap. XIX, p. 265. As it rained, she walked to Pental, and took train for Dunfield.... At Dunfield station.... To reach the exit ... she had to cross the line by a bridge.... The train by which she had travelled had also brought Wilfrid. [Trains from King's Cross station, London, to Leeds, after passing through Sandal station, stop at Westgate station, Wakefield, on the opposite side from the entrance and there is a footbridge. Wakefield has, and had, a very quick rail service for the 180 mile journey: so either Gissing bent the conditions or Wilfrid came on an express to Doncaster and changed to a local stopping train if Emily was able to join it at Sandal.]

Chap. IX, p. 134. It was impossible to go through Hebsworth (Leeds) with uncovered head.

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[When I first read the book I felt that this incident was far-fetched, but now I believe that my judgment was conditioned by present modes. For example, even as late as the 1914-18 war, it was so unusual for a man to walk bare-headed through the streets of Wakefield that "conscientious objectors" held at Wakefield prison were recognised and abused because they did not wear hats when allowed out into the town. Also, in *Thyrza*, Chap. XV, p. 112, "The children were dirty and ragged, several of them barefooted, nearly all of them bare-headed."]

Chap. XV. p. 217. There's a man called Rapley, an old clothes' dealer.... Talked to him ... by the parish church [cathedral] clock, just over his shop. [There are only two clock faces on the cathedral and neither has buildings backing up to it. A study of local directories has yielded nothing in the neighbourhood except, perhaps, one shop classified as a pawnbroker and outfitter.]

What else? I have written that I have solved nearly all the problems. Here is one that I feel is insolvable:

Chap. V, p. 64. Hither [to Banbrigg] her [Emily's] parents had come to live when she was thirteen years old, her home having been previously in another larger manufacturing town.... He

[James Hood] married a schoolmistress ... who, what was more, owned the house in which she kept school.

Chap. XI, p. 161. The house at Barnhill's going to be empty. [I do not think that any specific town can be identified and, although the name has similarities with Barnsley, ten miles south of Wakefield, it is not significantly larger and would have been more readily described as a mining town.]

* * * * *

The Emancipated (continued)

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Reuben illustrates the same failings with different causes: rebelliousness, egoism, self-indulgence and fatalism adopt the pretence of emancipation as a self excusing philosophy

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that has no real meaning for him. We are meant to understand, I think, from the frequent references to his childhood, that egoism and insincerity were inculcated in him as in his sister Miriam, in default of true standards of behaviour, by the "religious" atmosphere of their upbringing; only, presumably by mere chance, where she accepted the narrow puritanism, he rebelled and took to libertinism. That direct flouting of what had been forced on him was revolt, but it was not in any sense emancipation; it was just an inversion; defiance of convention had therefore no positive force as a rule of conduct, though he variously seeks justification for it. No allegiance, no guidance can be found here – he is merely *déraciné*; susceptible still to idealism, he can for a time share Cecily's, but is always seeking something, marriage, a change of domicile, a proposed book – which is expected to improve and guide him without the necessity of resolving his conflicts.

The continuing rebellion is self-destructive; in spiting those responsible for his upbringing he spites himself. There are consequently no surprises in the character. Except for Cecily, whose illusions blind her, all can see the inevitability of his course.

Of importance is his basic dishonesty and lack of scruple – founded no doubt on the examples of hypocrisy in his childhood – which is shown early when, for instance, he uses his chance awareness of Mallard's love for Cecily to prejudice her against her guardian's advice. Of course he does not care whether his imputation of ignoble motive to Mallard is justified, but half supposes it is, for his disingenuousness is of the kind which suspects others, eventually even Cecily, of faults such as his own; it is notable that he shares with his sister the same suspicions of Mallard at beginning and end of the book, a neatly achieved parallel.

In fact, there is justification – Mallard is not entirely honest in his actions, though Reuben's interpretation that he would therefore advise his ward wrongly is false. His disingenuousness lies in

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his attempt to deflect Reuben's attention away from Cecily – a laudable undertaking, from one point of view – being disguised as actions for Reuben's own good. Objectively, what he proposes, that Reuben should isolate himself from temptation and take to work, would really benefit him, as well

as Mallard, Cecily and Miriam ; there are many pleasing ironies in this situation, in which Mallard is at all times doing what is right, but ineffectually because he is aware of his own egoistic motives in doing it. This is a form of struggle with conscience which Reuben could not possibly comprehend.

The case of Mallard is most subtle; his battle with himself involves the whole man, all that he believes, and those things which he has not wholly committed himself to believing; and takes in the nature of his relations with Reuben, Cecily, Miriam, Mrs. Lessingham and the Spences. To simplify his problem somewhat, it has two sides: incomplete emancipation in him, and the moral problem of his quietism is irresponsible – touched on rather than analyzed. For Schopenhauer, quietism and altruism are interdependent, and further more Mallard comes close to the Schopenhauerian ideal of the artist whose freedom from Will approaches true perception. But his detachment has an element of egoism, and he is not truly free from Will, as his desire for Cecily demonstrates.

He has accepted the responsibility of guardianship reluctantly, and has in practice failed in his duties, allowing them to be performed, badly, by Mrs. Lessingham; whatever he may tell himself about his duty to his art, there is selfishness here, and Miriam's questioning of his moral position in regard to his art may touch him closely. Some consciousness of this confuses him. He has allowed Cecily to be educated in Mrs. Lessingham's version of emancipation, and though less self-deceiving than that lady he has not formed principles on the matter sufficient to guide him. He is not so independent of the opinion of others as definite principles of behaviour could make him, and this too contributes to his ineffectuality.

Because of rather unformed feelings about individual independence, he is unable to guide

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Cecily as he should; because of a rather indiscriminate tolerance, he appreciates the best of Reuben, and cannot act against him as ruthlessly as he should (Miriam's influence has some function here).

There is perhaps a degree of "posing" in his presentation of himself to the world, which, although he has talent, makes him not altogether different from the fake artist Marsh. The reputation he has acquired, for Cecily and others, as a dedicated mature (or elder) artist, man of ability and disinterested principle, is not one he can easily relinquish, even though his own acceptance of it is thrown into confusion by his discovery of egoism and passion in himself. Through this self-consciousness, and for other reasons, he cannot face the prospect of proposing marriage to his young ward, of declaring himself a rival to Reuben; and, a subtle touch, he attempts to avert Reuben by a proposed extension to him of the kind of parental guidance that was owed to Cecily. What would have happened had he declared his passion, is open to doubt; it would certainly have changed the relationship between him and Cecily, and Gissing at the end of the novel has left open the possibility that there might have been a fuller relationship. As it is, the irony of his indecision is not only that all goes wrong, but that he loses in Cecily's eyes as well as others' his reputation for mature detachment in a way which would not have occurred through open declaration.

In short, he fumbles the whole affair, and must be considered responsible for Cecily's fate. He has not been wholly honest, and in this he typifies many of the Emancipated: this may not be said only of Cecily in her innocence, the Spences in their withdrawal, Jacob Bradshaw in his limitations. These only are without pretensions.

Although we do not see the process, Mallard between the two parts of the novel has presumably faced and overcome these failings; he has reached and expressed firm opinions about the nature of emancipation and the need for principles of behaviour. Miriam, in Part Two, receives that tutelage from him from which neither Cecily nor Reuben benefited.

Miriam is the fortunate one of the *déracinés* of the book. Having expanded her understanding and awareness of life and beauty, she has nevertheless lost in the process those certainties which, undesirable though they were, had guided her actions. Religion now offers no allegiance, for she was formerly dedicated to its forms only, and that lack is now evident. Without belief or purpose, she seeks a substitute as well as a passionate satisfaction in Mallard, thus reflecting her brother's hope of saving himself through Cecily.

This makes sense, and it is Gissing's intention that Mallard shall now be wise and mature enough to fulfil Miriam's needs. Unfortunately Gissing is not at his best here; for one thing, he does not truly investigate what satisfactions Mallard may get from this relationship. Growth of intimacy between the two, the process of teaching and learning which brings them close, is excellently done; the idea that Mallard should elect to communicate his feelings about her through his chosen medium of paint is intriguing; but that climactic scene (Part Two, Chap. XVI) is handled with less subtlety than we have come to expect. Possibly theme – Mallard demonstrating, Miriam achieving, true emancipation – supersedes psychology at this point. Consequently Mallard has unfortunate overtones of the pompous Victorian prig, and Miriam's humility seems mindless.

Generally, however, the subtlety of Gissing's approach to his main characters' relationships and reactions leads to a more satisfying conclusion; particularly to a series of ironies and reversals. The organisation of the novel in two parts with a lapse of time between them, the first ending with the marriage of Cecily and Reuben, the second beginning when the marriage is feeling the first strains of disillusion, is interesting in that it does not conflict with a three volume division. Volume I is provided with its own climax, the meeting of Cecily and Reuben at Pompeii; in which effectively their love is declared. The whole volume has been building towards this. The remainder of Part I, which is the first five chapters of Volume II, moves not climactically but with

inevitability towards the elopement, considered as a disaster rather than a climax; and, time-lapse or no, we move on into the first chapters of Part II in the same mood – appropriately, for they described the process of disillusion which the last chapters of Part I forecast. So to the end of Volume II, where the death of Cecily's child marks the end of this stage with pertinent finality. (There is a suspicion of sentimental sensationalism attached to any use of this time-honoured device, but I think it can be justified at least partially as an aspect of the harsh reality Cecily must face). Volume III reintroduces Mallard, Miriam, and Italy, broadening the book's concerns again after Volume II's concentration on Cecily and Reuben.

The question therefore is, if the three-volume pattern was satisfactory, and the movement of the action could be conveniently adjusted to it, why the division into two "parts"? The answer seems to be that Gissing conceived the whole in two approximately opposing movements. The first brings a range of concepts and characters by stages into concentration upon the one point of the Cecily-Reuben relationship, in which all the main characters and themes are involved. The second reverses the process, widening out from that one point to reintroduce characters and themes and eventually to see Cecily and Reuben in perspective. Additionally, many of the scenes of Part II are roughly parallel to, or at least refer one's mind back to, some of the scenes of Part I. We may remember that Gissing had previously tried his hand at such a structure in the two volumes of *Isabel Clarendon*.

M. C. Donnelly complains that the second half is uninteresting and slow compared with the first.³ There is some truth in this. Partly it is an inevitable consequence of the contrast between a

movement of increasing rapidity and simplification towards a romantic climax, and a movement of complication and expansion of the inevitable consequences on a falling note. We should perhaps not allow ourselves to be much concerned about this: pace is not all; unfortunately Gissing is heavy-handed, in his dealing with other things than the Miriam-Mallard scene just noted, in Part II;

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his ironies are heavier, his developments rather lacking in surprise; there is more explanation and analysis (though Part I was not entirely free of explanatory essays), and even in the Italian scenes of Part II there is less atmosphere. In short, Part II is more effortful, less evidently a product of the writer's enthusiasm.

There are other partial failures in the novel. Most of the faults of sensationalism which obstruct one's pleasure in the earlier novels are now absent; for instance, in place of the stilted and stagy love scenes once prevalent we have here intense and dramatic exchanges in which genuine character is involved. One problem remains to him though, and that is the gallery of characters whose relevance to the theme and action is doubtful. Main characters – Mallard, Miriam, Reuben and Cecily; Mrs. Lessingham; the Spences – form a neat and closely integrated group, united by theme and plot, and the developments amongst them are logical and natural. There remain a number of characters whose affairs occupy a good deal of the book but who do not greatly support the main theme.

It is possible to argue some thematic relevance for all. Bradshaw, the commonsensical Englishman of plain views, who nevertheless devotes himself to the study of art in a true student's spirit, demonstrates a kind of emancipation which is honest and unselfconscious although it cannot go beyond his limitations. Where Bradshaw is completely without pretences, Marsh is all pretence, an ironic doppelganger to both Reuben and Mallard. The Denyer girls illustrate other kinds of false pretences; and so goes the argument. But the argument, at least of the Denyer family, is specious; and by what logic can Mr. Musselwhite, the wholly conventional, mindless and bored remittance man, be related to the emancipation theme? Yet he is a notable comic creation, second only to Bradshaw in this, and Dickensian principles of his inherent if irrelevant interest would justify his inclusion, and that of all the other inhabitants of the boarding-house world of Naples. Perhaps, too,

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as background to the life in Italy of the main characters they have their place. But to follow the affairs of the Denyers as Gissing does, even after their pretensions of "emancipation" have been discarded, seems unnecessary, and it is evidence of their intrusiveness that in the reader's memory they pervade the book although in strict fact the number of pages devoted to them is small. Nor, to return to Marsh, do I believe that a possible parallel between him and the main characters necessarily justifies the inclusion of a figure who in no other way connects with the central action. A more blatant example is the Mrs. Travis of Part II, doppelganger to Cecily whose removal would make not the slightest difference to the novel.

The prominence given to Cecily I think is too great. This is a very difficult judgment to make; Cecily is important, her story significant and well used as main plot. Nevertheless I feel that she is too lacking in complexity, her story too ordinary and predictable, properly to be the centre. I suspect an error one has noted before; once again Gissing (like so many of his contemporaries) seems to think that in attributing beauty and charm to her he has imbued her with inherent interest and the qualities of a heroine; a trick of mind that no doubt originates in his ideal version of womanhood, but which also partakes of a reliance on a kind of stock response not unlike that which uses girls in

advertising to sell unfeminine articles.

The truth is that Miriam and Mallard are much more interesting, their personalities subtler, their relationship much more potentially intriguing, than Reuben and Cecily. Despite this they are pushed into second place, – only just so, but distinctly so, – and the full possibilities in them are not developed. The “closing off” of their relationship at the end of the novel seems almost perfunctory.

To me, this is the main error Gissing has made. It is not the first, nor will it be the last, example in Gissing’s writing of the ordinary and predictable in character and situation – that which approximates more nearly to the conventional in novels of his time – taking precedence over the

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unusual; since his special talents were for the unusual in subject, this is a pity.

However, it is not perhaps a serious fault. Much more noticeable are the technical achievements of *The Emancipated* : unity of theme and action, atmosphere, controlled satire and irony, subtlety of characterization, presentation of idea through scene, effective prose. Lightness of touch is important; with the exceptions noted, the ironies and contrasts of this novel are not generally heavy or laboured, as they frequently have been in previous novels, and were to be in the following book, *New Grub Street*. I find intriguing the slightly different techniques used in presenting the main characters; Cecily, in the customary omniscient way, is seen both from within and without; but Reuben almost entirely through the eyes of others – he is lacking in powers of meaningful self-contemplation, and his importance to others depends on the degree to which they are deceived by him. Mallard is seen from within, but Miriam very largely from without with comparatively rare explanation of what her actions and expressions signify – the technique pioneered with Ada Warren in *Isabel Clarendon*. For instance, a great deal is conveyed about her when, in Chap. I, she pauses to consult her appearance in a mirror; this, occurring when she still is supposed to be adhering to her religiosity and puritanism, implies much about re-awakening femininity and other potentials, including her feelings about Cecily and Mallard; envy of the one, attraction to the other. Gissing inserts suggestion of this kind with great skill, concerning many things, but particularly the developing relationship between Miriam and Mallard:

“He glanced at Mrs. Baske, and their eyes met. Miriam smiled rather coldly, but continued to observe him after he had looked away again.” I.14.

The effect of such suggestion by external observation differs from that of explanation and analysis; the latter informs us as it were statistically, of what the situation is; the former hints what it may be,

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and invites us to learn more. In other words, suggestion sets up tensions, implies potentials for further development: it is a significant part of what may be called “preparation,” the technique of conveying information about plot and character in such a way as to encourage interest in them and a forward-looking attitude in the reader. The technique combines with hints and premonitions and other forms of forecasting, in conversation and otherwise. One of the more notable advances in *The Emancipated* is the naturalness with which Gissing introduces character and situation in a series of scenes and apparently uncontrived conversations which explain both the speakers and the persons they discuss, this combined with a pattern of subtle suggestion and premonition. Oswald Davis – to me, oddly – complains of a “slow opening”⁴; surely he cannot be referring to a dearth of incident. Gissing usually devotes his introductions to setting, character, situation, as he does here, and is not

noted for rapid development of incident. I suspect that Davis simply overlooked the subtle building of tension and expectation of the first chapters.

My final impression of the novel, and all its fine graduations, of technique, is of that competence, and confidence in competence that I noted before; a confidence that was not to desert Gissing after this, even (to be blunt) on occasions when it was misplaced.

3- Mabel Collins Donnelly, *George Gissing, Grave Comedian*, Harvard, 1954, p. 155.

4- Oswald H. Davis, *George Gissing*, London 1966, p. 72.

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Notes and News

Macmillan will be publishing on 18th September a critical study of Gissing, by Dr. Adrian D. B. Poole, of Jesus College, Cambridge. The book, entitled *Gissing in Context*, will contribute a close re-appraisal of the novelist's claim to representative status during the transitional period between the disintegration and reformation of the dominant "Victorian" and "modern" literary traditions, conventions and images. Gissing's novels will be studied in relation to many of his predecessors and contemporaries, ranging from major writers such as Dickens, Hardy and James, down to minor figures such as Besant and the "Cockney School." The discussion will centre on three main topics: the writer and the city; the images of the writer and the literary world; the literary treatment of women, marriage and identity. At the heart of the argument is a section dealing with the changes in the actual conditions and imaginative interpretations of authorship, that reach a point of crisis around 1890, and find a dramatic focus in Gissing's *New Grub Street*. The book's main claim to originality is that it seeks to bridge the gap between the close critical analysis of a particular writer, and more general arguments about historical consciousness and cultural change.

John Goode, of the University of Warwick, has completed a general critical study of Gissing, to be published by the Vision Press in England and by Barnes & Noble in America.

A collection of Gissing short stories, translated into Italian by Dr. Francesco Badolato, will appear later this year under the imprint of EDIPEM.

Professors John Halperin and Jackson I. Cope are writing for *Studies in the Novel* a review-article on recent Gissing scholarship.

George H. Ford, of the University of Rochester, N.Y., is editing a supplement to Lionel Stevenson's edition of *Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research*, covering the period 1962-1974. It is hoped that this volume will be available some time next year. Jacob Korg is doing the Gissing section.

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The Harvester Press announce that their next reprints in the Gissing series will be *The Unclassed* (ed. Jacob Korg), *In the Year of Jubilee* (ed. Gillian Tindall) and *Our Friend the Charlatan* (ed. P. Coustillas).

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Recent Publications

- C. C. Barfoot, "Current Literature 1973," *English Studies*, August 1974, p. 376. A short review of *The Born Exile*.
- J. C. H. Laker, "A Literary Selection," *Fife Free Press*, December 13, 1974. A notice of the Harvester edition of *Thyrza*. The same notice appeared in the *Marlborough Times and Standard*, on December 27.
- K. T., "Orangery is still an Urban Oasis," *Wakefield Express*, February 28, 1975. This is an article on Gissing's old school in Back Lane with a good photograph of the building.
- Denise Le Mallier, "Une Egérie de chez nous," *Nivernais-Morvan*, on Gabrielle Fleury, her relations with Sully-Prudhomme, Gissing, Wells etc.