

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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George Gissing’s Proletarian Novels

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[The following contribution was originally the text of a lecture delivered in Portsmouth. Miss Chialant recently published a long article in Italian on Culture and Anarchy in Gissing’s proletarian novels (*Annali: Anglistica*, Naples, Istituto Universitario Orientale, XVIII, 2, 1975, pp. 7-56) in which several points made in the lecture are discussed at greater length].

First of all, I consider it necessary to justify the title of this lecture and to define the field of research. I start from the assumption that “proletarian novels” are those which deal specifically with

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working-class life; the term is here used to refer only to subject matter, in the sense used by P. J. Keating in his study *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, where he explains that his main points of interest are “the ways in which the Victorian working classes are presented by mainly middle- and upper-class writers.” (1)

Gissing was a middle-class writer who faced this problem. A first question arises here: was fiction for him merely an attempt to resolve his own problems, a way out from the conflict of his

sympathy with the working classes without being of that class? From this question a second one immediately arises: to what extent did he reach artistic objectivity in dealing with his subject?

A statement of the problem in these terms – which is also a partial answer to these questions – is offered by P. J. Keating, who writes:

When studied in chronological order, they [the proletarian novels] testify ... to a struggle with the problem of how to establish a balance between a personal social viewpoint and artistic objectivity when writing about the working classes.
(2)

My intention is to develop Mr. Keating's thesis according to the following outline:

- I. to point out a recurring pattern in the characters of the novels;
- II. to refer to the problem of realism in Gissing's novels;
- III. to trace his artistic development and ideological change in attitude towards the working classes;
- IV. to suggest a comparison between Gissing's view of industrialism and Matthew Arnold's.

I - Gissing's proletarian novels are five: *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), *The Unclassed* (1884), *Demos* (1886), *Thyrza* (1887) and *The Nether World* (1889). They span ten years of his life, a period which covers what can be considered his first phase as a writer. In the 1880's Gissing was in

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direct contact with the London proletariat and lumpen proletariat, more out of economic need than by choice; in fact, his London life in that decade was characterized by anxious wanderings from one squalid lodging to another, and by a deep psychological involvement with the problems of the poor. It was in the 1880's that Gissing really came in contact with the dreariest aspects of slum life and took an interest in the working classes. The importance of that experience was acknowledged by Gissing himself when he wrote: "my early years in London were a time of extraordinary mental growth, of great spiritual activity ... there it was that I acquired my intense perception of the characteristics of poor life in London." (3) It is possible to find a recurring pattern in the five novels as regards the characters. They can be classified in three main groups according to their social class, with the exception of *The Nether World*, whose characters belong all to the working class:

- 1) the enlightened middle-class hero, who is an intellectual or an artist;
- 2) the working-class hero, who is generally a skilled worker with aesthetic ambitions;
- 3) the ignorant or semi-illiterate masses, who are never present as main but only as minor characters.

We find instances of the first type in only three of the five novels. They are all men who come into contact with the working classes accidentally, through working-class friends, or in an attempt to realize their philanthropic schemes. Arthur Golding, the main character in *Workers in the Dawn*, does not belong to the working class by birth (his father is an Oxford graduate who dies of alcoholism in the slums), although his upbringing is almost entirely working class. He is one of those "earnest young people striving for improvement in, as it were, the dawn of a new phase of our civilization," to quote Gissing's own words. (4) Golding is a man with artistic gifts who feels called

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upon to fight against the social conditions of the slums, and his dilemma is between commitment in

social reform and his interest in art.

A very similar case is that of Osmond Waymark (the leading character of *The Unclassed*), a young novelist, a schoolmaster and a former radical, who is well-educated and has the advantage of a small private income. After experiencing a phase of social commitment similar to Arthur Golding's, he abandons his belief in justice and equality and prefers working as a rent collector in the slums to teaching. Nevertheless, Waymark still tries to find a compromise between his aspirations for pure art and the moral need to denounce social evils, by writing a novel that deals with what he calls the "untouched social strata."

A third example of this kind of character is offered by Walter Egremont in *Thyrza*. He is a wealthy intellectual who hopes for a contact with the working classes during a series of lectures on English literature, which he delivers, in the end, to a select group drawn from "the upper artisan and mechanic class." He too – like his predecessors Golding and Waymark – chooses to construct an ideal for his otherwise meaningless life, deciding to educate the working people, albeit only the "cream" of that class.

It is no mere chance that the main characters of these novels are intellectuals or artists. "The artist for Gissing," writes P. J. Keating, "stands beyond society; he represents spiritual aspirations which by their very nature obliterate the slum background.... For the Gissing hero the way out is through an understanding of Art." (5)

Even though these "classless" or "displaced" or "outcast" intellectuals (as they have been defined by various critics) are definitely not working-class and are more or less financially independent, they cannot help being absorbed by the condition of the poor. They are constantly in a moral rather than political conflict, split between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This conflict is revealed in their choice of life as intellectuals and in their private lives.

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The professional conflict between social commitment and aesthetic ideals is summed up in this quotation from *Demos*:

There is a work in the cause of humanity other than that which goes on so clamorously in lecture-halls and at street-corners ... the work of those whose soul is taken captive of loveliness, who pursue the spiritual ideal apart from the world's tumult. (6)

Here, of course, the importance of art for art's sake represents the only salvation for humanity. What is not clear at all is the equation between "lecture-halls" and "street-corners"; both imply a confrontation with an audience – though of a different kind – which Gissing here seems to reject. Moreover, it is an irony (which Gissing is unaware of) that bourgeois art, remote from basic worries, can save the working class. All these questions remain without an answer in the novels; this probably indicates that Gissing used these characters to try to work out his own moral and ideological problems, without being able to find a definite solution to them. The conflict becomes personally acute in these characters' simultaneous involvement with women of a different class, which shows how the two levels – the ideological and the private one – intermingle.

My impression is that the inter-class love-story in Gissing's proletarian novels satisfied two requirements: a) a sentimental plot, which was an important ingredient of the Victorian novel, and so allowed the writer to get a hearing from his public (generally composed of lower-middle or middle-class women readers, the usual customers of the circulating libraries); b) using this as a device the author could communicate opinions about society and politics without explicitly dealing

with them. Probably it was even used symbolically to mean how difficult, or impossible it was to establish a love relationship between people belonging to different social classes. Thyrza's death, or the failure of Richard Mutimer's marriage are particularly revealing of Gissing's point of view on

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this matter, namely the belief that class barriers were too rigid to be abolished.

It is interesting, by contrast, to think of the meaning of the marriage between Thornton and Margaret Hare in Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South*, where the happy union of a factory owner of the industrial North and a girl of the rural South stands for the union of two classes, the industrial bourgeoisie and the landed gentry. A similar case is presented by Disraeli's *Sybil*, where the final marriage of Egremont, "the enlightened aristocrat," and Sybil, "the daughter of the People," turns out to be particularly ironic, for the main character is a dispossessed aristocrat, not a working-class girl. Once again, the marriage is a symbol of the political development which was the actual issue at the time. To conclude, we can say that the middle-class hero in Gissing's proletarian novels is acting as a spokesman of the author's dilemmas, being himself a middle-class intellectual who could not ignore the social problems of his time.

A second group of characters are those who belong to the working classes but are considerably above the average working man. Richard Mutimer, in *Demos*, Gilbert Grail in *Thyrza*, and Sidney Kirkwood in *The Nether World* are not representative of their class, they are exceptional working men.

Jacob Korg defines Mutimer as a man who "joins intelligence, industry and determination to his revolutionary principles," (7) a man capable of organising an industrial town on the Owenite principles of cooperation between workers and masters. Gissing presents him as quite common for his class:

Richard represented – too favourably to make him anything but an exception – the best qualities his class can show. He was the English artisan as we find him on rare occasions, the issue of a good strain which has managed to procure a sufficiency of food for two or three generations. (8)

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Apart from the slightly ironic tone used here by Gissing, the stress is clearly put on the atypicality of Mutimer as a working-class man.

Gilbert Grail is also atypical in his hunger for knowledge. The first scene in *Thyrza*, which shows him spending an hour of his Saturday afternoon in Westminster Abbey, is revealing. The physical setting is important because it introduces Grail, from the start, as a worshipper of art and of the past. Gissing gives him the highest praise possible when he presents him not just as a member of the working-class aspiring to working-class culture in order to improve his social condition, but as a man interested in culture for its own sake:

To Gilbert, a printed page was as the fountain of life; he loved literature passionately, and hungered to know the history of man's mind through all ages. This distinguished him markedly from the not uncommon working man who zealously pursues some chosen branch of study. (9)

Comparing the two characters, P. J. Keating observes: "Gilbert Grail had possessed the very

sensibility which Mutimer lacks, but he had been uninterested in social issues, while Mutimer prepares to set himself up as a leader of men.” (10) This suggests that, in spite of their uncommon gifts, each lacks something which probably brings about his final failure.

Sidney Kirkwood, in *The Nether World*, is similarly an atypical working man. He is aware of the social injustice of slum living, but, in the end, he cannot resist viewing the suffering about him with a sense of deterministic fatalism. This is the way Gissing describes his development:

Saved from self-indulgence, he naturally turned into the way of political enthusiasm; thither did his temper point him. With some help ... he reached the stage of confident and aspiring Radicalism, believing in the perfectibility of

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man, in human brotherhood, in – anything you like that is the outcome of a noble heart sheltered by ignorance. It had its turn, and passed. (11)

Gissing believes that, being exceptional, these characters are bound to become *déracinés*, above their environment, but excluded from the upper and educated classes as well. Since they are endowed with an awareness that is unknown to the majority of those who belong to “the lower orders,” it is they, and not those who are at the bottom of the social hierarchy, who are the real victims of society and for whom the author feels respect and admiration. It seems that, at this stage of his literary development, Gissing could not sympathize with the working class but only with its exceptional representatives.

It might be interesting to notice how different is Dickens’s treatment of Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times*, a rare example of a working-class character in his fiction. Introducing him, Dickens writes:

Old Stephen might have passed for a particularly intelligent man in his condition. Yet he was not. He took no place among those remarkable Hands, who, piecing together their broken intervals of leisure through many years, had mastered difficult sciences, and acquired a knowledge of most unlikely things. He held no station among the Hands who could make speeches and carry on debates. Thousands of his compeers could talk much better than he, at any time. He was a good power-loom weaver and a man of perfect integrity. (12)

Dickens probably wanted to portray him as the average working-man of his time, a point which is related to the question of realism.

A third group of characters in Gissing’s proletarian novels are those who belong to the underworld of the Victorian lumpen proletariat. For these people, close to the lowest possible abyss

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of material and moral misery, Gissing feels either compassion or disgust. Already in his first four novels, beside characters taken from different social classes, there are vivid portraits of the lowest types of working people: the prostitute Carrie Mitchell in *Workers in the Dawn*, the alcoholic wife of Julian Casti in *The Unclassed*, Richard Mutimer’s younger brother ’Arry, who refuses to work and becomes a tramp, and so on.

But only in *The Nether World* does Gissing introduce more heterogeneous representatives of

the working classes. One gets the impression that, apart from specific and individual characters, like Bob Hewett or Clem Peckover, the real proletariat is represented, in Gissing's view, by the anonymous and noisy crowd of the pubs, by the miserable slum dwellers, by the mob that kills Richard Mutimer or visits the Crystal Palace. As to this last example, it is interesting to quote Gissing's comment on the low-class visitors to the Crystal Palace, to understand his mixed feelings of pity and repulsion: "A great Review of the People," he writes. "Since man came into being, did the world ever exhibit a sadder spectacle?" (13)

From this classification by type of Gissing's characters in his proletarian novels, two main considerations arise, which take us respectively to the second and third parts of this lecture:

the problem of realism,

the problem of the "message" of this group of novels as a whole and throughout Gissing's production.

It is not my intention to go into the complex question of realism in Gissing's fiction. This would require a discussion of what realism and naturalism meant for the late XIXth century English novelists, a comparison with the French and Russian models, an illustration of the phenomenon in England as it appears in the slum novels and short stories of the 1890's, and so on.

As far as Gissing is concerned, it will be enough to say that, although he did not acknowledge

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any direct influence of Zola on his work, his attitude towards French naturalism was always equivocal. In many of his letters to members of his family (especially in those written between 1883 and 1886) he expressed very positive judgments on that literary trend, and on some French and Russian writers who followed it. There is one letter in particular, dated July 18th, 1883, in which he states some sort of aesthetic principles to which he would conform in his own life:

Philosophy has done all it can for me, and now scarcely interests me any more. My attitude henceforth is that of the artist pure and simple. The world is for me a collection of phenomena, which are to be studied and reproduced artistically. (14)

What is interesting here is that, through objectivity and personal detachment, Gissing wants to reach the same result he speaks of in other parts of his works, that is an isolation from the "world's tumult," an escape into the world of Art. To quote from a letter of 1884 where he specifically deals with this issue:

Human life has little interest to me, on the whole, save as material for artistic presentation. I can get savage over social iniquities, but even then my rage at once takes the direction of planning revenge in artistic work. (15)

The very principles of realism in fiction, that implied a direct observation of the surrounding world and a representation of it through the work of art, compelled Gissing to look around and be, therefore, unable to escape from the bitter reality that surrounded him. In a way, he was in a vicious circle which he was unable – personally and artistically – to break. This is particularly evident in his study on Dickens, where we find, on the one hand, a criticism of Dickens's use of certain literary devices that made his characters or situations hardly credible; on the other hand, an affirmation of the writer's autonomy in adopting the conventions that the novel as a literary genre requires and that

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even justifies a lack of verisimilitude.

On the question of realism in Gissing's proletarian novels, it is helpful to refer to John Goode's criticism. Taking the hint from the famous letter that Friedrich Engels wrote to Margaret Harkness in 1887, where he criticizes her novel *City Girl* and discusses the central problem of realistic aesthetics, John Goode comments on the relationship – emphasized by Engels – between specificity and typification in the context of fiction's response to historical movement. He writes:

Typification involves the realization of "real mutual relations" which do not allow for pessimistic but consoling "realities." It is something that the late Victorian novelists could hardly achieve: overwhelmed by the complexities of the present, they come to write of it as a hell from which they cannot escape.... To present the reality of historical change would mean, especially for the English writers, an abandonment of immediate realism. The best illustration of these problems is in the work of Gissing. We can see in him both a remarkable effort to assimilate the social actuality with which he is confronted, and a final incapacity to face up to its implications in formal terms. (16)

This contradiction in Gissing's fiction reveals itself in the way he portrays his working-class characters. We have seen, in fact, how Gissing depicts the working-class protagonists of his novels; he makes them either too intellectual, or too refined. Even Mutimer, who is neither, finds himself involved in an exceptional situation (a sudden inheritance that makes him wealthy and, therefore, puts him in a very unusual position for a working man). P. J. Keating suggests that Gissing was unwilling to accept the very plain truth that "if a novel is to deal with working-class life, then it must place at the centre working-class men and women who are representative of and not superior to their social environment." (17)

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It seems to me that Gissing was more interested in giving a faithful, honest and sociologically correct representation of reality than in strictly applying the principles of naturalism. For example, although he agreed on the point of "objectivity," he very seldom respected it, as it appears from his application of the "omniscient author" principle, his personal interference in the narration of the story, his "asides." Gissing's contemporary critics employed such terms as "realism" or "naturalism" to describe the more sordid or violent aspects of life; this explains why Gissing's working-class novels were attacked for being immoral, and *The Nether World* was considered the most naturalistic of Gissing's novels.

(To be concluded)

1 - P. J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971, p. xii.

2 - *Ibid.*, p. 53.

3 - *Commonplace Book*, ed. Jacob Korg, New York: N.Y. Public Library, 1962, p. 16.

4 - *Letters of George Gissing to His Family*, Constable, 1927, p. 53.

5 - P. J. Keating, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

6 - *Demos*, London, John Murray, 1908, p. 470.

- 7 - Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963, p. 87.
- 8 - *Demos*, p. 30.
- 9 - *Thyrza*, London: Smith, Elder, 1907, p. 67.
- 10 - P. J. Keating, *op.cit.*, pp. 70-71.
- 11 - *The Nether World*, London: John Murray, 1903, p. 57,
- 12 - *Hard Times*, London: Dent, 1963, p. 57.
- 13 - *The Nether World*, p. 267.
- 14 - *Letters of George Gissing to His Family*, pp. 128-29.
- 15 - *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.
- 16 - John Goode, "William Morris and the Dream of Revolution," in J. Lucas (ed.), *Literature and*

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- Politics in the Nineteenth Century* London: Methuen, 1971, p. 225.
- 17 - P. J. Keating, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

* * * * *

Gissing's Grave

E. M. Eleanor Wood

Last summer, as we were in the district, my husband and I decided to seek out Gissing's grave in the old cemetery at St. Jean-de-Luz. The cemetery itself was easily found – it stands on a slope only a little way outside the centre of the town and still well within the city's limits, unlike the newer and larger cemetery further out. The view is breath-taking. Gissing's grave is on the extreme topmost edge, backing right against the stone wall that bounds it and divides it from the small road behind. From there you see across the tops of the strange, baroque examples of the French funereal mason's craft – obelisks, cupolas, catafalques, miniature Greek temples, miniature Roman houses – to a wide panorama of the distant hills beyond, the foothills of the Pyrenees, with the faint outlines of the grand peaks beyond, melting into the clouds.

The grave itself is somewhat disappointing. No inscription beyond the bare name "George Gissing" in capital letters at the base of the cross. No dates, no attributes, no mention of home-town or family. A small stone curb bounds the usual rectangle of gravel – decently weeded we were glad to see, though it may have been the result of the exceptionally hot and arid summer of 1975, as weeds were not in evidence anywhere and only the plastic *immortelles* on other graves were at all flourishing. The cross is tall and narrow, Celtic in type, with the circlet round the top, but with no ornamentation. Unfortunately it proved to be difficult to photograph, as the stone matches the stone

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wall behind it exactly, and in the full glare of the noonday sun there were no shadows to throw it into relief, but we did our best with a small pocket camera, and on our first visit left it at that.

However, the bleakness and the paucity of such a memorial worried us. We decided to visit it a second time, this time armed with something in the way of a personal tribute from ourselves. After some thought we hit on the theme of driftwood (presumably with some recollection of *Thyrza* at the back of our minds), and on an irregularly-shaped piece of planking washed up by the Atlantic we

wrote in indelible ink the following inscription:

Hommage à George Gissing, écrivain célèbre, grand romancier, mort à St. Jean-Pied-de-Port,
1903

This we propped up against the base of the cross, where we hope it will survive the winter rains and arouse some interest at least in future passers-by. We also planted a small cactus. It seemed a suitable emblem somehow. Prickly but durable. Like himself.

This done, we took a closer look at its surroundings. Till then we had not taken in the fact that Gissing lies on the fringe of what is in fact the graveyard of the little English colony of the last century, those exiles whose occupations led them to work abroad, or who – more numerous – went there for their health, like Gissing himself. Some sad inscriptions recorded the failure of the treatment, a last hope that had failed. Some triumphantly announced deaths at the age of eighty or more – some even in their nineties – expatriates who saw no reason to return to the fogs and damp of England. The English (or perhaps one should rather say British, since Scots abounded) names were an interesting collection.

We recorded some of them. Walter George McGusty; Mary Kilburn; William Grindley Craig; Francis Tollemache Halliday; Elizabeth Campbell, Florence Campbell and Colonel John Gove

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Campbell; Huson Morris, Arthur Huson Morris and Sidney Morris.

It might be asked why Gabrielle chose to have Gissing's body buried here instead of in the equally beautiful little cemetery at St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, much closer to the house where he died. The journey to St. Jean-de-Luz must have been slow and costly. By road, with a horse-drawn hearse and attendant carriages, a distance of 40 miles, the journey would have taken all day. The train journey would have involved changing at Bayonne and a total distance of some 45 miles, but would of course have been considerably quicker. In either case it would have been a considerable undertaking, and an ordeal for Gabrielle. The answer of course lies in the presence of the Anglican Church and the resident Anglican priest. Gissing was no Anglican, but still less was he a Catholic. Gabrielle must have known that the deepest offence of all to his relatives in England would have been to have him buried as a Catholic among Catholics. This small corner of fellow expatriates was the most fitting place for him. The very style of the headstones there marks them out from those of the natives. We know from some passages in *Sleeping Fires* that Gissing himself did not approve of the exuberance of foreign taste in monumental masonry:

"I have been to the Cemetery," was Louis's first remark. "Do you know it, Mr. Langley? The monuments are nearly as hideous as those at Naples"

and again –

"Happily he does not lie among the foolish monstrosities of the Greek cemetery which I described to you.... Your wish is respected: on the marble is carved a cross."

Was Gabrielle remembering this when she ordered the plain Celtic cross and the slender unadorned shaft? Or did she act from instinct, knowing what would have offended him least? One could wish that she had added a little more to the bleak two words of his name – a date, his place of

birth, the nature of his profession – but this apart one can only be grateful to her as for so much else.
Requiescat in pace.

* * * * *

A Further Note on the Names of Gissing's Characters

Lawrence R. Barkley
San Diego State University

Micklethwaite, the idealistic mathematician in Gissing's *The Odd Women*, may well be the most patient man in literature. Gissing has drawn a character who waits seventeen years, until monetary conditions are ideal, to marry the sweetheart of his early twenties. But Micklethwaite's exaggerated delay should not surprise the reader, for his name means delay. "Mickle" comes from the OE "micel" or "miccel", which in its adjectival form means "great", and as an infinitive translates as "to magnify" or "to extend". The remainder of the name, "thwaite," can be reduced to "th" and "waite," where "th" can be seen as an abbreviation for "the" while "waite" is one of the varied ME forms of the ModE word "wait." Micklethwaite = To extend / to magnify the wait.

1 - For a brief survey of the significance of the meanings of primary characters' names in Gissing's novels see P. F. Kropholler's "On the Names of Gissing's Characters," *Gissing Newsletter*, II (Sept. 1966), pp. 5-7.

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Book Review

George Gissing, *Un'ispirazione ed altre novelle*, Novara: Edipem, 1975, pp. 200, Lire 1,800.

The present volume, edited and translated by Dr. Francesco Badolato, belongs to the well-

known Italian series entitled "La nostra biblioteca classica in cento volume," published by Edipem, and this implies that Francesco Badolato *qua* editor was not altogether free to proceed as he thought fit. For one thing, he would doubtless have liked his name to appear on the title-page – instead it is printed in small type on the verso of the same page, and there is no indication that the introduction is from his pen. He might also have been willing to write at greater length on Gissing's works (only a couple of novels are mentioned in the biographical sketch) and on the short stories, which surely deserved a genuine critical discussion in addition to the plot summaries and to the two paragraphs on his art as a short story writer. But even as it is the editorial matter offers a great quantity of facts and useful notions about Gissing's life and works, and the Italian reader who knows nothing of Gissing will not start reading unaided. It was a good idea to give some critical judgments by such critics as Jacob Korg, Russell Kirk, Virginia Woolf and Paul Elmer More: they should whet the reader's appetite, as should the suggestions for further reading which are included in the nine-page

introduction. But it is doubtful whether some of the stories mentioned will easily be found: thus neither "Simple Simon" nor "Mr. Brogden, City Clerk" have ever been reprinted in volume form and no cursory glance at a bibliography of Gissing's works will produce what is not given in the present book – that is the title of the magazine in which the stories appeared, followed by the volume number or the date of publication.

It is perhaps to be regretted that either Dr. Badolato or his publishers thought it appropriate to give this volume the title already used for a similar collection of short stories in 1970. Bibliographers will be puzzled, if not misled. For indeed this new collection is far from being identical to the previous one. In 1970 Dr. Badolato offered eight short stories while the present book

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contains fifteen. The additional stories are among the best Gissing wrote, and no one should complain about the selection. They are "Fate and the Apothecary," "A Lodger in Maze Pond," "Humblebee," "A Capitalist," "A Poor Gentleman," "Christopherson" and "The Salt of the Earth." That "A Poor Gentleman" is one of the lot confirms the success of this story. Of the hundred-odd tales Gissing wrote, it is the most popular with translators since other versions of it are known in French, German, Polish, Japanese and apparently also Chinese. The reason for this is simple enough. Mr. Tymperley, its unheroic hero, is a typical Gissing character – educated but poor (a former Harrovian and a graduate of Cambridge), sensitive, scrupulous and long-suffering – one more victim of circumstances.

It would be impertinent of a Frenchman who has but a reading knowledge of Italian to pass judgment on Dr. Badolato's translation, but it may at least be said that a checking of the 1970 and 1975 versions of the first eight stories in this volume has shown that no opportunity was lost to revise, and doubtless to improve, the translation. Since some Italian publishers are ready to publish Gissing, let us hope that we shall soon see one of the major novels in Italian translation, by the side of *Born in Exile*, which UTET have kept in print for over twenty years. – Pierre Coustillas.

Correspondence

To the editor,

The printing of the *Checklist of George Gissing's Appearances in Mosher Press Publications* by Bruce Garland in the January 1976 *Newsletter* was very timely especially in view of the arbitrary decision on the part of Michael Collie, author of *George Gissing: A Bibliography* to leave out all private press editions. Where is one to find such information if not in a "bibliography"?

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	B or C			green

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I should like to offer a further contribution in the ongoing Gissing bibliography and perhaps other readers can add to this. I have in my possession at the present moment four copies of the Mosher Press *By the Ionian Sea*, 1920, limited to 700 copies. The odd thing about all this is that there are differences in all four copies. I can hardly wait to hear from other possessors of copies to see what other differences exist. I have made up a chart showing these differences. Future bibliographers should take note and not rush into print without seeing numerous copies.

Sincerely,

Alfred M. Slotnick, New York.

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Notes and News

Among forthcoming publications are to be listed the Harvester critical editions of *The Unclassed* and *In the Year of Jubilee*, respectively edited by Jacob Korg and Gillian Tindall. The two volumes are announced for June. *Our Friend the Charlatan* will follow later in 1976. Studying the manuscript of this novel has proved a very absorbing task. *The Emancipated* has also been announced by the Harvester Press, but it is not likely to be available until next year.

The Nether World is selling well (it was reprinted in Everyman's Library in 1975, and the introduction was reset on the occasion) and *The Odd Women* is even more successful. The Norton paperback which was issued for the first time in the autumn of 1971, is now in its fourth impression.

The critical study of Gissing by John Goode, which Barnes and Noble announced prematurely some time ago, is to appear in England next November under the imprint of the Vision Press.

George Gissing on Fiction, edited with an introduction and notes by Jacob and Cynthia Korg is now at the binders. The book, approximately 110 pages long, will include the two essays by

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Gissing, "The Coming of the Preacher," and "The English Novel of the Eighteenth Century," and

will have four illustrations. This will be No. 9 in the series. The price has not yet been fixed, but it should be about £3.60. The publisher says that the volume brings together Gissing's comments on the artistic and economic problems facing the Victorian novelist, drawing on unpublished letters and other documents. "The English Novel of the Eighteenth Century" is an early essay which has never been published.

Shigeru Koike throws light on a Japanese article by Professor Kii Nakano, of Sophia University, Tokyo, listed in the *MLA Bibliography* with incomplete references. This article, entitled "Natsume Sôseki ni okeru G. Gissing Taiken" appeared in the October 1972 number of *Comparative Literature*, an annual publication of the Japanese Society of Comparative Literature, pp. 1-13. The title may be paraphrased as follows: "How Natsume Sôseki read Gissing and assimilated him in his own works, especially in *Mon*." Mr. Koike explains that Natsume Sôseki (Natsume is the surname, Sôseki a first name *de plume*, so to speak; his real first name is Kinnosuke) was one of the leading literary figures of Japan in the early twentieth century. He lived from 1867 to 1916. He was at first a scholar in the field of English Literature and after two years' study in London (1900-1902), he taught at the University of Tokyo. But he resigned his post and after that devoted himself to creative work, producing many novels which have achieved the status of classics. His stories have a strongly European flavour; they testify to the influence of nineteenth-century fiction, for instance the works of Jane Austen and Meredith. Of Meredith he was particularly fond, and he is reported to have read all his stories. There is no evidence that he had any great interest in Gissing. The complete catalogue of his library shows that he nonetheless had four of Gissing's books: *The Unclassed* (1895 ed.), *The Town Traveller* (no date), *New Grub Street*, (1901, but this date seems to be wrong)

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and *Veranilda* (1904, first edition).

Mr. Nakano's article starts from this point and notes that of the four books Sôseki seems to have been most interested in and impressed by *Veranilda*, since there are numerous pencilled entries in his copy of the story. (It is curious, Mr. Koike comments, that he had no copy of *Henry Ryecroft*, but Mr. Nakano found evidence that Sôseki did read it, after the publication of his article). *Mon*, or *The Gate*, is no masterpiece of Sôseki's, but it is full of problems which have puzzled critics. Mr. Nakano detects some similarity between the diagram which Sôseki himself drew in reference to plot-construction in *Veranilda* and the plot-development in *The Gate*. "He also notes that both heroes in their predicament wish to find their way out rather unexpectedly with the help of religious people. Their impulsive urge to throw themselves into a religious order bears a close resemblance. Sôseki's diagram on the flyleaf is proof enough that *Mon* and *Veranilda* have the relation of influenced and influencer. The fundamental difference between the two works is that, while Gissing's hero succeeds in finding his peace of mind, Sôseki's fails in the attempt. This difference is subjected to further scrutiny and the conclusion drawn is that Sôseki is too handicapped by his idiosyncratic, modernistic way of thinking to give his hero a penetrating, religious consciousness in weaving a natural, yet powerfully moving plot."

James A. Means of Université Laval in Quebec reports: "Recently, I purchased a two-volume set of the *Poems* of John Gay (London, 1737). The fly-leaf of the first volume is signed very clearly and distinctly: "Algernon F. Gissing, 1887." Above this signature are the initials "TWG. 1852," which (I assume) stand for Thomas Waller Gissing. In addition, on the paste-down there is an heraldic bookplate with the name "Kimmel Roberts," as well as the undated signature of "E. M. Rudd," above the initials of the elder Gissing."

The Northeast Victorian Studies Association announces its intention to sponsor a bulletin serving as a clearinghouse of information for people interested in Victorian Britain. We hope that it will act as an international, in-house organ keeping Victorianists informed of the goings-on of various groups: noting exhibitions, conferences, publications, and research-in-progress; registering notes, queries, desiderata; and recording the movements of significant scholars (job-changes, visits, exchanges). Its format will be interdisciplinary, covering such fields as literature, history, art, economics, medicine, architecture, science, religion, psychology, law and photography. As a bulletin, it should appear as frequently and as cheaply as possible. Intended to fill a perceived gap, it will not compete with any existing publication. Our mailing address is: Lynne F. Sacher, Editor, *Victorian Studies Bulletin*, Baruch College, City University of New York, 17 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010.

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Recent Publications

Volumes

- Michael Collie, *George Gissing: A Bibliography*, Folkestone: Dawson, 1975, £7.50; Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press; pp. xiv + 129.
- Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975, \$19.00.

These two books will be reviewed in the July number.

Articles, reviews, etc.

- Anon., "Gissing in Context," *British Book News*, December 1975, p. 911. A review of Adrian Poole's book.

- John R. Reed, *Victorian Conventions*, Ohio University Press, 1975. Contains many references to Gissing.
- Maria Teresa Chialant, "'Cultura' e 'Anarchia' nei romanzi proletari di George Gissing," *Annali (Anglistica)*, Istituto Orientale di Napoli, 1975, no. 2, pp. 7-56.
- *Frank Sidgwick's Diary and Other Material Relating to A. H. Bullen and the Shakespeare Head Press*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1975. Contains a couple of references to Gissing, but is mainly interesting on account of the pages devoted to Bullen. Frank Sidgwick was Bullen's partner before the foundation of Sidgwick & Jackson.
- William Haley, "A Life's Little Ironies," *Books and Bookmen*, January 1976, pp. 54-55; February 1976, pp. 35-36. A two-part review of the recent books by Adrian Poole and Michael Collie.

- Anon., "Gissing in Context," *Choice*, March 1976, p. 88. A review of Adrian Poole's book.
- Adrian Poole, "Praxis Makes Perfect," *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 April 1976, p. 403. A review of Alan Swingewood's *The Novel and Revolution*, Macmillan, 1975, which contains a discussion of Gissing's work.