

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*.

\*\*\*\*\*

Volume XV, Number 4  
October, 1979

\*\*\*\*\*

-- 1 --

The Gissing Trust:  
Achievements to date

Kate Taylor  
Wakefield

In terms of practical achievement The Gissing Trust can look back on the past year with considerable satisfaction. But until response to the financial appeal is very much greater there can be no resting upon laurels.

There have been two real steps forward since the report that appeared in the April *Newsletter*. There I referred to the loss of the northernmost bay of the Gissing’s family house and suggested that the arguments for rebuilding it were compelling. The Committee of the Gissing Trust subsequently decided that, however much they welcomed the Wakefield M.D. Council’s proposals for the

\*\*\*\*\*

Editorial Board

Pierre Coustillas, Editor, University of Lille  
Shigeru Koike, Tokyo Metropolitan University  
Jacob Korg, University of Washington, Seattle  
Editorial correspondence should be sent to the Editor:  
10, rue Gay-Lussac, 59110-La Madeleine, France,  
and all other correspondence to: C. C. KOHLER,  
12, Horsham Road, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2JL, England.

Subscriptions

Private Subscribers: £1.50 per annum  
Libraries: £3.00 per annum

\*\*\*\*\*

-- 2 --

restoration of the remaining part of the house, they must object formally to the scheme as a whole since the Council had no plan to re-instate the bay in question. The Department of the Environment shared our view that the bay was an important element if the totality of the building and the Gissing way of life was to be fully understood.

It is therefore most encouraging to be able to report that the Council has now itself recognised the value of the entire building as a historic “document” and has decided to rebuild the end bay. Their declared aim (paper presented to the Conservation Executive Group of the Wakefield M.D. Council on 27th September 1979) is “to recreate the external appearance and internal divisions as closely as possible.” Work has already begun.

The second major step has been the resolution passed by the Council agreeing to lease at least two rooms in the house, once it is refurbished, for use as a Gissing Centre.

The need for substantial sums of money remains urgent and we hope that the very fact that we have been able to achieve so much will serve as a spur to donors. The Trustees have been able to provide £2,000 towards the cost of restoring the house. The Committee aims to have much to offer both the tourist-visitor and the Gissing scholar. For the former visual displays and interpretative leaflets are essential. For the latter we must build up the best collection possible of books and manuscripts (whether original or in facsimile).

The range of those who have supported the appeal so far is impressive. The names of subscribers to the *Gissing Newsletter* are prominent, and amongst them it would be invidious to identify that band who have not only given generously from their own purses but have raised substantial funds in their countries from individuals hitherto unknown to us. Locally we have had a donation from a former Bishop of Wakefield and £500 from one of Wakefield’s leading industrial concerns, M. P. Stonehouse Ltd. The founder of the firm, as it happens, was active with T. W.

-- 3 --

Gissing in the Wakefield Mechanics’ Institute, the Liberal Party and both the Industrial and Fine Arts Exhibition of 1865 and the Institution (school of Art) that was created from its profits. Another major novelist, Anthony Powell, has sent a donation and two publishing firms, Victor Gollancz and Routledge & Kegan Paul, have also made significant contributions.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### On *The Unclassed* as Autobiography

John Halperin  
University of Southern California

Two days after the publication of *The Unclassed* (1884) we find Gissing writing to his brother Algernon: “When I am able to summon any enthusiasm at all, it is only for ART.... 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.” (1) This is interesting for two reasons. First, it shows how prone Gissing was to use fiction as a response to events in his own life. Second, what he says here sounds very much like a paraphrase of Waymark’s views in *The Unclassed*. Algernon wrote back to express his dismay that Waymark’s cynicism should be shared by his brother. Gissing’s reply, considering other pronouncements he made around this time on his new “detachment” as an artist, is a bit ingenuous:

You evidently take Waymark’s declaration of faith as my own. Now this is by no means the case. Waymark is a *study of character*, and he alone is responsible for his sentiments ... my characters must speak as they would actually, and I cannot be responsible for what they say.... I have not for a moment advocated

any *theory* in the book ... it so happens that my ideals involve war to the knife

-- 4 --

with those which are professed by the hero of *The Unclassed*.... I make ... the clearest distinction between *The Unclassed* and George Gissing. (2)

I say this is ingenuous because the most casual reading of the novel (not to mention other letters Gissing wrote to various correspondents around this time) shows how much of the novelist there is in Waymark. As in *Workers in the Dawn* and a good many of the novels produced after *The Unclassed*, Gissing wrote into his fiction a spiritual history of himself. *The Unclassed* is in part the autobiography of George Gissing during the years 1880-83. One of the reasons *Demos*, his next published novel, succeeded with the public where *The Unclassed* did not, was that in *Demos*, which touched upon a number of popular issues of the day, autobiography was somewhat more diluted by objective social commentary.

At the center of *The Unclassed*, certainly, is the question Algernon had raised – that of the resemblance of the protagonist to the novelist himself.

In July 1883, while working on *The Unclassed*, Gissing wrote to Algernon:

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. In the midst of the most serious complications of life, I find myself suddenly possessed with a great calm, withdrawn as it were from the immediate interests of the moment, and able to regard everything as a picture. I watch and observe myself just as much as others. The impulse to regard every juncture as a “situation” becomes stronger and stronger. In the midst of desperate misfortune I can pause to make a note for future use, and the afflictions of others are to me materials for observation. (3)

-- 5 --

Gissing was using the new “detached” philosophy he had evolved from his reading of Schopenhauer and his growing conservatism to describe, in a dispassionate way in *The Unclassed*, a number of incidents in his own life. It was precisely this aspect of the novel that most concerned Algernon when he read it for the first time.

“Only as artistic material has human life any significance,” declares the protagonist of *The Unclassed*. “The artist is the only sane man.” And Waymark adds that for him life is chiefly interesting “as the source of splendid pictures, inexhaustible materials for effects.” A novelist himself, he used to write, he says, “with a declared social object. That is all gone by. I have no longer a spark of social enthusiasm. Art is all I now care for.” (4)

This is Gissing the pessimist looking back at Gissing the Positivist; certainly this is the same Gissing of the letter to Algernon which declares that life is interesting only as the raw material of art. The author of *The Unclassed* reviews the author of *Workers in the Dawn* in these terms:

“I was not a conscious hypocrite in those days of violent radicalism, working-man’s-club lecturing, and the like; the fault was that I understood myself as yet so imperfectly. That zeal on behalf of the suffering masses was nothing more nor less than disguised zeal on behalf of my own starved passions.

I was poor and desperate, life had no pleasures, the future seemed hopeless, yet I was overflowing with vehement desires, every nerve in me was a hunger which cried out to be appeased. I identified myself with the poor and ignorant; I did not make their cause my own, but my own cause theirs. I raved for freedom because I was myself in the bondage of unsatisfiable longing.” (p.211)

Waymark says this to Casti during one of their long evening talkathons very much as Gissing

-- 6 --

must have said it to Bertz or Roberts under similar circumstances. Perhaps what is most interesting here is the perception that Waymark/Gissing did not *sympathize* with the disadvantaged so much as see himself, for a time, as one of them. He has now ceased to do so. And he has come to the conclusion in Waymark’s words, that “ranting radicalism” is worthless. His “philosophical study” has taught him the value of – yes, detachment: “the artist *ought* to be able to make material of his own suffering even while the suffering is at its height.” There was a time, says Waymark, when “Radicalism of every kind broke out in me, like an ailment” (p. 54) – to the extent of wanting to help educate working men; but now he cannot imagine what it was like to be this sort of person with these inclinations. Of course his views make a mockery of Gissing’s statement to Algernon that the protagonist of *The Unclassed* is not himself.

There are many connections between the two. Like Gissing, Waymark admires Hogarth, whose “pictures harmonised with his mood” (p. 123). Waymark’s first book was written in that “mood” but was scarcely noticed by the reviewers. Those who did notice it remarked that there was some “powerful” writing in it but generally condemned it as morbidly naturalistic; like *Workers in the Dawn*, “it was destined to bring the author neither fame nor fortune” (p. 290). Like Gissing, Waymark is a cynic who has considered suicide from time to time. A student of Schopenhauer (Chapter XXVII, called “The Will to Live,” is largely a discussion of Schopenhauer’s philosophy), Waymark believes in “the doctrine of philosophical necessity, the idea of Fate” (p. 225). Like Gissing he is a great walker; is fascinated by the life of the streets; loves the theater; hates science, “progress,” everything new; is poor but well-educated; writes but doesn’t sell; lives in lodgings; tutors pupils to make extra money; longs for the companionship of women; and believes that life is governed by “personality.” He speaks of himself as “a student of ancient and modern literatures, a

-- 7 --

free-thinker in religion, a lover of art in all its forms, a hater of conventionalism” (p. 40). And he is described as a man for whom “poverty was [a] familiar companion, and had been so for years.” Waymark even complains in striking Gissingesque phrasing of the “hand-to-mouth existence” his impecuniousness forces him to lead (pp. 61 and 53). It is precisely this anomalous existence that renders him “unclassed,” in “exile” from his natural social sphere – “in a limbo external to society,” to quote Gissing himself. (5)

Waymark meets Casti as Gissing met Bertz in January 1879 through a newspaper advertisement. The description of the man Casti meets constitutes an obvious self-portrait:

He was rather above the average stature, and showed well-hung limbs, with a habit of holding himself which suggested considerable toughness of sinews; he moved gracefully – and with head well held up. His attire spoke sedentary habits; would have been decidedly shabby, but for its evident adaptation to

easy-chair and fireside. The pure linen and general tone of cleanliness were reassuring; the hand, too, which he extended, was soft, delicate, and finely formed. The head was striking, strongly individual, set solidly on a rather long and shapely neck; a fine forehead, irregular nose, rather prominent jaw-bones, lips just a little sensual, but speaking good-humour and intellectual character. A heavy moustache; no beard. Eyes dark, keen, very capable of tenderness, but perhaps more often shrewdly discerning or cynically speculative. One felt that the present expression of genial friendliness was unfamiliar to the face, though it by no means failed in pleasantness. The lips had the look of being frequently gnawed in intense thought or strong feeling. In the cheeks no healthy colour, but an extreme sallowness on all the features. Smiling, he showed imperfect teeth.

-- 8 --

Altogether, a young man ... whose intimacy but few men would exert themselves to seek; who in all likelihood was chary of exhibiting his true self save when secure of being understood. (pp. 41-2)

Waymark's identity was certainly no secret to Gissing's new friend Frederic Harrison, who guessed most of the novelist's past history from *The Unclassed* and discovered the rest in the course of several painful discussions with him. (6)

Waymark's relations with women must remind us of Gissing's. Waymark's sexual fantasy is the same as Arthur Golding's in *Workers in the Dawn* to be married to a respectable woman (in this case Maud Enderby, the successor in this novel of Helen Norman) while sleeping with a decidedly less respectable one (Ida Starr, an ex-prostitute, the Carrie Mitchell of this novel – or, to be more precise, Carrie with self-respect). Maud excites Waymark's social instincts, Ida his sexual ones; there is the intellectual preference for the gentlewoman and the physical preference for the lower-class girl (plus the subterranean feeling that he is not worthy to sleep with the respectable woman). Faced with an identical choice, Arthur had pursued Helen while married to Carrie; this is the same triangle.

“A refined and virtuous woman had hitherto existed for him merely in the sanctuary of his imagination; he had known not one such. If he passed one in the street, the effect of the momentary proximity was only to embitter his thoughts, by reminding him of the hopeless gulf fixed between his world and that in which such creatures had their being” (p. 82). No one else could have written that; to see a “hopeless gulf” between oneself and a virtuous woman (sufficiently remote to be perceived as a “creature” rather than an ordinary being) is utterly Gissing. As respectable women seem to be beyond his reach, so are humble women idealized by Waymark into fantasy wives

-- 9 --

completely unlike poor Nell.

Ida is clean, well-organized, desirous of self-improvement and of being of use to others – a literary reproach to the Carrie/Nell character of his nightmares and an excellent example of how Gissing tended, as he said himself, to respond in fiction to real-life problems. Ida, the former prostitute who becomes a respectable sempstress despite a sordid past (like Gissing, she had gone briefly to prison for theft) is the Nell of Gissing's youth transfigured by wish-fulfillment. Why didn't his wife improve herself for him, as Ida does for Waymark? “I ... should be very capable of falling desperately in love with a girl who hadn't an idea in her head, and didn't know her letters,”

Waymark says. "All I should ask would be passion in return, and ... a pliant and docile character" (p. 93). We know where we are. By now Gissing understood his own sexual nature well enough at least to write about it with clarity. "To love was easy, inevitable; to concentrate love finally on one object might well prove, in his case, an impossibility," Waymark muses (p. 227). And so with Gissing, whose "double" sexual life persisted until his last years.

There is also a good deal of Nell Harrison Gissing in Harriet Casti, a vulgar, scheming, dishonest woman who traps her husband into a marriage he does not really want and in a short time makes him "dread ... seeing his wife's face and hearing her voice." Her usual companions, like Nell's, are "gross and depraved people, who constantly drag her lower and lower," during Casti's absences from home, he complains (as Gissing himself often had cause to do), "women have called to see her who certainly ought not to enter any decent house" (p. 202), eliciting objections from the landlady. Casti's account of how his wife has destroyed his peace of mind and thus his inclination to work (he is a poet) is, again, pure Gissing. He *cannot* do anything as long as he is married to this woman, Casti says; and he adds:

"My nerves are getting weaker every day; I am beginning to have fits of

-- 10 --

trembling and horrible palpitation; my dreams are hideous with vague apprehensions, only to be realized when I wake. Work! Half my misery is caused by the thought that my work is at an end for ever. It is all forsaking me, the delight of imagining great things, what power I had of putting my fancies into words, the music that used to go with me through the day's work. It is long since I wrote a line.... Quietness, peace, a calm life of thought, these things are what I *must* have; [but] ... I find they are irretrievably lost." (pp. 163-65, *passim*)

One recalls Gissing's oft-stated need for peace in order to work, his tender nerves, his neurasthenia. Once again we have here the sort of complaint the novelist probably made of an evening to Bertz or Roberts (like Nell, Harriet Casti is also an expert at making her husband's friends feel unwelcome). It need not be taken as an inconsistency that there is something of Nell in a woman who is not married to Waymark; an examination of Gissing's other novels demonstrates readily enough his propensity to write something of his life into more than one character or household at a time.

*The Unclassed* embodies other autobiographical connections. The most important of these, and the last I shall cite, is Waymark's preoccupation with money. On this subject he speaks unmistakably with Gissing's voice:

"What can claim precedence, in all this world, over hard cash? It is the fruitful soil wherein is nourished the root of the tree of life; it is the vivifying principle of human activity. Upon it luxuriate art, letters, science; rob them of its sustenance, and they droop like withering leaves. Money means virtue; the lack of it is vice. The devil loves no lurking-place like an empty purse. Give me a

-- 11 --

thousand pounds to-morrow, and I become the most virtuous man in England. I

satisfy all my instincts freely, openly.... To scorn and revile wealth is the mere resource of splenetic poverty. What cannot be purchased with coin of the realm?" (p. 53)

In many ways Waymark is the archetypal Gissing protagonist; there can be no real doubt about his identity. Two years after *The Unclassed* was published, Gissing, faced with the possible simultaneous publication of two of his novels, suggested that one of them (*A Life's Morning*) appear under the pseudonym of – Osmond Waymark. (7)

- 1 - *Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family*, ed. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (London, 1927), pp. 138-40, *passim*.
- 2 - *Letters*, p. 142.
- 3 - *Letters*, p. 128.
- 4 - George Gissing, *The Unclassed*, ed. Jacob Korg (Hassocks, 1976), p. 117. All following references are to this edition; page numbers are given in the text.
- 5 - Gissing's comment appears in a preface he wrote in 1895 to *The Unclassed*. I am quoting from *George Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (London and Boston, 1972), p. 75.
- 6 - Recounted in Pierre Coustillas's biography of George Gissing (unpublished), Chapter VI.
- 7 - This story is recounted by Coustillas (see n. 6 above), Chapter VI.

\* \* \* \* \*

-- 12 --

### Gissing's Academic Feat Reconsidered

P. Coustillas

An important factual discovery was made recently, almost by accident. Until November 1978, it was unanimously believed by Gissing scholars that the novelist achieved his greatest academic feat when he came out first for the whole of England at the Oxford Local Examinations in 1872 – that is at the time he was, with his two brothers, a boarder at James Wood's Lindow Grove School, at Alderley Edge in Cheshire. This view of things must be revised. The truth was revealed when Miss Kate Taylor, whose knowledge of Wakefield past and present has been many times testified by her articles on Gissing in the *Wakefield Express* and other publications, attempted to find out a little more about George's success. She herself does a good deal of work for the Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations and so took the opportunity of asking Mr. J. R. F. Turner (M.A. Oxon), a former Administrative Officer at the Delegacy, for any details he might come across in the records of the place.

Mr. Turner confirmed that Gissing was a candidate for the Oxford Junior Local Examination in 1872, gained a certificate and was placed in the first class of the Division List, but he added that "in order of merit he was placed 12th out of a total entry of 1082 candidates for the examination." Gissing satisfied the examiners in the following subjects: (a) Preliminary Subjects (which comprised Reading aloud, Writing from Dictation, Analysis and Parsing, English Composition, Arithmetic, Geography and Outlines of English History); (b) Rudiments of Faith; (c) Latin; (d) Greek; (e) French; (f) Mathematics; (g) Drawing. Mr. Turner further explained that "in order to gain a certificate candidates were required to satisfy the examiners in all seven preliminary subjects, in

addition to two subjects taken from a list of alternatives. Gissing in fact offered six of these

-- 13 --

alternatives and was successful in all six.”

When Miss Taylor communicated to me the substance of her discovery, I wrote to Miss C. G. Hunter, M.A., Secretary to the Delegates, who kindly sent me a photocopy of the two pages of the First division list, in which candidates appear in order of merit. The first column gives the index number and centre, then come the candidate's name, his residence, date of birth, the school attended, and the Principal of the school. Gissing is 12th out of 52. All names before and including his, with the exception of the 10th, are preceded by an asterisk which signifies that the candidates satisfied the examiners in the Rudiments of Faith and Religion. Eleven names out of the 52 have no asterisk, Seven candidates out of the first twenty came from the same school, the New Kingswood School at Bath. Gissing clearly appears to have come out first in the Manchester district – hence the confusion which I try to trace to its source later – and the only candidate belonging to James Wood's school. The following list invites another remark; if the seventh candidate in order of merit, C. A. Davies, a Manchester boy, had been taught in a local school, instead of being sent to Christ's College, Finchley, young Gissing would not have been granted the scholarship which entitled him to three years' free tuition at Owens College, and the course of his life would undoubtedly have been altered.

First Division, in Order of Merit  
(first twelve names which, for convenience's sake, are numbered)

- 1 - 3 Bath; Barber, W. T. A. Brynmawr; Jan. 4, 1858; New Kingswood S., Bath; T. G. Osborn.
- 2 - 64 Bath; Prescott, C.J.; Southampton; June 9, 1857; New Kingswood S., Bath; T. G. Osborn.
- 3 - 1 Finchley; Baker, E. N.; Notting Hill; Mar. 23, 1857; Christ's College, Finchley; Rev. T. R. White.
- 4 - 38 Bath; Hillard, A.; Rochester; July 10, 1858; New Kingswood S., Bath; T. G. Osborn.

-- 14 --

- 5 - 33 Bath; Hancock, H. H.; Stapleton; Apr. 5, 1857; Bristol Grammar S.; Rev. J. W. Caldicott.
- 6 - 10 Bath; Bowley J. L.; Bristol; Apr. 27, 1857; Bristol Grammar S.; Rev. J. W. Caldicott.
- 7 - 7 Finchley; Davies, C. A.; Manchester; Sept. 1, 1857; Christ's College, Finchley; Rev. T. R. White.
- 8 - 72 Bath; Shaw, A. B.; Brixton; Dec. 12, 1857; New Kingswood S., Bath; T. G. Osborn.
- 9 - 18 Liverpool; Forsyth, A. R.; Liverpool; June 18, 1858; Liverpool College; Rev. G. Butler.
- 10 - 16 Watford; Saunders, S. T. H.; Berkhamsted; May 16, 1857; King Edward VI's S., Berkhamsted; Rev. B. Bartram.
- 11 - 5 Lincoln; Latham, R. M.; Tattershall; June 18, 1857; Lincoln Grammar S.; Rev. J. Fowler.
- 12 - 38 Manchester; Gissing, G. R.; Wakefield; Nov. 22, 1857; Lindow Grove, Alderley Edge; J. Wood.

How and when the confusion between first in the Manchester district and first in the whole of England arose is now easy enough to determine. As far as post-war scholars are concerned (although I claim to be an exception), a possible source of the error was Thomas Seccombe's *D.N.B.* article, which states distinctly that Gissing “came out first in the kingdom in the Oxford local



examination.” The *D.N.B.* article is known to be unreliable, and it was wrong in this particular. H. G. Wells’s rejected introduction to *Veranilda* which he published in the August 1904 number of the *Monthly Review* is another plausible source, which Seccombe duly lists in his bibliography. Wells quotes from the reminiscences of an old school-fellow on two occasions without giving his source and he indeed borrows much more than he acknowledges. Clearly his statement that Gissing “came out first of the kingdom in the Oxford Local Examination” comes straight from T. T. Sykes’s “The Early School Life of George Gissing” (available to the present-day reader in my *George Gissing at*

-- 15 --

*Alderley Edge*), like the whole of Wells’s survey of Gissing’s life at Lindow Grove School. Before the publication of this booklet, no scholar of the present generation seems to have been aware of the existence of T. T. Sykes’s recollections, which were buried in the files of third-rate provincial weeklies and in a school magazine ignored by all union lists of periodicals. Sykes had been a contemporary of Gissing at Lindow Grove school – he was apparently an authority. When James Wood reprinted his article with some comments in the *Dinglewood Magazine* (April 1904) he did not correct Sykes’s misstatement, which he may have thought to be providential publicity for his school. Nor did the family correct it in print, though Ellen and Algernon Gissing – the latter a contemporary of his brother at Lindow Grove school – had two good opportunities of doing so: when reading the proofs of Seccombe’s *D.N.B.* article in 1912,<sup>1</sup> and as editors of George’s letters in 1927. Sykes’s error became so contagious that Alfred Gissing took it for the truth and in all good faith encouraged others to do so. Sykes’s inadvertent promotion of his old school-fellow from the first place in the Manchester district to the first place in the kingdom, doubtless due to a slip of memory, gradually became a “reality” no one thought of questioning.

One should therefore be grateful to Miss Taylor and Mr. Turner who, though they do not claim to be Gissing experts, have proved in this particular instance all experts to be wrong.

1 - See P. Coustillas, “Thomas Seccombe Writes the Gissing Entry in the *D.N.B.*,” *Gissing Newsletter*, October 1977 and January 1978.

\* \* \* \* \*

-- 16 --

### Gissing and the Feminist Critics

David B. Eakin  
Arizona State University

Recent years have witnessed a marked increase in scholarly studies devoted to the role of women, most particularly the “new woman,” in Victorian fiction. The general revival of interest in Gissing is perhaps most specifically and most frequently focused on the novelist’s view of women, both in his personal life and in his fiction. Because Gissing was a writer of strong social, political and economic convictions, his novels about the treatment of women during the last two decades of the nineteenth century have been assiduously, if not always accurately, scrutinized by modern critics and historians of the feminist movement. Expressing both an intellectual and emotional concern for the plight of the Victorian woman, Gissing’s chronicles appeal to the critic or historian most wanting an accurate reflection of the social milieu. Recent studies have thus concentrated just

as much on Gissing's subject matter as they have on the novelist's more personal interpretation of that subject matter.

While a few of the studies published in the last couple of years have given only passing attention to Gissing (for example, Martha Vicinus' *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (1977) and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own* (1976), the majority of such studies have devoted more sustained analysis, usually covering one chapter, to the novelist. Perhaps the most surprising discovery is the consistent questioning of Gissing's long-standing sympathy for the Victorian woman's social dilemma. Certainly the most vehemently negative appraisal of Gissing is Lloyd Fernando's "Gissing's Studies in 'Vulgarism': Aspects of His Antifeminism," in his *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1977). Fernando states categorically that the received scholarly opinion espoused by Jacob Korg and others, which affirms Gissing as both sympathetic and

-- 17 --

consistent in his social and political concern for women, is inaccurate. While admitting that Gissing is sympathetic in his letters, Fernando stresses that the novels of the 1890's (*Denzil Quarrier*, *The Odd Women*, and *In the Year of Jubilee*) dismiss his epistolary sympathy "with a degree of shallow flippancy" (p. 107). The novels, in fact, are a "reasoned animosity" toward the women's movement, his ostensible concern being obscured by his hostility toward the "vulgarism" of a society not affording the educated and intelligent Gissing a higher and more esteemed place (p. 108). The "two larger motivations" of Gissing's work which overshadow any concern for Woman were his belief in a class system founded on scholarly culture and his own two unfortunate marriages (p. 108). Gissing, Fernando admits, recognized the connection between general social conditions and the precarious state of women, but his crusade for social reform was undermined by a gnawing desire to be part of the upper echelons of the society which scorned him. According to Fernando, Gissing "never conceded, expressly or tacitly, that women should be or are the full moral and intellectual equals of men" (p. 112).

Other recent writers have not been either as harsh or as insistent about Gissing's portrayal of women, yet doubts about his intentions have been voiced. Jenni Calder, in her *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), finds Gissing "often inconsistent and less than honest in his writing" (p. 198). In *The Odd Women* the female cause is presented with "understanding and sympathy," yet the heroine is "very unpleasant." For Calder, Rhoda Nunn "is a prig and a puritan, condemning the 'sexual instinct' and insisting that women will only win their freedom when they can reject not only marriage but sex as well" (p. 201). The issue of women's liberation for Gissing is at best confused; his treatment of marriage, however, is more consistent and his studies of the disastrous marriage "convincing" (p. 201). Particularly noteworthy is Monica's marriage to Widdowson and its "representative summing-up of the Victorian husband,"

-- 18 --

at once combining his kindness and his autocracy (p. 201). Unlike earlier Victorian novelists, Gissing portrays the destructive husband "without the protection of an ideal of insulating marriage" (p. 202).

Gail Cunningham's *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978) also finds Gissing an ambivalent feminist. For Cunningham the central problem is Gissing's failure to embody consistent opinions in his characters, his own strong opinions notwithstanding. Focusing on the same marriage singled out by

Jenni Calder as convincing and consistent, Cunningham sees the Widdowson marriage as sympathetically portrayed, the husband becoming a “victim of injustice” despite Gissing’s reasoned and emotional antipathy to marriage without love and equality (p. 139). More generally, Cunningham concludes that the New Woman theme in *The Odd Women* is “handled with sensitivity and suggests genuine involvement in the woman’s cause” (p. 144). However, as Gissing moves from the earlier *Odd Women* to the later *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool*, there is a decreasing sympathy with the movement. In *The Whirlpool* Gissing “seems to come into the open with his contempt for modern womanhood and his despair about marriage” (p. 149). Gissing’s early ambiguity and his decreasing sympathy suggest that overall he was “opinionated without having consistent views; aggressive without always identifying his target” (p. 151).

In *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction*, (Cambridge, Mass, and London: Harvard University Press, 1978), Nina Auerbach interprets Gissing’s assessment of women in a more neutral tone. Auerbach refrains from a categorical judgment of Gissing as either feminist or anti-feminist and instead probes into the cohesion of his communities of women, finding that the sustenance of the feminist cause comes from the messianic inspiration engendered by the community. For

-- 19 --

Auerbach, Gissing’s communities of women become plausible because they are depicted in the light of man’s historical reality. In *The Odd Women* “the nexus of women’s community is no longer the privacy of love and dreams but the clarity of historical reality” (p. 148). Both the degradation of marriage for Monica and the inadequacy of a “free union” for Rhoda are made patently clear: the work world takes precedent in fashioning a stronger community of women.

By far the most positive assessment of Gissing is to be found in Jean B. Kennard’s *Victims of Convention* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1978), Kennard contends that Gissing is very modern in his study of women and that he argues for female emancipation “on the same grounds as the modern women’s movement: liberation for women will bring about true liberation for men” (p. 151). In *The Odd Women* Gissing goes further than stressing the need for women’s financial independence; he argues for the totally independent agent. Gissing’s modernity is evidenced also by the plot-line of Monica’s marriage, which foreshadows the “two suitors convention” apparent in the fiction of Doris Lessing and Joyce Carol Oates, one suitor representing the restrictions of bourgeois life and the other representing freedom. With Rhoda Nunn, Gissing “has perhaps come closer than any other nineteenth-century novelist” in “suggesting a direction future novelists might more profitably take in portraying the maturing of a central female character” (pp. 156-157).

It is doubtless appropriate that Kennard ends her book with her discussion of Gissing in a chapter titled “Her Transitory Self.” It might also be suggested that criticism of Gissing, especially his views on women, is in a transitional stage. While earlier criticism has generally conceded Gissing a secure place among feminist sympathizers, the diversity and occasional vehemence of recent interpretive studies clearly herald new interest and new points of contention. That ambiguity is now being attributed to a writer whose views have at times been deemed dogmatic is in itself evidence that future critics will be readily afforded a lively forum for discussion.

-- 20 --

#### Book Reviews

John Goode, *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*, London: Vision Press, 1978.

One has waited with impatience for the publication of John Goode's book, in the expectation, not in the event disappointed, that it would be an important addition to Gissing criticism. It clearly distinguishes an aspect of Gissing and an approach to him; and every remark the author makes, particularly in detailed textual examination, is a perception worth consideration whether or not one is in agreement. I am not always in agreement, as will appear, but this is a book valuable for any student of Gissing, and I am glad to possess it.

Reviews call for an account of the content of the work examined; the difficulty here is that a summary cannot do justice to the complexity and subtlety of some of the argument, and indeed may misrepresent it. I feel it best therefore to indicate in outline what the author is attempting without attempting to justify the stages of the operation: saying initially that we have here a generally well-thought-out argument in which I have objections to the premises rather than the conclusions.

Establishing first his approach, through Marxist sociological materialism if that is the right term, Goode sets out to seek a niche within this pattern of ideas into which Gissing will fit: such definition however to be neither simple nor based on any single consideration. He embarks on an analysis of Gissing's criticism of Dickens, giving it due praise but more importantly showing that, since by Gissing's own account he is not Dickens, then he must be something else to which the criticism itself must offer more clues than the obvious. Quibbles apart, this section is a lesson in how to read the Dickens criticism for which alone the book is worth while. Goode draws many intriguing conclusions regarding the relationship of the artist to his material, his audience, his

-- 21 --

circumstances and his own patterns of ideas. I think he underestimates the direct influence on Gissing of Dickens's work – indeed Goode declares there is none (p. 17) – whereas I believe that there is a good deal of technical influence of which Gissing may possibly have been unconscious, or have accepted merely as a base for his departures. I note here that Goode observes that Gissing does not depart from the structures of the traditional novel, without indicating what that tradition is (p. 14). Perhaps too we should be made more conscious here that the Dickens writings were late in Gissing's career – however this point is taken up later (p. 71). In quite properly elaborating the different concepts of "realism" Goode includes too many things under that head, until "realism" loses all meaning – no doubt all that vexed term deserves, but confusing nevertheless.

Continuing to define the nature of Gissing's ideas and material, Goode contemplates the elements of intellectual debate in *Ryecroft*, *Workers in the Dawn*, and *Born in Exile*, and constructs a fascinating argument about the relationships and the conflicts (scarcely resolved by Gissing) between the intellectual life, the life of art, its material conditions and the class structure which embodies them all: and an explanation of the theme of exile which arises from this (and incidentally which is not dependent, as in the traditional account of Gissing, on the author's inchoate responses to emotional experience). To relate the careers of similar protagonists in Gissing's novels is of course not new, but the terms in which this argument is formulated may well contribute to a clearer understanding of what Gissing is "about" whether one strictly agrees with their assumptions or not. My qualification here is that by the nature of the discussion the actions of Godwin Peak in particular become an altogether too conscious consequence of a rationalizing and systemizing process, which overlooks the strong element of irrationality which Gissing attributes to the character.

Having established some ideas relating to intellectualism and exile, Goode searches through the novels from *The Unclassed* to *The Nether World*, examining the studies of unclassed persons

-- 22 --

seeking a social and intellectual position, and looking for a development in those studies that will lead towards a new novel form. He rapidly involves us in a brilliant analysis of Gissing's attitude to London – spatially conceived, as a map of areas themselves representing social structures containing groups of characters in which Gissing is interested. This is most revealing and memorable. He makes intriguing use of contemporary sociological evidence in this. Yet in the course of this exploration Goode reveals a problem which is inherent in the kind of systemized analysis used by this author and by Adrian Poole. "*The Emancipated* is a parenthetical novel ... the only time at which the novel begins to have any life is when the heroine returns from abroad and lives in London." Re-reading this novel confirms me in the opinion that the exact opposite is true (in which case, by the way, there is some doubt of the identification of the "heroine".) The difficulty seems to be that the critic cannot see the novel except in the terms of his continuing argument: bound to find the best work related to London, he is blind to the effectiveness of the Italian scenes.

Gissing's significant novels, says Goode, are in form developed from the demands of his matter, and not slavish following of the tradition – with which I agree, and with most of his definitions of that form, though I think not all is accounted for. The rest of this book studies *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*, *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool* in terms of all that has so far been established, with some passing comments on other novels.

It is perhaps a consequence of the pattern on which such books as this are constructed – the careful establishment of a "thesis" before consideration of the major works – that the reader may expect a resounding climax which characteristically is not there, the major criticism not being of higher quality than what has preceded; or even being less convincing because of the greater complexity of the argument at the crucial points; the "thesis" tends to be lost in the detailed consideration of the problems of the text. Add to this some doubts as to whether the thesis being

-- 23 --

pursued embraces the totality of the work, and these discussions may seem inadequate. This is not I hope to undervalue Goode's criticism; let me reiterate here my remark about the enlightening nature of his detailed commentary.

His analysis of *New Grub Street* has three main parts that are memorable; the clarification of the significance of the places in London used in the book; the interesting discussion of contemporary evaluations of authorship and especially the section on Walter Besant; and the discussion of the relative significance of the interwoven plots. These things occur in the process of an exposition of nothing so simple as the financial problems of the literary market alone, but of the complex interrelationships of theories of art, social classes, and conditions of production as presented in the novel. Goode proves his point when he says that the novel cannot base its structure on a conflict of values (p. 131), but I think the eventual result is to dispense too far with artistic values as an element of opposition in the action.

Some of the problems the author seems to have – or at least chooses to expound – in his excellent exploration of *The Odd Women* may be the consequence of too literal an interpretation of "odd" as of number, or as "unusual," whereas Gissing in choosing the title may well have had "unbalanced" in mind. The study seems to be not of liberated women but of those insufficiently liberated, not so much odd as refusing oddness – hence perhaps their insistence on forming even numbers which Goode finds disturbing in the novel's structure. He further declares himself unable to see motive in Schopenhauer's ideas for writing about women as Gissing does. But here he seems to overlook, first, that Schopenhauer equates art and perception, which in addition to giving support to one concept of realism provides motive for composition on any observed material; and, second,

that central to Schopenhauer's ideas, at least as perceived by Gissing on the evidence of several

-- 24 --

books, is the issue of withdrawal versus involvement in life and particularly sexual activity – both dangerous activities of the Will: this thought goes far towards explaining not only much of Gissing's action especially around women but much of Hardy's too. I believe *The Odd Women* to be primarily philosophical and psychological, though no doubt founded on observation of individuals within social movements which provide the background; I believe that most of Gissing's novels have this direction; and it seems to me that Goode accordingly has difficulty whenever he attempts to convert these books into sociological studies, and particularly here when he looks for a novel on feminism and finds none. Not that his process has no value, for he shows clearly what the novels might have been, and on occasion that they could have been much better had they not missed the opportunity offered of an exploration of their established background; indeed one is led by the lines of thought he stimulates to draw that conclusion sometimes when he has not specifically made the point himself.

In his comments on *Jubilee* he does make it, and while this passage is not his most ambitious critical effort it is here that his method is most successful in showing that the obvious failings of that novel are the result of an incomplete social analysis by the author. But more important is his observation that at this point Gissing was turning from exhaustion to energy for his matter; this notable judgment enables him to say interesting things not only of *The Whirlpool* but of novels hard to incorporate into a systematic view of Gissing such as *Eve's Ransom* and *The Town Traveller*. This and his remarks about social Darwinism in Gissing are the most useful parts of the concluding pages for the general reader. Ideas about *The Whirlpool*, for some reason placed in the Conclusion, are as stimulating as ever but appear to miss some things: the overt parallels with *Vanity Fair* seem to be overlooked – at least they are not mentioned – so the implications of the comparisons so invited are ignored. The author's prejudices show on the “disgusting” (his word) subject of

-- 25 --

Imperialism, which he seems to equate with Jingoism; not only has he a very simplified view of the phenomenon, but he takes Rolfe's remarks at face value. Can anyone seriously read the passage in which Rolfe talks of *Barrack-Room Ballads* and suppose that his appreciation is unalloyed or unironic?

The book concludes by justifying the “historical materialist analysis” prefigured at the beginning and redefining some of the critical attitudes adopted throughout. I hope that this brief and superficial account of John Goode's work has given praise due. But I must now register a fundamental objection to the whole. Mr. Goode will no doubt find this contemptible, but I am bound to say that I am not convinced by the Marxist position; not that it has no value, nor that he fails to use it to good purpose; but I object to its exclusivity and its pretence to account for all, an illusion fostered by leaving out or denying that which does not (to quote Adrian Poole) “contribute significantly to the furtherance of the argument.”

Goode initially praises Poole, whose work he says “has put the analysis of Gissing on the sophisticated plane denied him for so long” (p. 9). Agreed, much writing on Gissing, including one's own, has been naive; but there are scholars who will be surprised that they are unsophisticated. Why so? fashions change, even in techniques of sucking eggs. But at least we must ask, what is this “sophistication”?

For King Lear, “sophisticated” meant, among other things, having clothes: and ideas in both

Poole and Goode are dressed up in acceptable current jargon, that is to say, in the ideas that currently are accepted for scholarship. What disturbs me most in this use of "O.K." terms is the dreadful consequences to these authors' own prose. "This congruence between particularisation and externality on the one hand and typicality on the other is what constitutes Dickens's veracity, not of course an absolute veracity, but a veracity made true by the historic significance of its mode of idealization." (p. 30) Did you ever see so many abstract terms in one sentence? So many "tall,

-- 26 --

opaque words" standing between the reader and comprehension? These terms have generally a specifically ideological cast: "... the hegemony, which is industrial capitalism ... demands a quarrel between methodology and ideology in order to prevent either from becoming a theoretical practice." (p. 50) "The space in which Gissing's novels can achieve their distinctness ... is one in which an unmediated materiality is reflected in the unrequited idealism of the post-Dickensian emancipated intellectual producer." (p. 71). And so on.

Assuming that this book is intended for the general reader as well as the specialist may lead one to tolerate the impudence of short first-year lectures on basic economics of capitalism, as on pp. 164-65. But what general reader's interest could survive the irritation of having to learn the special meanings of all this jargon, critical or political, in which words have little relationship to general usage, so that understanding is at first quite inaccessible? No doubt the problem is that traditional English does not incorporate these groups of ideas. But in that is a clue to the function of these abstracts. They are the building blocks of Goode's own ideas; not Gissing's, most of the time, nor even those of the period. The function of his kind of prose is to assemble those blocks in appropriate formations at each turn of argument, making structures offering security in thought, and into which Gissing's works can be fitted, sometimes with distortion. The process of fitting, I suspect, is reflected in the metaphors used: of "spaces" in which Gissing is permitted to operate, "boundaries" which are "determinants of a literary production" (p. 16), as the "intellectual" and the novelist is allowed "a specific function within the ideological apparatus of society" (p. 14). Images of imprisonment, and of machinery, are appropriate to a system of thought that would shape and mortar so variable a writer as Gissing into a monolithic structure that purports to comprehend everything.

Jargon inflates: it makes old ideas seem original, original ideas impressive; and in the consequent exercise of cutting the stuff down to size one may go too far and do injustice. But my

-- 27 --

strictures are made not just because I am a reactionary for whom creativity is not entirely a "myth" (p. 56) and other critical approaches than the strictly materialist do not exist only in an "intellectual vacuum" (32); nor because, as I shamefacedly admit, to me the Marxist argument seems not a revelation of eternal truth but another intellectual game, similar to those I play myself, in which the prize is to seem cleverer than one's neighbour. I object because, in the process of concept-hunting through the novels (in which we all indulge in our own ways) there is much stretching and lopping to fit; and also because, after all the declarations of Gissing's value, that value is made to depend on the position of the matter of his novels in the historical materialist frame. In other words, we have here another version of the tired old apologetics, which say that Gissing is not *really* worth reading, but the content, etc. etc.... – C. J. Francis.

George Gissing, *Born in Exile*. Edited by Pierre Coustillas. Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978.

Having read *Born in Exile* many years ago in the Nelson 7d edition, my experience on re-reading it in the well produced Harvester Press series has reinforced my impression that this is a powerful and intelligent novel – one of Gissing’s best efforts. When it was first published in 1892 there were already signs that the Victorian novel, with its easy acceptance of the social hierarchy still so strongly entrenched in the British Isles, was being challenged by a more realistic and more outspoken type of fiction, owing partly to Continental influence and partly to the growing independence of a group of native writers. In *Born in Exile*, however, Gissing placed the problems of social injustice and class prejudice more bluntly and more convincingly than had other British novelists. The development of the plot showed considerable skill, and the literary quality of the writing was far above the average fiction of the period.

The misfortunes of his hero, Godwin Peak, might have been those of any young intellectual of

-- 28 --

the eighteen eighties – and nineties. He is shown as having long since shed all religious illusions and even as having published anonymously an article which was a sharp rebuttal of Christian mythology. His hatred of all forms of vulgarity is represented as being due to experience of certain members of his own family. He works for a time as an analytical chemist – lives in cheap lodgings and has few personal friends. During a holiday in Devonshire, he is recognised by a former schoolfellow who introduces him to his family circle. Peak has thus a picture of a comfortable country home, with a well-to-do and intelligent host and his family, who receive him kindly. The elder daughter strikes him as being a model of modesty and refinement. Before long he makes what, at first sight, is an astonishing and unnatural announcement to the effect that he has decided to stay in Exeter and study for a curacy in the Church of England. He explains to himself that a man of no means and of undistinguished family background can overcome class prejudice and mix with the “upper classes” only in the role of a clergyman. Even allowing for his attraction to the elder daughter and for the unaccustomed impetuosity with which he makes known his decision, this can only be interpreted ethically as a serious lapse which would almost certainly recoil on him eventually. Meanwhile, the unexpected happens, and Sidwell, the daughter in question, confesses to Godwin that she has lost faith in the Church. When exposure comes suddenly, Peak is obliged to seek employment elsewhere, but before then Sidwell and he own to mutual sympathy and promise to remain in touch by correspondence. Some years later, Peak inherits a large sum of money from a young woman who had loved him silently and hopelessly in the past. When he writes to Sidwell offering her marriage, she replies, while disclaiming any retrospective jealousy of Peak’s benefactress, that she is “too weak to take the step.” Peak receives this reply with cynicism, describing Sidwell to himself as “a woman, like most women, of cold blood, temperate fancies; a domestic woman, the ornament of a typical English home.” It was a cruel judgment, though hasty

-- 29 --

and presumably insincere, but calculated to give a shock of surprise to the most hardened reader. Peak then decides to travel on the Continent, and after an attack of malarial fever, he dies in a hotel in Vienna, whither he had been invited by some musical friends.

This is a bare outline of the plot, and in the novel is depicted a number of secondary characters, all full of interest and subtly delineated. The wealth of discussions is enlivened with excellent dialogue, and the occasional humorous situations come naturally into the story. We have the faithful friend, the journalist Earwaker, who follows Peak’s career with affectionate attention, neither



judging nor interfering; there are the Moxeys, Christian and Marcella, brother and sister, the former a romantic dreamer and the latter Peak's silent idoliser. There are also occasional characters such as Buckland Warricombe, Sidwell's brother, who poses as a "radical" but marries for money after denouncing Peak's villainy. We are also introduced to the Reverend Bruno Chilvers, who formerly in the same college with Peak wins all the first prizes while Peak has to be content with the seconds. Chilvers makes a show of "modernism" and lack of respect for orthodox Christianity but remains vicar of a fashionable parish in Exeter and marries the daughter of a peer. There also bursts into the story the excitable Malkin, a congenital bungler, with matrimonial tangles of the utmost absurdity, and whose total absence of tact makes him partly responsible for the divulgence of Peak's secret.

Most of the press notices which hailed this novel were crushingly antagonistic. The principal objection was that this was a story of pessimism and that Godwin Peak was an unrepentant pessimist. Why, we may ask at the present moment, should pessimism be taboo as a subject for a novelist? The general attitude towards literature has, of course, greatly changed since *Born in Exile*, followed by Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, so upset the critics. True, there is in our time a greatly increased production of comfortable, romantic and optimistic fiction; nevertheless some of the

-- 29 --

Victorian novelists condemned in their day are being read again with cooler head, less prejudice and less snobbery. The success of the Gissing revival during the last twenty odd years is surely one of the most cheerful signs of this changed attitude.

The introduction to the Harvester edition of *Born in Exile*, in the safe hands of Pierre Coustillas, gives a finely researched history of the conception of the novel and of a certain number of both earlier and later writers whose minds were preoccupied with the kind of problem dealt with in this most absorbing book.— C. S. Collinson.

George Gissing, *The Whirlpool*. Edited by Patrick Parrinder. Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977.

*The Whirlpool* was written, after much preparatory work and some abortive starts, in the last months of 1896, and Lawrence & Bullen published it in the following April. By Gissing's own admission it was an earnest, if somewhat ambitious venture; at least he intended the story to be a return to the spacious type of fiction which he defined shortly afterwards in letters to the author-hunting Grant Richards. His last full-length novel, *In the Year of Jubilee*, dated back to December 1894, and he had come to think in the mid-nineties that if short fictions for magazines or new popular series of one-volume novels meant a better income and new readers, they did not increase his reputation as an author who wrote for the following generations as much as for the present one. His artistic motives must also be placed against a background of rising imperialism and developing suburbanism, of social restlessness affecting the middle-class, and of female emancipation currently associated with the New Woman. Simultaneously Gissing was confronted in his personal life with a number of issues in process of being solved for better or for worse: the education of his elder son, cohabitation with an uneducated, irascible wife, and the quest for balance between, on the one hand, the demands of his art and family, and on the other, the claims of social

-- 30 --

life as represented by the world of publishers and editors as well as those upper-class readers who sought personal acquaintance with him. *The Whirlpool* combines all these elements in an oblique manner which the present-day critic, with his knowledge of Gissing's life and times, with his

retrospective view of the fictional technique of realism in the last eighty years, is in an excellent position to judge intelligently.

This potentiality is brilliantly realised by Dr. Parrinder's introduction to the present edition. It is a well-informed and stimulating discussion of the picture of English society offered by the story in connection with Gissing's ideas. References to the writer's life are few and parenthetical, allusive and undeveloped, a fact which enabled Dr. Parrinder not to exceed the reasonable length of eleven pages and at the same time to avoid the repetition of data easily available elsewhere. Rightly enough, it is to the literary context that we are invited to turn for comparison and enlightenment. Gissing certainly gains by being discussed alongside Flaubert and Zola, Bennett and Galsworthy. Edith Wharton, to whom Henry James may well have spoken of Gissing, might also have been mentioned. *The House of Mirth*, with which William Haley compares *The Whirlpool*, shows indeed some affinities with the present book, as was first pointed out a long time ago. Helen and Wilson Follett noted in *Some Modern Novelists* (1918): "Many of the same narrative elements are here: the part played by financial entanglements in the world of smart ambitions: the woman who means to 'arrive' at any cost; [...] the man who, through jealous love, is betrayed into a tragic mistake by appearances worse than the reality; the end with a rising inflection and a question mark – oddly in either case following a narcotic overdose."

Dr. Parrinder's introduction will be found worth studying. Not only is it full of sympathy for Gissing and most knowledgeable, in an unassuming way, about the period; it contains pithy statements which aptly sum up some of the tensions in the book. Thus he notes that the restlessness

-- 32 --

of the main characters "is symptomatic of the confusion between the old ideals of relaxed and gracious living and the new ones of material opulence." One might add – between the Victorian ideal of living on one's income (which was so contagious that even a man of humble origin like Bernard Kingcote in *Isabel Clarendon* dreams of living the life of a *rentier* on sixty pounds a year) and the necessity, soon to be acknowledged by all but the most wealthy of Englishmen, to work in order to increase or merely earn one's income. In this respect, although the reader hardly hesitates to give his sympathy to Rolfe in preference to Carnaby, there is no doubt that the latter, whatever his motives and the way he translates them into acts, better understands some of the imperatives of the future. Equally suggestive is Patrick Parrinder's remark that "Alma lives in an unstable rhythm of submission and domination, of self-suppression and self-assertion." *The Whirlpool* is a novel interesting for its variety of beats and rhythms: it would be worth drawing a graph of Alma's and Harvey's manifestations of strength and weakness, one also of the two characters' moments of harmony and discord. In connection with the latter point, I feel bound to record my disagreement with the editor about what he calls Alma's suicide. Her death, which results from a drug overdose, occurs – ironically to Gissing's mind, I am sure – after a reconciliation with Harvey and with herself which seems final even though it might well prove nothing more than a short-lived compromise. Harvey's "answer satisfied her, and she lay in his arms, shedding tears of contentment. Then, for a long time, she talked of the new life before them. She would be everything he wished; no moment's trouble should ever again come between him and her." Clearly Alma's mental agitation in the night following is only a sequel of the ultimate quarrel with Sibyl, not a sign of sudden madness which would account for suicide.

With *The Whirlpool* we have one of the thirteen Harvester reprints of Gissing's novels, the latest being *The Crown of Life* and *Denzil Quarrier*. As usual the editorial material contains beside

-- 33 --

the introduction, a bibliographical note on the publishing history of the book, textual notes and a bibliography. The notes to the text are particularly useful; at once informative and critical, they will facilitate an intelligent reading or re-reading of the novel. Only one thing might have been added – a short study of the manuscript. Considering Gissing’s surprise at Bullen’s request to make alterations in the opening chapters, it would have been interesting to know what it was that Bullen objected to.  
– Pierre Coustillas

\*\*\*\*\*

#### An Appeal for an MLA Session on Gissing in 1980

Wulfhard Heinrichs (Arnoldstrasse 36/1, D-Z Hamburg 50, West Germany) writes that, considering the success of the special Gissing session at the MLA Convention in New York City last December, he would like to suggest a similar discussion for the MLA meeting to be held in San Francisco in December 1980. Anyone who is interested in this suggestion should write to Herr Heinrichs and/or to the editor of the *Newsletter*, with a view to exchanging ideas on a possible theme and choosing subjects for papers. Wulfhard Heinrichs offers two ideas to start with: (1) Gissing on fiction ; theoretical and practical aspects, i.e., on the one hand, statements in his correspondence and personal writings; on the other, the art of the novel as practised in a selection of novels. (2) Gissing and fiction, that is Gissing’s work viewed in terms of theories of literary production (the incentives, environmental and psychical, to creation; the writer’s attitude to his art; what enabled and/or compelled him to write? What was the reason for his continuing or growing dissatisfaction with his literary results? Was he a “born” or a “gifted” writer? Was an all-pervading and inherent masochism the driving force behind his works?)

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Notes and News

A. C. Ward’s booklet on Gissing, no. 111 in “Writers and their Work,” is out of print. The general editor of the series declares that the British Council has no plans to reprint the original

-- 34 --

booklet nor to commission a new presentation. “We have had to slim down the series in the interests of economy, and Gissing was unfortunately one of the casualties.” This is a deplorable decision which not a few Gissingites will think was dictated by reasons that were not purely economic.

Radio Leeds had a short programme in June on Gissing’s birthplace and the projected foundation of a Gissing Centre in Wakefield. It consisted of an interview with Kate Taylor, Clifford Brook and Robert Scriven.

The Harvester Press, which published critical editions of *The Crown of Life* and *Denzil Quarrier* earlier this year, will publish *The Odd Women* and *The Town Traveller* within the next twelve months. Critical editions of *The Paying Guest* and *Will Warburton* will soon be ready for the printers.

A correspondent reports that a forthcoming anthology of English travellers in Calabria (in Italian) will include Gissing. Further details will be given when the volume appears.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Recent Publications

Articles, reviews, etc.

- Jean E. Kennard, *Victims of Convention*, Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1978. Contains various references to Gissing's novels and an assessment of *The Odd Women*.
  - Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978. Refers to *New Grub Street* and quotes Henry Ryecroft on Dickens.
  - Francesco Badolato, "Il 'mistero' Gissing," *Ausonia*, January-April 1979, pp. 101-02.
  - Anon., "Only Connect," *Victorian Studies Bulletin*, May 1979, p.5. Paragraph on the projected Wakefield Memorial to Gissing.
- 36 --
- [Helmut E. Gerber], "Announcements: 2 – George Gissing Fares On," *English Literature in Transition*, 1979, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 3.
  - Anon., "Walking in Wakefield Novelist Footsteps," *Wakefield Express*, June 8, 1979, p. 6.
  - Anon., "Big Boost for Yorks Trust," *Yorkshire Evening Post*, June 22, 1979. Article on Gissing's birthplace.
  - Anon., *Choice*, June 1979, p.529. Review of John Goode's *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*.
  - Sylvère Monod, "Comptes Rendus," *Etudes Anglaises*, April-June 1979, pp. 235-37. Review of *The Emancipated*.
  - Anon., "Gissing Trust Centre Moves a Step Nearer," *Wakefield Express*, July 2, 1979, p. 18 (Second section).
  - Anon., "L'Opera di Gissing," *Il Corriere di Roma*, July 8, 1979, p. 4.
  - William Haley, *Books and Bookmen*, July 1979, pp. 56-57. Review of Michael Collie's *The Alien Art*.
  - Anon., "By George – put that wall back Wakefield," *Yorkshire Evening Post*, August 14, 1979, p. 7.
  - Anon., "Rebuild Order will cost £10,000," *Wakefield Express*, August 24, 1979, p. 5. In the same

number, p. 12, an article entitled "Civic Society Plans Season of Lectures" reads in part: "Wakefield's major novelist, George Gissing, is the subject of a meeting in January (1980), held jointly with the Wakefield Historical Society. Mr. Clifford Brook, secretary of the Gissing Trust, will speak on 'George Gissing in Wakefield' at a meeting in Unity House on January 9."

- Yukio Otsuka, "The Diary of George Gissing," *Eigo Seinen (The Rising Generation)* September 1, 1979, p. 38.

-- 36 --

- The same writer reviewed *Victorian Writers and the City*, ed. Jean-Paul Hulin and Pierre Coustillas, in the issue of October 1, 1979, p. 40.
- Patrick Parrinder, "Reviews," *Prose Studies* (Leicester), 1979, vol. II, no. 2, pp. 128-33. Review of Gissing's diary.
- David Daiches and John Flower, *Literary Landscapes of the British Isles: A Narrative Atlas*, New York and London: Paddington Press, 1979. Gissing appears on a number of maps.
- Gilbert Phelps, *An Introduction to Fifty British Novels 1800-1900*, Pan Literature Guides, 1979. *New Grub Street* is one of the fifty novels (pp. 504-12).
- Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*, London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Gissing appears on pp. 322, 432, 539 and 600. The so-called unpublished letter from Conrad to Gissing of December 21, 1902 was in fact published in P. Coustillas's essay on Conrad and Gissing (*Studies in Joseph Conrad*, University of Montpellier, 1975). A letter from Conrad to Pinker in the Berg Collection shows that Conrad read *Henry Ryecroft*.