

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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Gissing in America:

Two Tales Rescued from Oblivion

Pierre Coustillas, University of Lille
Robert L. Selig, Purdue University, Calumet

Research into the life and work of George Gissing has gone through various phases since 1903; one of them, which began with the quasi-simultaneous publication of the volumes by Morley Roberts and Frank Swinnerton in the autumn of 1912, included many efforts to trace the American tales, written for Chicago journals and published mainly there. In the first edition of *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, Roberts wrote: “I think it would be very interesting if some American student of Maitland would turn over the files of the *Tribune* in the years 1878 and 1879 [actually the

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Editorial correspondence should be sent to the Editor:
10, rue Gay-Lussac, 59110-La Madeleine, France,
and all other correspondence to: C. C. KOHLER,
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spring and summer of 1877] and disinter the work he did there” (p. 39). This was read by the American admirers and collectors of Gissing responsible for the two volumes of juvenile stories, *The Sins of the Fathers* (1924) and *Brownie* (1931), in particular Vincent Starrett and Christopher Hagerup. The second edition of *Henry Maitland* (1923) shows that these men corresponded with

Roberts during the first world war and that by September 1916 Hagerup had exhumed from the files of the *Tribune* the four tales (“The Sins of the Fathers,” “R.I.P.,” “Too Dearly Bought” and “Gretchen”) which, contrary to Roberts’s advice, appeared in the first collection.

In addition to the title story, seven others appeared in *Brownie*: “The Death-Clock,” “The Serpent-Charms,” “The Warden’s Daughter,” “Twenty Pounds,” “Joseph Yates Temptation” and “Dead and Alive.” For unclear reasons, the collection excluded a story identified in the 1927 volume of Letters to the family – “An English Coast-Picture” – but it can safely be asserted that by the time of the 1931 reissue of these letters twelve American Gissing tales had come to light. Some correspondence in *Notes and Queries* in the autumn of 1933 revealed two more stories which M. C. Richter, of the Book Den, Santa Barbara, California, had recently purchased from Alfred Gissing: “A Terrible Mistake” (*The National Weekly*, May 5, 1877) and “The Artist’s Child” (*The Alliance*, June 30, 1877).

No further progress occurred in the search for American tales, but Alfred Gissing admitted implicitly that there was room for fresh discoveries when he said that his father had not kept copies of all his Chicago stories, only a selection.

The French author of the present article often thought over this suggestion in the last twenty years, but an efficient search of the Chicago press can only be conducted locally. When asked – as he was at the MLA Convention in December 1978 – whether he had investigated this field, he merely replied that the task seemed to have been completed by those scholars and collectors of the inter-war period who had devoted so much time to it – with remarkable results. Still a tantalizing

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entry appeared in Gissing’s *Commonplace Book* (ed. Jacob Korg, N.Y.P.L., 1962):

There has come into my mind an odd incident in my literary experience in America. I wrote some stories for a man who combined the keeping of a dry-goods store with the editing of a weekly paper, – & had always, by the bye, to wait about in the shop & dun him for payment due. I told him one day that I had finished a long story for serial publication, & asked if he would have it. One of his chief inquiries was: “Do you tell the *ends* of all the characters?” An odd requirement, & with him, as I saw, a *sine qua non*.

One could draw two inferences from this passage: (1) no editor of a Chicago weekly paper like the *Tribune*, the *Journal* or the *Post* supplements could reasonably have combined the keeping of a dry-goods store with the editing of his paper, so Gissing probably had in mind the editor of another journal; (2) the unidentified paper contained more than one Gissing story. Only two weeklies seemed likely to offer unknown material – *The Alliance* and *The National Weekly*, which had apparently printed only one story each. At this point, the American author of this article undertook the necessary research in the Newberry Library, Chicago, and discovered in *The Alliance* two new stories signed G. R. Gresham, Gissing’s pseudonym at the time: “A Mother’s Hope,” IV, May 12, 1877, p. 364, and “A Test of Honor,” IV, June 2, 1877, pp. 412-13.

“A Mother’s Hope,” set on the Yorkshire coast, tells the story of a young woman, Mary Patterson, whose husband has been missing at sea for about a year. She lives with her dying child in the same village as her mother, who believes that her son-in-law has perished in a shipwreck. But one morning, a letter comes with a Chinese postmark – James Patterson is alive, and he returns just

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in time to see the child die. The man “had been rescued from the waves on the morning after the storm by a steamer bound from Newcastle to London, and had been carried on to its destination. From London he wrote a letter explaining what had happened. The letter had somehow never been delivered. He had no money to return from London to his home, and meeting with a number of sailors, he was induced to get a place on a merchant vessel sailing for China, partly from necessity, partly in hope of earning a good sum of money.”

The first-person narrator, a young man on a holiday in the seaside village, meets Mary and her baby on the shore. He hears the first part of the story – up to the arrival of the letter, which he reads for her as she and her mother cannot read. A year later he visits his holiday acquaintances and hears the rest of the tale.

The second story, “A Test of Honor,” is as characteristic of young Gissing and of greater psychological and biographical interest. Mary Woodlow, a middle-aged woman with a husband just emerged from a fifteen-year prison term, will not let him return to her for fear of jeopardizing their daughter’s marriage engagement. Mary kept the imprisonment from her daughter by saying that the father had died when the girl was about three, but Edith sees him for a moment and asks her mother for the truth. She then insists that they take her father back and tell his story to her fiancé, George Leigh. He accepts the revelation gracefully, yet the family cannot again find the ex-convict, who has slunk away forever. The last paragraph reads: “Edith’s trust was not misplaced, and Mrs. Woodlow often confessed with tears that the brave girl had, by that adherence to her sense of honor, procured for herself a happy, instead of a miserable life. They do [sic] not fail to seek for the heart-broken father – but in vain. He kept his vow, and never was seen by them more.”

As a consequence of this double rescue, Gissing’s production in his starvation days in Chicago now amounts to sixteen short stories, five of which remain uncollected. If a file of the elusive

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National Weekly can be found, we shall know whether these figures again need revising. The long story mentioned in the *Commonplace Book* seems unlikely to emerge from the Chicago press, but it is permissible to think that, if Gissing brought back his manuscript from America, it may have become “All for Love” in the winter of 1879-80. At all events, that he tried to rewrite some of his American stories is attested by “The Artist’s Child,” the third story in *The Alliance*, a much improved version of which appeared in *Tinsleys’ Magazine* for January 1878. Between the spring of 1877 (when he first wrote it) and the autumn of the same year (when he revised it), he had made promising progress.

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Gissing: Father and Son

Robert L. Selig
Purdue University, Calumet

H. G. Wells’s suggestion that Gissing’s father was “the cardinal formative influence” on the son deserves another look with perhaps a more sophisticated psychological lens than the one available to Wells. (1) A central event, early in George Gissing’s life, that made him feel cast out into sudden isolation was the unexpected death of his father in 1870. As the oldest of five children, the thirteen-year-old George claimed a special relationship with Thomas Waller Gissing, a

pharmacist, spare-time botanist, privately printed poet, and radical freethinker. The boy preferred his father to a mother who was pious and respectably conventional. (2) Through strenuous efforts of study and feats of precocious scholarship, George had tried to win Mr. Gissing's praise as more than a mere boy. At age thirty-nine the novelist still remembered his "great ... indignation" when father spoke of him at about the age of ten as "this little boy." (3) He insisted, at ten, on going on to school in spite of a fish bone in his throat. (4) At eleven, on a summer's vacation, he sent a request

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to father that few "little boys" would make: "Do not forget to send my marks...." (5) In long and breathless polysyndeton several days later, he ridiculed a note, enclosed in his own, from his nine-year-old brother by tattling to father about William's tears in his childish efforts to write. (6) And, after the achievement of having mastered Latin, which he had begun at "about eight," (7) George went so far as to ridicule father himself for his ignorant belief that Latin poets rhymed. (8) Yet for all of the amusing aggressiveness of the small competitive scholar, his messages to Thomas Gissing glow with the assurance that his parent will accept his efforts to be brilliant. George seems so certain of his audience that it is hard to recognize in these early letters the later pessimist of prose who wrote sad novels in the valley of the shadow of alienation. But the grown-up writer was a man who never recovered from the trauma of his father's premature death.

From the father's death in late 1870 to the son's expulsion from college in 1876, George's extraordinary labors and successes as a student can be seen as a struggle to regain an intellectual father, who, like Thomas Gissing, would approve of his efforts of mind. In a wistful reminiscence, at forty, of the Quaker school in Cheshire to which he was shifted upon Mr. Gissing's death, George, in his conclusion, records his affection for his academic fathers, the teachers of Lindow Grove. He praises a Mr. Bigler, who stirred the precocious classicist with private memories of Italy, a French master named Organ, who fascinated "us boys by his singular personality"; and a Mr. McKim, who was "liked" by "everyone," because "it was impossible to do other than like him." The culminating "happiness" for George, under male authority at school, was a nightly ritual of talks by the Head Master, Mr. James Wood:

Lastly – yet not last in order of recollection – I must speak of that evening hush which fell upon the collected school before we went to our rest. This, too, associates itself with warm days, with summer sunsets. Our Head Master used

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this half-hour before bedtime for a little reading to us, a little quiet talk such as boys need after the work and riot of the day. It might be something from Dr. Arnold; a passage well chosen and impressively delivered. (9)

Gissing repaid his masters at Lindow Grove by prodigious efforts of study, which, in 1872, enabled him to gain the highest rank in the Manchester district in the Oxford Local Examination. (10)

Gissing's outstanding showing in the Oxford won him a three-year scholarship to Owens College, Manchester, at the early age of fifteen. (11) This twenty-year-old college was almost as precocious as its new exhibitor. Though already strong in professors, it existed, temporarily, in a former private house, wedged within a slum. With little space for classes and none for dormitories, Owens was unable to supervise the lives of any of its students, underage or not. (12) The odd result for Gissing was that, on the decision of his mother, he attended college without leaving his school.

He continued to live in the old school, where his brothers were still students, and rode the train to classes in Manchester, some thirteen miles away. (13) Presumably he stayed in “a private Bed Room,” (14) for, in a Lindow Grove dormitory filled with younger boys, George’s twenty hours of “sweating” at examination times, with only four hours of sleep, (15) would have been next to impossible. He was, in other words, a specially favored son in the house of his old teachers.

So long as he remained in his old place of study, among his old masters, he did brilliantly well in his excursions to the college. When Gissing returned triumphantly to the Lindow Grove School with a steady succession of prizes, (16) he was, in his own country, a scholar with honor. He was even asked “... to deliver three lect[ure]s on *Hamlet* to the assembled inhab[itant]s of Lindow Grove.” (17) He was, in effect, guest lecturer at less than sixteen. No wonder that his failure, at

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Owens a few weeks later, to win the Shakespeare Exhibition against older students who had already taken their first B. A. was an unexpected anguish that made him resolve to “grind, grind, grind” for the honors of the future. (18) The future came quickly for him. In October 1875, he finished highest on the list in the second of three examinations for the B.A. degree and also won the Owens Shakespeare Scholarship that, two years before, he had missed. He even earned two additional scholarships, from the University of London, and so gained more honors than he could, in fact, use. (19) He chose to prepare at Owens for his final set of B.A. examinations. But a crisis came about in 1875 when Gissing’s mother decided that the boy was now old enough for total submersion in college. Cut loose at barely eighteen from his Lindow Grove academic fathers, he plunged, unprepared, into rooming-house life in Manchester’s urban anonymity. (20)

For a few months back at Owens, with the encouragement of others, he took constructive steps towards integrating himself into a common college life. In November he was elected an editor of the magazine and made committee member of the Owens College Union, in which he spoke at his first recorded debate. In December he read a paper to the Shakespeare Society. In February he debated in meetings of both the Union and the Shakespeare group. (21) Yet he wrote a “preface” for the magazine expressing regret that the college still provided such small “means of connection” between its few hundred students who were scattered among private homes and lodgings in a large industrial town:

The true object of the Magazine is, doubtless, to be to some extent a means of connection between the students, and to foster that spirit of unity which hitherto has not been so prominent a feature of our college intercourse as is desirable.
(22)

This public manifesto of “unity” seems, in fact, a confession of loneliness by a boy who had just lost his comforting connection with the male authority of the Lindow Grove School, his virtual

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home since his father’s death.

After no more than four months alone, the scholarly ascetic, who had based most of his life on postponement of ordinary pleasures for the sake of winning the approval of his teachers, switched, with abruptness, to a contrary life of immediate and repeated sexuality with a Manchester prostitute. Gissing and Nell Harrison were archetypal opposites: the ascetic vs. the libertine, the saver vs. the spender, the good child vs. the bad, yet both were precocious in their conflicting extremes. The

scholar, with all his honors, was only eighteen, and the secretly alcoholic prostitute was seventeen years of age. (23)

Gissing, however, involved himself with Nell in the same intense way that he had earlier pursued his triumphs of studious asceticism. After taking up with her, he appears to have attended only one more extracurricular meeting at the college – the Shakespeare Society, on March 3rd – at which he participated in a dramatic reading. (24) By early April he was cutting all his classes in order to extend, for an extra week of intimacy, a seaside vacation with Nell. (25) In place of his old dedication to scholarly effort, he concentrated now on a chivalrous resolve to reform his prostitute love by combining affection with steady gifts of cash. (26)

Gissing's unwise choice for his project of reformation may have owed something to his dead father's influence. Thomas Gissing, in 1855, had published privately a small volume called *Margaret and Other Poems*. In the title poem, fifty-five stanzas long, he told the story of a young girl, sexually deflowered and then deserted and yet "more virtuous than those who daily sneer," for, in spite of public shame, her inner self retained all its essential purity. Thomas Gissing added an explanatory note, calling for the compassionate pardoning of sexually erring women. (27) Gissing seems to have obeyed his dead father's call. Either at Manchester, or later, he actually gave Nell a copy of Thomas Gissing's *Margaret*, perhaps as an inducement to reform. In any case, in 1888,

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when reform had failed and Gissing found Nell dead in a pathetic rooming house, he noted, in his diary, as the climax of his anguish, a "workbox" for the respectable occupation of sewing, which he had wished her to adopt those long years before, and "a copy of my Father's 'Margaret' which she had preserved" even in her final degradation. (28)

In a few weeks at Manchester, instead of reforming Nell, the perfect student had himself changed into a campus thief. One can deduce, from the evidence of his movements toward disaster, a pattern of deepening isolation from everyone but the undependable girl. This boy, who had lived for the approval of his masters at both school and college, was involved at last in a sexual crisis of which he could say nothing to a world of official propriety. And his family back home was far too puritanical for him to turn to them, even if the girl had not been a prostitute. Years later, in 1889, he made the following bitter comment:

When I read in a French novel of the intimacy existing be[twe]n members of a family, – mothers, brothers, sisters – I reflect with astonishment on my own experiences. I never in my life exchanged a serious confidence with any relative – I mean, concerning the inner things of one's heart & mind. This may in part be a personal characteristic of our family; in part, I feel, it is due to the innate puritanism which forbids us to hint at anything like sexual relations – even to the extent quite permissible in other English households. (29)

In this resentful catalogue of prudes in the family, Gissing speaks of all his "relatives" through the whole span of his "life" yet does not mention father. Possibly he felt that his father, had he lived, would have been able to advise him about the perplexing troubles of his sexual awakening in the arms of a Manchester prostitute.

Far from being secretive by nature, Gissing always yearned to expose his innermost problems

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to close male advisers. In 1876, according to Morley Roberts, Gissing told four classmates, from both school and college, the embarrassing details of the early stages of his entanglement with Nell. (30) Significantly, he seems to have been more open at first with these male friends than with the girl herself, for, although he revealed to her his connection with the college, he apparently gave her the false name of Mr. Gregory, a near anagram of George. His later furtiveness with his friends should be understood in the light of their disapproval of his infatuated plans for marriage. Still more destructive of his candor must have been the discovery that one of the four, John George Black, had actually had sex with Nell after he had learned of Gissing's own involvement. Black insisted that he had not known that his friend was "really ... in love," but this defense, though plausible, can hardly have kept Gissing from feeling resentment at betrayal (31). Finally, the boy's sordid discovery that both he and Black had evidently caught venereal disease from their contact with Nell may have tended to shift Gissing's "resentful ferocity," from his shamed male friend to "the unknown author of the poor girl's troubles...." (32)

These pathetic details help to explain Gissing's complex motives for his series of thefts from the cloakroom at Owens. Committed, of course, for money to keep Nell away from further prostitution, the thefts were directed specifically against Gissing's fellow students. In the course of his anguish, the boy seems to have moved from a naive trust in selected classmates through disillusionment with Black to a generalized resentment against a faceless all. Perhaps Gissing felt unconsciously that, in stealing from the students at Owens, he was confiscating their fees for potential visits to Nell. He may also have been enacting an irrational retribution, directed at random against the infecting male.

Although Gissing's thefts were directed against his academic brothers, he was punished by the

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college's administrative fathers. On May 31, 1876, in the student cloakroom, he was caught stealing marked coins by a police detective acting for the Principal of Owens. Gissing was jailed and convicted, sentenced to a month of hard labor, and expelled, not only from his college, but from any further chance in an English university. (33) After five and a half years of dependence on various scholastic fathers, this eighteen-year-old veteran of scholarship was suddenly deprived of them all. He was left with no father except the one that he carried within himself – an internalized phantom of Thomas Gissing. But this ghost was an uncertain ally of a son who had thrown away all his academic honors by the shame of petty crime. And his quixotic act, finally, of marrying the prostitute for whom he had besmirched himself prolonged the effects of disaster into years of further disgrace. (34)

In the years following Manchester, however, the son tried desperately to recover a sense of approving oneness with his father's authority. In 1879, for example, George was "extremely anxious" to be sent Thomas Gissing's portrait as a spiritual medicine of which he had "urgent" need. (35) In 1894 he made a pilgrimage of justification to the birthplace of "the dear, kind Father" to dream of "how proud" the dead man would have been of "his son's literary" achievements. (36) Yet, in spite of Gissing's accomplishments as a writer, his attempts to be reconciled with his father's ghost were essentially unsuccessful. In 1884 he began a thick notebook, hopefully entitled "Reminiscences [*sic*] of my Father," yet abandoned it after filling in only a few pages. In 1896 he took it up again yet abandoned it once more with a total, in all, of eleven skimpy pages of memories, many of them critical of father. The rest of the notebook is blank, suggesting an inability in Gissing to break through barriers of memory in his search for his lost father. Still later, in his forties, the novelist recorded a distressing dream, recurring periodically over a course of years, in which Thomas Gissing returned yet remained cut off from true communication with his son:

Twice or thrice a year I dream of my Father, & always with one circumstance characterizing the dream. Though he appears to me in very different places, & under very different conditions, he is invariably, for a reason unknown, held beyond the possibility of intimate association. Thus, last night, I dreamt I was just leaving, with a company, the dining-room of some hotel, having dined, when lo! my Father comes in, & I exclaim to myself "How unfortunate that he did not come before, & dine with us!" – I remember one dream in which he seemed to be living in the same house, but hopelessly shut away. At times I have felt a passionate desire to approach him, & have even done so with words of affection, but he never responded; his manner was always abstracted, unconscious, at best coldly aware of me. Very strange, this characteristic of dreams about one long dead. (37)

One suspects that the spirit of Thomas Gissing was "hopelessly shut away" not by physical death alone but also by the son's resentful shame over his sexual misadventures, his imprisonment, and his expulsion from his triumphs at Owens College.

The theme of lost or alienated fathers sounds with particular insistence in Gissing's first book, *Workers in the Dawn*, which lies closest in time to his personal loss. In this novel, Gissing throws much of the blame for Arthur Golding's troubles on his father's weakness in succumbing to drink, poverty, and death and in leaving his son a vulnerable orphan. Though the boy continues to revere his father's memory, the grown Arthur's own pattern of self-destruction has a haunting resemblance to his father's own pattern. And although this wistful fictional waif finds two admirable foster fathers in succession – the elegant minister, Reverend Norman, and the idealized Mr. Tollady, the

good-hearted printer – both fail young Arthur by succumbing, like his father, to the final alienation of death. In this immature first novel, self-pity dominates Gissing's conception of a spiritually lost and fatherless son.

We can see both from Gissing's private papers and from his revealing first novel that Wells was perceptive in calling the novelist's father "the chief formative influence." Yet the influence was as much the father's absence as his presence. Gissing's early love and esteem for his parent was confused by Thomas Gissing's desertion into death and then by the son's own guilty uncertainties about how his father would have judged him after his disgrace at Owens. The son's growing psychological distance from his once-revered father seems reflected in the increasing tendency of his fiction after *Workers in the Dawn* to present orphaned sons whose memory of their fathers has dropped down a dark hole of unconsciousness; for example, Kingcote in *Isabel Clarendon*, Reardon in *New Grub Street*, Rolfe in *The Whirlpool*. (38) In Gissing's fiction as in his life, final reconciliation with the memory of the father tends to be put off *sine die*.

- 1 - Tindall, p. 47. See H. G. Wells, "George Gissing: An Impression," in *George Gissing and H. G. Wells: Their Friendship and Correspondence*, ed. Royal A. Gettmann (Urbana, Ill., 1961), pp. 261-62.
- 2 - Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Seattle, 1963), p. 7; John Spiers and Pierre Coustillas, *The Rediscovery of George Gissing: A Reader's Guide* (London, 1971), p. 16;

George Gissing, "Reminiscences (sic) of my Father jotted down from time to time as they by chance occur to me," Beinecke Collection, Yale University Library. This and subsequent references to items in the Beinecke Collection are cited through the courtesy of Yale University Library.

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- 4 - *Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family*, ed. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (London, 1927). Appendix C, p. 403.
- 5 - Letter of George Gissing to Thomas Waller Gissing, [1868 July] 25, Beinecke.
- 6 - Letter of George Gissing to Thomas Waller Gissing, [1868 July], 27, Beinecke.
- 7 - Letter of George Gissing to his son, Walter Gissing, October 2, 1896. Beinecke.
- 8 - "Reminiscences" [sic].
- 9 - George Gissing, "The Old School," *Dinglewood Magazine* (December 1897), pp. 2-4, reprinted and introduced by Pierre Coustillas in "George Gissing à Alderley Edge," *Etudes Anglaises*, XX, no. 2 (1967), pp. 174-178.
- 10 - "George Gissing: A Collection of 14 of his school and university certificates, 1869-75." Beinecke.
- 11 - Spiers and Coustillas, p. 21.
- 12 - Edward Fiddes, *Chapters in the History of Owens College and of Manchester University, 1851-1914* (Manchester, 1937), pp. 27-28, 57; Joseph Thompson, *The Owens College: Its Foundation and Growth; and its Connection with the Victoria University, Manchester*. (Manchester, 1886), pp. 210, 246-49, 464.
- 13 - Pierre Coustillas, "Editor's Note" to Francis Noel Lees's "George Gissing at College," *Gissing Newsletter*, V (April 1969), p. 11.
- 14 - James Wood's prospectus for the Lindow Grove School quoted by Coustillas in "George Gissing à Alderley Edge," p. 174.
- 15 - Letter of George Gissing to his former schoolmate at Lindow Grove, Arthur Bowes, May 7 [1873], Beinecke.

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- 16 - 17 letters of George Gissing to Arthur Bowes, 1873, Beinecke.
- 17 - Letter of George Gissing to Arthur Bowes, September 12, 1873, Beinecke.
- 18 - Letters of George Gissing to Arthur Bowes, October 23 and November 15, 1873, Beinecke.
- 19 - "Gissing: Collection of school and university certificates," Beinecke; The Owens Extension College, "Minutes of the Proceedings of the Senate," meeting of June 13, 1876, Appendix 1, pp. 191-92, quoted in Pierre Coustillas, "George Gissing à Manchester," *Etudes Anglaises*, XVI (July-September 1963), p. 260.
- 20 - Coustillas, *Gissing Newsletter*, V (April 1969), p. 11.
- 21 - Lees, "George Gissing at College," pp. 4-5.
- 22 - A printed proof of "Preface" for the *Owens College Union Magazine*, n. d., corrected in Gissing's hand, Beinecke.
- 23 - Coustillas, "Gissing à Manchester," pp. 259-60.
- 24 - Lees, p. 5.
- 25 - "Gissing à Manchester," pp. 259-60.
- 26 - Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, ed. Morchard Bishop (London, 1958), pp. 28-29.

27 - *Margaret and Other Poems*, by an East Anglian (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1855), pp. 1-23. Arthur C. Young, in "Poems by Thomas Gissing," *Rutgers University Library*

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Journal, XXX (December 1966), pp. 23-26, first identified the anonymous volume as the work of Gissing's father but was unable to find a reference to it in any of the son's "letters" or "papers."

28 - George Gissing, Diary, March 1, 1888, *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1978), p. 23.

29 - *George Gissing's Commonplace Book: A Manuscript in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library*, ed. Jacob Korg (New York, 1962), p. 23.

30 - Roberts, pp. 28-31.

31 - "Gissing à Manchester," p. 257.

32 - "Gissing à Manchester," pp. 258-59. The phrases in quotation in the last two lines of the paragraph come from George Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn*, ed. Robert Shafer, 2 vols. (New York, 1935), II, p. 58. The fictional relationship of Arthur Golding and Carrie Mitchell, who later turns prostitute, is parallel to Gissing's experience with Nell yet sometimes significantly different. Carrie's specific trouble is pregnancy, not venereal disease.

33 - "Gissing à Manchester," pp. 260-61.

34 - Spiers and Coustillas, pp. 25-26.

35 - Letter of George Gissing to Algernon Gissing, June 2, 1879, Berg Collection, New York Public Library, courtesy of the Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation.

36 - Diary, May 26, 1894, *London and the Life of Literature*, p. 338.

37 - *Commonplace Book*, p. 26.

38 - On this point, see Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), pp. 3-4.

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Gissing and "the impertinent Ego":

a comparison of editions of *The Unclassed*

Robert S. Powell
University of Manchester

Reviewing Chapman & Hall's three-volume publication of *The Unclassed* (1) in 1884, the anonymous *Athenæum* critic complained that "the arrangement of the book is very bad; there is no central narrative keeping the various parts together, and the characters are shuffled off and on the stage in a very confused way." (2) Such criticism of the work, deliberately taken "from the strictly technical point of view," is regrettably justified. The focus of attention in the novel swings between the protagonist, Osmond Waymark (who does not appear until Book Two), and the two women who come to love him. On the one hand there is Ida Starr, daughter of a prostitute and unwitting grandchild of the ogre-like accountant Abraham Woodstock; on the other, Maud Enderby, reared by

her over-pious aunt Theresa Bygrave, and kept in ignorance of her father's criminal past and her mother's suicidal insanity. Large sections of the novel are concerned with these backgrounds, the discovery by the two women of their true family relationships, and the eventual destinies of each member of the respective family units. In addition, the novel reveals the fate of Waymark's ex-colleagues O'Gree and Egger, and of the artistically sympathetic Julian Casti. Moreover, both O'Gree and Casti are connected, through their respective spouses, to Ida Starr, and a business relationship exists between Waymark and Woodstock. Nor does the complexity of the interaction of

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the *dramatis personae* end here: but to explain further the structure of *The Unclassed* with reference to Waymark's links with low-class life and thereby with Casti's wife Harriet, or to Harriet's own childhood relationship with both Ida and Maud, would serve only to emphasise the "very confused way" in which Gissing presents his tale. The problem is not so much one of range of material as of quantity. Gissing, forced by the three-volume format to produce a novel of over nine hundred pages, is unable to concentrate fully upon the Waymark/Ida/Maud triangle, and of necessity includes much that is irrelevant to this central action. He needs to show the different natures of Ida and Maud, but, rather than make such a distinction via his portrayal of those figures, chooses to explore their divergent backgrounds. Thus the narrative is frequently – and clumsily – interrupted by passages which supply the wanted material; entire chapters, entitled "Antecedents" (Vol. I, Book One, Chap. 3), "The Missing Years" (Vol. II, Book Three, Chap. 4) or "Parents" (Vol. II, Book Four, Chap. 1) contribute only to this tangential concern, while Book One *in toto* is set eight years prior to the main action. Having established, for example, the past history of the Enderby family, Gissing then feels obliged to follow the destinies of the embezzling Paul and his unbalanced wife: resultant melodrama invests the sub-plot material with an interest which both distracts attention from the Waymark/Ida/Maud story and fails to provide meaningful parallels. As Joseph J. Wolff has shown, (3) Gissing's bifocal concern produces a fault in the plotting of *The Unclassed*: Waymark is given prior knowledge of the police search for Paul Enderby, and yet – inexplicably – does not transfer this valuable information to his fiancée, Maud, so that she might save her father. This slip, and the confusing double role played by Mellowdew, partly signify the author's personal discomfort with the bulk of material with which he has to deal: the flaws can, to some extent, be put down to the lengthy demands of the three-volume format. That Gissing was also aware of the artistic compromises the three-decker enforced is apparent from his obvious delight, in a letter of 1885, that

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the format was in decline:

It is fine to see how the old three-volume tradition is being broken through. One volume is becoming commonest of all. It is the new school, due to continental influence [...] The old novelist is omniscient; I think it is better to tell a story precisely as one does in real life, hinting, surmising, telling in detail what can be told and no more. (4)

This authorial awareness was to be transformed into action ten years later.

Despite the faults of the novel, Gissing could inform his brother in 1893 that "several times of late there have been trade enquiries for copies of *The Unclassed*. Of course it is unobtainable save second hand, and the book seems to have grown extremely rare" (*Letters*, p. 335). Consequently it

perhaps came as no great surprise that in 1895 Lawrence & Bullen approached the author about a one-volume re-issue of the eleven-year-old work. In September of that year, Gissing wrote to Eduard Bertz:

At the urgent request of my publishers, I have revised "The Unclassed" for publication. About a third of the book is cut away, and I shall write a brief preface. If the thing had been utterly forgotten, I should never have reprinted it; but reviewers frequently make mention of it. So let it, in a better form, be added to the list of my books. (5)

And again, in November: "Of course the book is painful to me, on several accounts, but I have made it, in this form, less crude and absurd." (6) It is obvious from these comments that Gissing saw this re-issue as an opportunity to rectify some of the artistic flaws which the first edition, through a combination of authorial inexperience and publication format, had contained. The Enderby sub-plot was greatly reduced; Waymark's informant, Ecclestone, disappears from the

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revised edition; Mellowdew's roles as seducer of Ida and lover of Mrs. Enderby are taken by Edwards and Rudge respectively. Major changes in the novel, however, concern authorial stance rather than plot manipulation. The *Athenæum* review of the first edition, not content with pointing to structural imperfection, had further advised the author to "exercise the virtue of self-repression," advice to which Gissing readily responded: "the author," he said in the Preface to the new edition, "has been glad to run his pen through superfluous pages, and to obliterate certain traces of the Impertinent Ego." (7)

This running of an editorial pen through passages in the first edition is, in fact, all the revision that Gissing made; only where cutting demanded a continuity link or grammatical reconstruction of a sentence did the author actually rewrite passages of *The Unclassed*: the variants between *U* (a) and *U* (b) are otherwise entirely occasions of excision. It is therefore remarkable that the second edition should be so significant an improvement on the authorially indulgent and clumsily-constructed three-volume version. An examination of the revisions made indicates Gissing's new-found awareness of fiction's autonomous nature, and signifies the extent to which the novelist artistically matured in the period between 1884 and 1895.

Most obviously missing from *U* (b) are the various signposts to the reader with which Gissing dotted *U* (a). Perhaps undervaluing the attentive powers of his audience – but more probably as the simple result of inexperience – the author of the first edition time and again reminded us where we had been; or, like a man leading the blind, told us where we were to go: "We leave Ida to her lonely sadness and see how Christmas was spent in two homes not very far from hers. The first is one of which we have already had a glimpse" (*U* (a), I, p. 72). "Having seen how Harriet liked to spend her free evenings, let us now turn our attention to her cousin, and observe him one night after the shop is closed and he is at liberty to follow his own inclinations" (*U* (a), I, p. 187). "We take our way

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with Sally" (*U* (a), II, p. 62). "At this point in our story, it becomes necessary to go back some twenty years..." (*U* (a), II, p. 106). "To understand this we must go back a few days and mention sundry incidents." (*U* (a), III, p. 197). "A glance at two more pictures, and we have done" (*U* (a), III, p. 303). Similar directions are given on at least thirteen other occasions in *U* (a) (8): all have been

dropped from the second edition.

Authorial presence in the first edition of *The Unclassed* is also indicated in Gissing's foreknowledge of the destiny of his characters; god-like, he is able to determine their fate. Of course, this is the privilege of all novelists, whose task is to transport their creations from the opening of the work to its prearranged conclusion. But in *U (a)*, Gissing makes this manipulation obvious. Ida and Maud are made to cross each other's path shortly after the former's dismissal from Miss Rutherford's schoolroom. There is, however, nothing save the omniscient intervention of the author to draw from their accidental meeting the significance that they are "never again to meet, but each to be an unperceived agent in the other's lot; to suffer, without mutual knowledge, on each other's account" (*U (a)*, I, p. 72). Again, Waymark's search for Ida immediately after her arrest occasions a gratuitously interpolated prediction: "But his knock met with no answer; nay, at that door never again would be answered" (*U (a)*, II, p. 268). In effect, Gissing is preparing the reader for the outcome of the novel, dropping hints which will aid an understanding of his story. Once more the author is guiding his audience. Gissing's stance is however no longer that of a fellow-traveller through the work: in these examples of authorial omniscience he adopts a privileged position, accordingly distancing himself from the normal reader. It is as if the novelist believes his audience to be in need of help; he therefore condescends to impart some of the knowledge which is his and his alone.

This superior role is revealed in a number of instances in *U (a)*, all of which are excised from the one-volume version of *The Unclassed*. Gissing is, in the earlier work, not content to supply the

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reader with material from which the import may be inferred, but must indicate its significance. Thus Paul Enderby is made to draw, in overt terms, the parallel between Theresa Bygrave and the saint whose name she bears (*U (a)*, II, p. 123), and the nature of Maud's sensibility is directly likened to Wordsworthian pantheism (*U (a)*, II, p. 162). The condescending tone of painful explanation occasionally becomes objectionable:

Now the discerning reader, by which I mean the one who has been led by inclination or dire circumstance to study female humanity in the phase represented by Harriet Smales, will already be at no loss to understand the significance of that scene up-stairs; needless to explain in detail that the situation was all pre-planned between the girl and her friend Miss Mould. [...]

Herein Harriet was typical of the people whose lack of principle arises from their lack of imagination. They do not disbelieve the existence of noble motive, but, recognizing its presence in this and that person, are simply unable to comprehend the nature of such a characteristic. Its practical display they can foresee and can calculate upon, as Harriet did in the present instance. (*U (a)*, I, pp. 296-297)

Carried away by the extent of his knowledge within the novel, Gissing steps outside his capacity as fiction-writer and pronounces upon the nature of unprincipled people who exist in real life. His reaction is uncharitable, reflecting that anti-democratic strain in his character which can be seen elsewhere in his writings. (9) Nor, as a social commentator, does he show sympathy towards his audience. By explaining what "the discerning reader" will have already surmised, the first of these two paragraphs is tacit proof that Gissing considers his reader incapable of such interpretative

action: his own “impertinent Ego” clouds the evaluation of the intelligence of others. This is also

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shown in the exaggerated character-sketches which proliferate in the three-volume edition. The author, feeling obliged to identify the villains of his story, paints a series of portraits akin to those of pantomime.

The most extreme instance of exaggerated character description in *U* (a) is Gissing’s treatment of Abraham Woodstock. Joseph J. Wolff points to the six-page portrait, but does not indicate the extent of Gissing’s early condemnation of this character. (10) Woodstock is shown as possessing a violent temper and intense personal pride. His marriage merely saves him the expense of hiring a prostitute to satisfy his sexual greed (*U* (a), I, pp. 45-46), and slightly curtails – but does not eliminate – the necessity of frequent libertinism (*U* (a), I, p. 46). In now occupying the house where he was once employed, Woodstock can exercise a tyranny over his erstwhile master “out of no definite motive of revenge; merely in brutal exultation over one who had once employed and paid him” (*Ibid.*). His financial manipulations and utilitarian habits are reminiscent of Dickens’ Gradgrind. Woodstock does have one characteristically human trait, an all-consuming hobby; but when it is realised that this is a devotion to the study of contemporary politics, and entails immersion in the arid wastes of Blue Books, Parliamentary Reports and a full series of the Annual Register, the accountant is once more seen as sterile and devoid of personal sympathy (*U* (a), I, pp. 48-49). In case the reader has not judged this life-denying monster aright, Gissing hammers home his point by direct interpolation:

No Bill found its way into either House without his making himself more or less familiar with its details; so-called “great” measures were the delight of his – I was going to say soul, but will ask the reader to substitute some other word. (*U* (a), I, p. 50)

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If Gissing insists on the reader’s recognition of villainy, he is just as adamant that the heroine of *The Unclassed* should be seen in favourable terms. The authorial attitude towards Ida in the first edition produces moments of mawkish sentimentality. Reflecting on Ida’s innocent childhood love of animals, and her nostalgia for almost-forgotten visits to the zoo, Gissing rhapsodises:

Oh Ida, Ida! How often in the years to come shall you remember these long sunny days in Regent’s Park, and yearn back to the time when the world’s secrets seemed but a hidden joy, and life was one of happiness! (*U* (a), I, p. 63)

Certainly the doting author does not forget Ida’s past. When, elevated in social standing through the revelation of her relation to the wondrously – and unbelievably – converted Woodstock, she holds a garden party for the girls of the slums, Gissing overtly connects hostess and guests, and praises Ida’s actions as droolingly as does the minor character, Ecclestone:

Good, gentle, noble-hearted Ida! How often her eyes filled with tears as she listened to [(the girls)] chatter among themselves and recognised so many a fragment of her own past life. (*U* (a), III, p. 181)

Two of the girls had caught each other by the waist at the first sounds [of a hand-organ]. Might they? would “the lady” like it? Ay, in the name of all that is merciful, dance away, poor little maidens, and thank “the lady” in the depths of your grateful hearts! (*U* (a), III, p. 184)

In case we miss the moral of the episode, it is pointedly made for all to note and act upon:

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Should I invoke the muse to help me to describe that tea, I might perhaps dimly body forth its wonder and its happiness; but better to leave it to the imagination. If this fail in the reader, why then I will hint that there is yet a way of appreciating it, – “Go, and do thou likewise!” (*U* (a), III, p. 187)

All the examples quoted above, obviously the work of a young and inexperienced author who does not yet recognise the prudence of maintaining a distance from his work, are to be found only in the three-volume edition of *The Unclassed*. Grosset of all such passages, perhaps, is the following direct address to the reader. Gissing has just shown Ida’s problems in finding new employment after having been dismissed from her position in the laundry:

If you, dear madam, who read this in the ease of assured leisure, should even feel disposed to vary the monotony of your life with a distinctly new sensation, permit me to suggest that you should disguise yourself as a simple work-girl, and supposing yourself for the moment quite friendless and “character”-less, go about from place to place begging for leave to toil. Of course there will be lacking the real piquancy of despair, yet I doubt not a very tolerable misery will be produced in the process. Here you will be met with an indifferent negative, perhaps by a careless shake of the head; there, after being gauged in a manner clearly indicative of certain opinions about you, you will be rebuffed with frank insolence; everywhere you will be given to understand that you are altogether superfluous, and that your existence is clearly a matter of no concern to any soul on earth. A few hours of such experience will suffice to you; Ida had to endure it day after day, till the days grew to weeks. (*U* (a), II, p. 261)

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This extract encapsulates many of the aspects seen in those quoted above – the author interrupts his narrative to proselytise, and does so in a condescending tone (“dear madam,” “the ease of assured leisure”); the message communicated is repeatedly emphasised, drummed into the reader by an all-knowing commentator (“I doubt not,” “you will be met,” “a few hours ... will suffice”); and the stressed difficulty of Ida’s task correspondingly exaggerates the suffering of the heroine, this example of late-Victorian melodrama thereby signifying Gissing’s personal sympathy. (11)

Wolff believes Gissing’s decision to eliminate these instances of direct authorial intrusion from the 1895 edition signifies the author’s “determination to remove the appearances of subjectivity so numerous” in the earlier version. (12) But “subjective” does not refer exclusively to the author’s self. A large proportion of *The Unclassed* – both *U* (a) and *U* (b) – is concerned with subjectivity of character, particularly in those parts of the book where the focus of attention is Osmond Waymark; indeed, one could almost see this emphasis on the protagonist’s inner life as the central interest of

the novel. Waymark, like Reardon, Peak or Ryecroft, is a figure who appeals to the sensibility of his creator; a partial self-portrait, the fictionalised novelist is the source of the work's imaginative and philosophic power, and simultaneously the artistic flaw in the otherwise competently written revised edition. Obviously some measures have been taken to reduce Waymark's significance in *U* (b). Whereas the cuts in character-study of all other figures in *The Unclassed* were concerned with the authoritative presentation of external details – Woodstock in *U* (b), for example, loses his interest in politics, is not shown as being unnecessarily cruel to his wife or to his past employer, and does not have so extensive a set of mercenary attitudes – the passages excised from the portrayal of Waymark all dealt with subjective self-examination or, through interior monologue, displayed the author's intimate affinity with the mind of his protagonist. Gone from *U* (b) are such passages

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which show the workings of Waymark's ethical consciousness as the following, from Volume One: "a cynical doubt of the possibility of pure passion was becoming the habit of his mind, though naturally he was disposed to idealism in all things, and instinctively rebelled against the grossness of his experiences" (*U* (a), I, p. 234); gone are the many instances of self-assessment: "Might it be that he was ceasing to find in his own pursuits and prejudices that satisfaction which had formerly attended them, and that thus his mind became more disposed to consider the aims and ideals of those who differed from him?" (*U* (a), II, p. 51); gone are the revelations of emotional impact which only the individual can undergo:

As he listened, his brain filled with rich fancies; the ambitious, which at times grew feeble before his natural love of ease, stirred themselves strongly within him. [...] At the same time, the songs woke the passionate elements of his nature, and made him chafe in the bonds of his sordid life. (*U* (a), I, p. 166)

All of these extracts (13) display the closeness which exists between the author and his privileged character. Gissing seemingly presents a third-person, distanced, objective statement, but the content of such a statement can be known only to the character. The startling imagery of some of these quotations is the product, not of removed, disinterested reportage, but of vividly experienced subjective spontaneity. (14) The fictionalised Waymark is so close to his creator that Gissing is writing straight from experience: he has failed to exert that necessary artistic control on his material which Mark Schorer's distinction between "content, or experience, and achieved content, or art" has since demanded. (15) If Waymark is Gissing, how can one evaluate the opinions and attitudes which that privileged character expresses? Where is the moral norm by which the protagonist can

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be judged?

It would appear that Gissing's brother, Algernon, asked similar questions, when *The Unclassed* was first published. In a letter of 23 June, 1884, the author is at pains to convince his brother that a difference does exist between himself and his creation:

Waymark is a *study of character*, and he alone is responsible for his sentiments. [...] If my own ideas are to be found anywhere, it is in the practical course of events in the story; my characters must speak as they would actually, and I cannot be responsible for what they say. You may tell me I need not have chosen

such people; ah, but that is a question of an artist's selection. You see, I have not for a moment advocated *any* theory in the book. Perhaps you have overlooked the few lines at the end of that very first chapter of Volume III? There I speak in my own person, and what I say in reality contraverts all that Casti has just thought, if rightly understood. (*Letters*, p. 140)

Gissing's statement has been dismissed out of hand by Jacob Korg, who feels that Algernon, having read "many of Waymark's opinions expressed in nearly the same language in Gissing's own letters, must have wondered at his brother's capacity for self-deception." (16) The same critic has also reached this conclusion in a study more firmly based on the evidence of the novel. Indicating Waymark's "heretical moral philosophy," and pointing to that character's promotion of objectivity and pessimism, (17) Korg finds that the sentiment which Gissing claimed as his own – "Suffer in silence. *Si quis tota die currens pervenit ad vesperam, satis est*" (*U* (a), III, p. 20) – is "not at all at odds with the moral indifference Waymark exhibits in the speeches deleted from an earlier part of the chapter. It is, as a matter of fact, a reflection of the personal philosophy Gissing had worked out

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in an essay called 'The Hope of Pessimism' two years before, and constitutes a very suggestive link between Gissing's real views and those of his protagonist." (18) And if Gissing and Waymark are confused in the work there can, of course, be no authorial indication of external moral values: Waymark's attitudes are condoned. C. J. Francis, on the other hand, believes that "there is always a moral tone to which actions are eventually referred..." (19) This divergence in critical opinion is – at least in part – explained by a simple bibliographical consideration: whereas Korg uses the first edition to support his argument, Francis' conclusions are based on a reading of the edition of 1895. Even so, I fear that Francis has overlooked certain key passages of *The Unclassed* which Gissing allowed to stand in the one-volume edition, and which transport the imperfection of *U* (a) into the later book. The author's attempted criticism of Waymark in *U* (b) – and thus the establishment of "a moral tone to which actions are eventually referred" – is compromised. This can hardly come as a surprise, for Gissing's revision of *The Unclassed* as Francis himself observes, involved "very little actual rewriting of the [book], in the sense of improving and changing; his work on [it] was almost entirely cutting and eliminating." (20) Accordingly, some passages survive in *U* (b) which, on close reading, display a variation in viewpoint which negates intended objective assessment of Waymark's thoughts and actions. Consider the following paragraphs from the end of Chapter XVII; Waymark has just proposed to Maud, and has been accepted:

On the way, he thought over everything once more, reviewing former doubts from his present position. On the whole, he felt that fate had worked for his happiness.

And yet there was discontent. He had never known, felt that perhaps he might never know, that sustained energy of imaginative and sensual longing which ideal passion demands. The respectable make-believe which takes the

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form of domestic sentiment, that every-day love, which, become the servant of habit, suffices to cement the ordinary household, is not the state in which such men as Waymark seek or find repose; the very possibility of falling into it

unawares is a dread to them. If he could but feel at all times as he had felt at moments in Maud's presence. It might be that the growth of intimacy, of mutual knowledge, would make his love for her a more real motive in his life. He would endeavour that it should be so. Yet there remained that fatal conviction of the unreality of every self-persuasion save in relation to the influences of the moment. To love was easy, inevitable; to concentrate love finally on one object might well prove, in his case, an impossibility. Clear enough to him already was the likelihood of a strong revulsion of feeling when Ida once more came back, and the old life – if it could be – was resumed. Compassion would speak so loudly for her; her face, pale and illuminated with sorrow, would throw a stronger spell than ever upon his senses. Well, there was no help. Whatever would be, would be. It availed nothing to foresee and scheme and resolve.

And, in the same hour, Maud was upon her knees, in the silence of her own chamber.... *She* had no doubts of the completeness and persistency of her love. (*U* (b), p. 227)

The problem in these paragraphs is to locate and identify the consciousness behind the expressions put forward. The dominant voice is that of Waymark's inner self, whose procrastinating self-examination has by now become one of the features of the novel. It is obviously Waymark who assesses his own happiness and discontent; Waymark who hopes that his love for Maud will

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become continuous and who decides to endeavour to make it so; Waymark who evaluates Ida's possible future influence. But Gissing too makes his presence felt here. It is only the omniscient author who can generalise upon the attitudes of "such men as Waymark"; and the obvious – and somewhat forced – contrast between Waymark's self-questioning and Maud's certainty of love can only be achieved through the writer's ability to shift the scene of action. Certain sections of this extract, however, can be ascribed to a particular voice only with extreme difficulty, if at all. The flow of consciousness would seem to insist that Waymark's lack of "ideal passion" is something of which he is himself aware; yet the cynical attitude adopted by this character elsewhere in the novel surely denies the possibility that such a romantic notion of love could enter his thoughts. Similarly, could Waymark by himself be expected to experience such a "fatal conviction of ... unreality" as is ascribed to him? It is only through this recognition, and the suspicion that he may not be capable of concentrated love for one woman alone, that Waymark is led to waver from his firm decision to make his love for Maud "a more real motive in his life"; and if these examples of complete self-knowledge are present only in the author's conception of his character, as seems likely, then the ensuing retreat from the decision which Waymark is seen to have made is an act which does not have any psychological credibility. Gissing is attributing to Waymark a knowledge of his essential being which the character cannot, as elsewhere presented, be expected to possess. In so doing, the author does not allow the censure of Waymark's behaviour – when it is contrasted with that of Maud – to take full effect, for the reader believes Waymark's self-awareness thorough enough to be incapable of faulty judgement. Gissing's miscalculation of his and his protagonist's degree of knowledge undercuts the authorial condemnation intended. Indeed, such confusion at times leads to a mixture of respective roles as when, at the beginning of Chapter XI, Waymark's epistolary comments to Casti – "So there ends another chapter", etc. (*U* (b), p. 79) – can be taken as Gissing's

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résumé of narrative progress to date.

U (b), then, while losing the more overt authorial intrusions which had expanded the first edition to three-volume length, is not without its artistic flaws. And many of the structural and plotting imperfections of the earlier edition still persist in the revised form. C. J. Francis discusses most of these in his study of the novel, finding that *The Unclassed* inherits many of the features of Victorian “sensation” fiction. (21) Thus Edwards, who in *U* (b) replaces Mellowdew as Ida’s menacing follower, appears on two occasions in the story and then “disappears entirely as though the writer had forgotten what he intended”; there are a number of “melodramatic effects which seem gratuitous,” Mrs. Enderby’s suicide (*U* (b), pp. 279-280) being but the most obvious example; coincidences abound: Waymark first meets Ida on the same day as his relationship with Maud is put on a firm footing (Chapter XI); Ida and Harriet have, prior to Waymark’s intervention, already met in circumstances bound to precipitate the jealousy of the latter; the plot is encumbered with innumerable “trite contrivances” (Woodstock inexplicably delays in revealing his true relationship with Ida; Waymark does not tell Ida of his engagement to Maud, nor Julian of Ida’s past activities; there is much play with legacies and an unexpected return of investment). In addition, not all the gross characterisation and sentimentality of *U* (a) is expunged from the revised edition; Woodstock’s character, though not so villainous, is still painted too blackly for the change in his outlook to be convincing; Ida’s garden party still occasions considerable mawkishness; and Slimy’s actions, though slightly curtailed, are still stogy.

To have eliminated such elements altogether from the one-volume revision of *The Unclassed* would have necessitated a complete rewriting which Gissing did not feel called upon to perform in 1895. The social concerns with which the novel deals were, by this time, of less consequence to

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Gissing than had been the case in the early 1880s; his private life consumed much of his time, and was causing him personal anguish; a new publishing deal required the rapid output of new material. (22) Indeed, when these circumstances are taken into consideration it is surprising that such complete revision as was undertaken should be accomplished. The import of the achievement should not be thought of in terms of the failure to produce an artistically satisfying novel, but lies in the fictive maturity which *U* (b) reveals. In the light of Gissing’s success in removing those “traces of the impertinent Ego” which bedevilled the earlier three-volume edition, subsequent strictures levelled against the author seem somewhat excessive. Henry James’ 1897 verdict on Gissing, for example – that “the whole business of distribution and composition he strikes me as having cast to the winds,” (23) – while an accurate criticism of the three-volume edition of *The Unclassed* surely cannot be applied with the same force of conviction to *U* (b). Whereas some of the cuts for the second edition were obviously made to accommodate the shortened format, others – notably the reworking of the Enderby sub-plot so that Waymark does not have prior knowledge of the police search for Paul (24) – signify a greater degree of authorial control and a conscious effort to produce a novel less encumbered with faulty plot construction. Given an objective distancing from his work such as the eleven-year gap in this instance provided, Gissing’s workmanship can – and does – produce a more complete work of art; and it is significant that the novels written in maturity – *The Nether World* (1889) onwards – do not display some of the more obvious faults which are to be found in the early work.

1 - For ease of reference, the three-volume first edition of *The Unclassed* will be cited as *U* (a). The novel was re-issued in a revised, one-volume edition by Lawrence & Bullen in 1895, upon

which all further re-issues have been based. The revised edition used – cited as *U* (b) – is the AMS photo-reproduction of the New York edition of 1896.

- 2 - "Novels of the Week," *Athenæum*, No. 2957 (28 June, 1884), pp. 820-821.
- 3 - "Gissing's Revision of *The Unclassed*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, VIII (June, 1953), pp. 42-52.
- 4 - *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family*, ed. A. & E. Gissing (London, 1927), p. 166. Henceforth cited in the text as *Letters*.
- 5 - *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, 1887-1903*, ed. A. C. Young (London, 1961), p. 206.
- 6 - *Ibid.*, p. 207.
- 7 - Reprinted in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, ed. P. Coustillas & C. Partridge (London, 1972), pp. 74-75.
- 8 - *U* (a), I, p. 60; I, p. 74; I, p. 76; I, p. 77; I, p. 82; I, p. 153; I, p. 269; II, p. 29; II, p. 109; II, p. 116; II, p. 117; II, p. 125; II, p. 138.
- 9 - Ryecroft, for example, is adamant in his dismissal of egalitarian concepts: "Every instinct of my being is anti-democratic," Gissing has his fictionalized counterpart say, "and I dread to think of what our England may become when Demos rules irresistibly." Moreover, this has always been the Ryecroft viewpoint: "I never was, and never shall be, capable of democratic fervour...." (*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (London, 1903), pp. 47, 194). That this viewpoint is in line with that of Ryecroft's creator can be assessed from Gissing's authorial reaction to the August Bank Holiday excursion to the Crystal Palace taken by the characters of *The Nether*

World (3 vols., London, 1889), I, pp. 252ff.

- 10 - Wolff, p. 45.
- 11 - Similar features can be found in Gissing's patronising explanation of "two-on-two," *U* (a), II, pp. 196-197.
- 12 - Wolff, p. 46.
- 13 - Other examples include *U* (a), I, p. 139; I, p. 168; I, p. 213; I, pp. 227-228; I, pp. 236-237; II, pp. 201-202.
- 14 - The most marked example of this is the rendition of Waymark's dream in *U* (a), I, pp. 261-262.

This account, and the examples cited in fn. 13, were all dropped in revision.

15 - See "Technique as Discovery," *Hudson Review*, I (Spring, 1948), pp. 67-87.

16 - "Division of Purpose in George Gissing," in *Collected Articles on George Gissing*, ed. P. Coustillas (London, 1968), pp. 64-79 (p. 75).

17 - See *U* (a), III, p. 20.

18 - "Cancelled Passages in Gissing's *The Unclassed*," *BNYPL*, LXXX (Summer, 1977), pp. 553-558 (p. 558).

19 - "Gissing's Characterisation: III; Temperament," *Gissing Newsletter*, III (September 1967), pp. 1-7 (p. 3).

20 - "*The Unclassed*," *Gissing Newsletter*, X (January, 1974), pp. 1-11 (p. 1).

21 - *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

22 - See Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Seattle, 1963), *passim*.

23 - "London Notes, July 1897," in *Notes on Novelists with Some Other Notes* (New York, 1914), p. 438.

24 - See Wolff, p. 45.

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A Note on Gissing in Calabria

Readers of *By the Ionian Sea* will recall the passage on Gissing's visit to the Reggio Museum in the last chapter of the book: "Ere I left, the visitors' book was opened for my signature. Some twenty pages only had been covered since the founding of the museum, and most of the names were German. Fortunately, I glanced at the beginning, and there, on the first page, was written: 'François Lenormant, Membre de l'Institut de France' – date, 1882." The name of Lenormant, the author of *La Grande Grèce*, was a magic one for Gissing. We find him reading the French writer's master work and taking notes from it before his third trip to Italy (Diary, 16 August, 1897), and later comparing these notes with his own impressions on the spot. The anecdote about the visitors' book is duly recorded in Gissing's diary (12 December, 1897), which was his main source when he wrote his travel narrative in 1899.

But what has become of the visitors' book? Until recently it was commonly assumed that it had been destroyed in the 1908 earthquake which laid waste the city. This was a mistake. The book has been found in the Museo Nazionale at Reggio – the Museo Civico in Gissing's time – by Mrs. Ernesta Vollarò Mills who is known as co-translator with her husband, Lieutenant-Colonel A. Spencer Mills, of Edward Lear's *Journal of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria* (first published in Italian in 1973; second edition 1976).

The photocopy of the first page duly shows the name of "F. Lenormant Membre de l'Institut de France" and that of "Prof. Luigi Viola" in or shortly after October, 1882. Gissing's own entry,

much more legible, reads "George Gissing. Londra. 12/12/97." It is the last but one signature for December 1897, and one of six for the whole month.

Mrs. Mills wrote two pieces on Gissing in recent years which escaped the notice of bibliographers. "George Gissing's Athens of 1889" appeared in *Athens News* (19 January 1977); it is based on the novelist's correspondence with Bertz. "La Calabria di George Gissing" was

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published in *La Voce di Calabria* for 22 May 1977.

Extracts from *By the Ionian Sea* in Mrs. Mills's translation are soon to appear in an Italian journal as part of an anthology of English travellers in Calabria from Henry Swinburne to H. V. Morton.

As a footnote to these valuable activities, one is naturally led to mention a sizeable Italian book edited by Mario Currelli and Albert Martino, *Critical Dimensions: English, German and Comparative Literature: Essays in Honour of Aurelio Zanco*, Cuneo: Saste, 1978, pp. XVIII + 557, L30,000 (hardback), L15,000 (paper). The book is available from Messrs. Saste, Spa, 9, Via XX Settembre, 12100 Cuneo, Italy. It contains an essay on Norman Douglas, Gissing and Lenormant. – P.C.

Notes and News

The article on *The Unclassed* printed in the present number is part of a thesis entitled *The Writer as Artist and Individual: An examination of selected novels of George Gissing*, dissertation for the degree of M.A. (Method One), University of Manchester, September 1978. Its author, Robert S. Powell, submitted his article in the belief that it would be pertinent to Wulfhard Heinrichs' proposal in the October 1979 *Newsletter*, "that a possible subject for discussion at a second M.L.A. session on Gissing may be the author's theoretical and practical approach to fiction." Mr. Powell goes on as follows: "May I suggest, as an extension to this proposal, that Gissing's sentiments on a variety of matters, as presented in correspondence and personal writing, seem to be integrated into his novels in a way which perhaps compromise fictional intent. My reading of *Demos*, for example, would be that the direct social comment intended – that the novel should be "a savage satire on working class aims and capabilities" – is weakened, if not rendered inappropriate, by implicit authorial sympathy for the individuality of the supposed 'villain,'

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Mutimer. Gissing's idiosyncratic concept of fictional realism, that it prohibits the objective approach; his anti-democratic hatred of the common man; his passionate concern for the sanctity of the individual – all of these matters intrude into his work, seldom to artistic advantage."

The Wakefield Metropolitan District Libraries (Library Headquarters, Balne Lane, Wakefield WF2 0DQ, England) have issued a brochure entitled *George Gissing 1857-1903: Novelist and Man of Letters*. It is a select list of material in the Gissing Collection at Wakefield Library Headquarters: it includes the works and criticism about them as well as miscellaneous material – press-cuttings, files of correspondence collected in connection with the Gissing exhibition held at Wakefield City

Library in 1953, photographs, reviews of recent publications as well as material on the novelist's family. No Gissing scholar can afford to overlook this collection which contains unique items. The brochure can be obtained from the Librarian.

The Victorian Fiction Group of the University of Queensland announces a series of Victorian Fiction Research Guides which is assuredly destined to fill many gaps. The first booklet, compiled by Joan Huddleston, is devoted to Sarah Grand. Three others – indexes to fiction in *Belgravia* and to *Woman at Home*, and a number on Edmund Yates – will be available shortly. Professor P. D. Edwards, the general editor of the series, writes: "The Group concentrates on minor or lesser known writers active during the period from about 1860 to about 1910. Among the writers we are presently working on are Francis Adams, Sara Jeannette Duncan, Grant Allen, Mary Cholmondeley, Victoria Cross, Mary and Jane Heton Findlater, Jessie Fothergill, Annie Hector, Annie Thomas, Annie

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Edwards, Frances Cashel Hoey, Morley Roberts, E. L. Voynich, Mary Linskill, Eliza Lynn Linton, Anne Thackeray, George Egerton, Arabella Kenealy, Ethel M. Dell, Beatrice Harraden, William Black, Mrs. Craik (Dinah Maria Mulock), Mona Caird, Emma Frances Brooke, Iota (Kathleen Caffyn), Rosa Campbell Praed, and Edna Lyall.

We should be interested to hear from anyone else working on any of these writers, and any information about the location of manuscript and other material would be most welcome. Since there will inevitably be gaps and errors in our published bibliographies, we should also be grateful for information about these.

All correspondence, including orders for future publications, should be addressed to the general editor, P. D. Edwards, Department of English, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Australia 4067."

The list of writers to be included in the series contains various names of some significance for Gissing studies, in particular Morley Roberts, who will be dealt with by Professor Edwards himself.

Malcolm Cowley, in whose *Exile's Return* (1932) Gissing appears briefly, mentioned him again in the *New York Times Book Review* for 25 November 1979: "Some books I do remember from that long ago," that is when he was thirteen. "There was George Gissing's *New Grub Street*, which Kenneth Burke and I read in high school. It painted a dark picture of the literary life, but it didn't discourage us; we didn't want to be rich or famous writers."

Harper's Magazine for June, 1979 contained a significant Gissing allusion. In an article called "A Juggernaut of Words," Lewis H. Lapham renews that complaint heard in *New Grub Street* that

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the public is deluged with reading matter of little value, and that the world of books avoids solid ideas and capitalizes on superficiality. Lapham says: "In the literary bazaar, the pride of place customarily falls to knaves and fools, as witness Balzac's description of the milieu in the Paris of the 1830s, or George Gissing's account of the same milieu in London of the 1880s".

Jacob Korg, who sent the preceding note, also communicates the following about the Gissing brothers in the *OED*:

“In the list of books ‘most commonly quoted’ that appears at the end of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the following entries appear:

Gissing Algernon	<i>Both of this parish: a story of the by-ways</i> 1889 <i>A village Hampden</i> 1890
Gissing, George R.	<i>A life’s morning</i> 1888 <i>The nether world</i> 1889

The question, of course, is, where do the quotations appear? *Newsletter* readers who spot them should notify the editor immediately”.

The editor, for his part, has come across one quotation, from *The Town Traveller*, under “seven” (p. 563):

d. with ellipsis of *years* (of age). *To be more than seven*: To “know one’s way about.” 1898
GISSING *Town Trav.* viii. 81. Oh, we all know that Mr. Gammon’s more than seven.

Professor Yukio Otsuka, whose book on Gissing was noticed in the *Newsletter* some years ago,

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has published about a hundred titles, original works and translations. His latest book, in Japanese, is entitled *In Quest of French Moralists* and deals with Flaubert or the Cult of Art, Stendhal or the Quest for Love, Sainte-Beuve or the Melancholy Man. This attractively produced volume is regarded by the author as a sequel to his *French Moralists* (1967).

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Recent Publications

Pamphlet

W. J. West, *George Gissing in Exeter*, Exeter Rare Books, 1979, 12p. Illustrated with a photograph of the Exeter Literary Society building (front cover) and another of 24, Prospect Park, Exeter where Gissing wrote *Born in Exile* (frontispiece). This limited edition of 500 copies is available from the publishers at 14a Guildhall Shopping Centre, Exeter, Devon, England.

Mr. West has collected scattered material. He throws new light on Gissing’s life in Exeter and on the sources of various incidents in *Denzil Quarrier*, which was written in that city.

Articles, reviews, etc.

- Malcolm Pasley, ed., *Nietzsche: Imagery and Thought*, London: Methuen, 1978. Chapter 8, “English Writers and Nietzsche,” by Patrick Bridgwater. Contains various passages on Gissing.
- Peter Keating, “No Entry,” *New Edinburgh Review*, Spring 1979, pp. 33-34. A review of Gissing’s diary and John Goode’s *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*.

- William E. Buckley, "George Gissing's 'The Whirlpool': The Plight of Urban Men and Women. Comment and Bibliography," *Recovering Literature*, Spring 1979, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 5-45.
- F. N. Lees, "Book Reviews," *Critical Quarterly*, Summer, 1979, vol. XXI, no. 2, p. 87. A review of John Goode's *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*.
- Terry Eagleton, "Inspired Hack," *New Statesman*, July 20, 1979, p. 98. A review of John Goode's *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*.
- Anon., *Choice*, July-August 1979, vol. XVI, nos. 5-6, p. 664. A review of Gissing's diary.
- Anon., *Wakefield Express*, Friday, September 14, 1979, second section, p. 2, cols. 3, 4, 5. "Trust organizes walk in footsteps of city novelist."
- Anon., "Briefly," *Yorkshire Post*, Saturday, September 15, 1979, p. 13, col. 2. On the Gissing walk in Wakefield.
- Anon., *Choice*, September 1979, vol. 16, no. 7, p. 828. A review of Michael Collie's *The Alien Art*.
- Francesco Badolato, "Scrittori Vittoriani: Urbs in Rure," *Il Corriere di Roma*, Sunday, October 7, 1979, XXX, no. 381, p. 3. A review of *Victorian Writers and the City*, ed. J.-P. Hulin and P. Coustillas.
- Anon., "English Literature," *MLA Newsletter*, Fall 1979, p. 12. Paragraphs on *Victorian Writers and the City* and the Fairleigh Dickinson reprints of Gissing.
- Patricia Stubbs, *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920*, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979. Contains substantial passages on Gissing, in particular pp. 143-55.