

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 XVII, Number 1
January, 1981

-- 1 --

Eve Madeley: Gissing’s Mona Lisa

Adeline R. Tintner
New York

To the Memory of Alfred Slotnick,
Gissing scholar and collector

In July, 1894, Walter Pater died quite suddenly at Oxford. In the wake of his funeral a new flurry of Pateresque literature appeared. The first wave had occurred after the appearance in 1873 of the first edition of his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. It left its mark on two short stories

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: £3.00 per annum
Libraries: £5.00 per annum

-- 2 --

by Henry James and on his novel, *The Princess Casamassima*, all written by 1886, (1) especially where the characteristics attributed by Pater to Leonardo’s masterpiece, the Mona Lisa, are concerned. These characteristics had made Mona Lisa the foremost *femme fatale* of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. After Pater’s death, James’s short story “Glasses” (1896) presented a hero, based on the actual figure of Pater himself, who falls in love with the painting of a beautiful woman

with failing eyesight whom he marries in spite of her vanity which leads to total blindness.

In a writer like James with a strong predisposition to the aesthetic point of view and a habit of reworking icons from classics of literature and art, this adaptation of Pater's *Mona Lisa* might have been expected. It is when we confront such a point of view in George Gissing, a writer whose matter is usually drawn from the lower middle and middle classes (whose concerns are chiefly with the conflicts between the women from these classes who have rising expectations and whose men are more or less sympathetic to the raising of their consciousnesses), that we are surprised at how capacious the net of Pater's influence was.

Just a month before Pater died at a time when his influence was at its height, Gissing wrote his novel, *Eve's Ransom*, which appeared in print the following year. The novel, which is usually dismissed by Gissing critics, becomes manageable and understandable when it is realized that it is Gissing's attempt at fashioning his *Mona Lisa*, for the story is nothing more or less than the story of the subjection of a man to the mysterious power of a face, first encountered in a photograph album.

Actually, there is evidence in Gissing's correspondence of a great sympathy with the art-for-art's sake movement of which Pater was the prime mover. Gissing wrote to his brother on June 12, 1884: "When I am able to summon any enthusiasm at all, it is only for ART – how I laughed the other day on recalling your amazement at my theories of Art for Art's sake! Well, I

-- 3 --

cannot get beyond it. Human life has little interest to me, on the whole – save as material for artistic presentation." (2) To his sister Ellen he wrote on July 8, 1887: "Two things I aim at in my work: the love of everything that is beautiful, and the contempt of vulgar conventionality." (3)

When Gissing went to Paris in 1888 he wrote in his *Diary* that on October 7 he spent "two hours among the Italian pictures and Renaissance sculpture at Louvre." (4) On October 10 he wrote to his sister Margaret: "Each day I spend several hours either at the Louvre or the Luxembourg and delight myself amid wonderful things." (5) Gissing is so impressed with "the Da Vinci smile" that he sees it reflected in Sodoma's "Leda." (6) But there is an even more significant entry for Friday, October 12. He noted in room II "386: a head by Da Vinci, used as a frontispiece to Pater's 'Renaissance.'" (7) This indicates that Gissing was very familiar with either the second (1877) or third (1888) editions of Pater's *Studies in the Renaissance* (since the first edition had no illustrations), familiar, therefore, with the most famous essay in the book, the piece on Leonardo, and the most famous pages in that essay, the two pages devoted to the *Mona Lisa*.

The traces of those pages are in the novel for it is only in Pater and for the first time that the attributes of a *femme fatale* are given to the subject of the famous painting which Vasari had not seen in that way, for he had contented himself with praising only the beauty of the sitter. He had added a comment that "while Lionardo was drawing her portrait he engaged people to play and sing ... and remove that melancholy which painting usually gives to portraits." (8) The melancholy is seen by Vasari only as a product of the situation of being painted, not of the character of *La Gioconda*. Pater's description, on the other hand, involves "the unfathomable smile, always with a touch of something sinister in it." (9) In Gissing's novel Hilliard sees a photograph in an album of a young woman with "lips" that "appeared to smile, but in so slight a degree that perchance it was

-- 4 --

merely an effect of natural line: whereas, if the mouth were concealed, a profound melancholy at once ruled the visage." (10) It "was a beautiful face"; it "spoke as no other face had ever spoken," and it belongs to *Eve Madeley*. The effect of the photograph is that of the mystery of the girl and

when he gets to know her she is “mysterious to him still in many respects” (p. 222). Eve continues to be mysterious and solitary. The sympathy Hilliard feels for the image of Eve corresponds to the sympathy Pater sees between La Gioconda and the painter Leonardo. Pater found the portrait “expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years man has come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all ‘the ends of the world are come,’ and the eyelids are a little weary” (p. 90). Eve begins to obsess Hilliard and she represents to him the fathomless quality of the mystery of woman, and her “eyelids,” like those of the Mona Lisa, “dropped wearily” (p. 258).

“Certainly Lady Lisa,” Pater wrote, “might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea” (p. 90). Eve Madeley is that for Gissing, the new woman and the old – a woman desiring personal freedom and finding it, only, perhaps, in making a marriage in which the poverty of her youth can never again overtake her, but also “older than the rocks among which she sits” for “all the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there” (Pater, page 90).

Gissing even places her in a setting which repeats the famous parapet against which La Gioconda is painted. “Eve issued of a sudden on to a sort of terrace, where the air blew shrewdly ... in front [lay] a limitless gloom ... It was now a black gulf, without form and void, sputtering fire ... She paused here for a moment” (p. 260). This is equivalent to the mysterious and rocky mountainous backdrop of the Mona Lisa.

Eve is also seen against a “framed engraving of the Parthenon” in Hilliard’s room which suggests the contrast between the Mona Lisa and the Greek goddesses of antiquity, which is an experiment Pater invites the reader to make. “The white Greek goddesses,” Pater told us, would “be

-- 5 --

troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed”! (p. 90). (Could Eve’s name, Madeley, be an echo of the word malady?) Eve’s personality, her melancholic predisposition, her mystery, makes her Gissing’s Mona Lisa. Eve, too, lives in the black towns, Bilston and Wolverhampton. When she climbs to the terrace she does not look at the sky, “illumined with a broad glare,” but “paused here for a moment,” as if it would form her backdrop as the rocky landscape forms the backdrop of the painting by Leonardo. Eve is usually “in a strange mood” (p. 269). She looks at Hilliard with “a strange intensity”; her “subtlety” is stressed and when Narramore meets her he too feels she has to be his wife. “Eve ... is very much out of the common, look at her how you may. She’s rather melancholy, but that’s a natural result of her life” (p. 328), although “her nerves are out of order.” This condition designates her as Pater’s Lady Lisa, “The symbol of the modern idea.” She is not in love with Hilliard, nor with Narramore, but she is grateful that Hilliard has “ransomed” her and supported her until she was “safe.” As La Gioconda “is found present at last,” Pater wrote, “in Il Giocondo’s house,” so Eve is finally seen against the landscape of her garden after her marriage to Narramore. She is grateful to Hilliard for tiding her over until she is secure in marriage and, as Mona Lisa was made immortal by Leonardo, she is perpetuated by Hilliard’s aesthetic sense in this novel which is a work of art, thus freeing him from his obsession.

It is interesting and confirmatory that Professor Pierre Coustillas has called my attention to an entry in a Gissing notebook in the Dartmouth College Library entitled *Extracts from my Reading*, begun on April 1, 1880, in which Gissing copied out most of Pater’s long passage on La Gioconda. (11)

Many Gissing critics, missing this Pateresque thrust, have paid little attention to the book, since Eve Madeley is unclassifiable as a Gissing woman and is an unusual portrait in Gissing’s gallery of heroines. Although her particular kind of melancholic beauty imprisons Hilliard’s

imagination, she is not a bad woman in the sense that other Gissing women are bad or destructive. Her effect is independent of her actions and it is not her fault if she seems incapable of returning love. The critics seem also closed to the acknowledgement of an aesthetic point of view so early in Gissing's *oeuvre*.

Indeed, it may very well have been Virginia Woolf who was responsible for the notion that Gissing moved from the younger writer concerned with social change to an older one with "other tastes" which "were tugging him in a different direction. He came to think, as he believed finally, that the "only thing known to us of absolute value is artistic perfection ... the works of the artist ... remain sources of health to the world." (12) She talks about his visiting Greece as if it only took place at the end of his life. Actually, he went to Greece and Rome fairly early in his writing career in the eighties. She decided that he at the end found that "ugliness is not the whole truth; there is an element of beauty in the world." (13) But Gissing, as we know from his letters and his diary, wanted beauty at the very outset of his life as an adult and his hatred of the poor and uneducated was a revolt against ugliness. The very threat of having himself engulfed by ugliness was the great stimulus for writing in opposition to that ugliness and against the harm poverty does to the sensitive person. *Eve's Ransom*, written in mid-career, shows that there are Mona Lisas among the disappointed lower middle classes – women who can have the finest aesthetic effect on a man's imagination. Eve is a woman who would not have been very different even if she had been born richer, because of her temperament. We are not left with the impression that her marriage to the moneyed Narramore is going to make her any happier, but she is presented as trying to get something out of a comfortable, poverty-free marriage. The chief difference between her and other Gissing heroines is that she seems, like Leonardo's *Gioconda*, "born to" melancholy, rather than

directed that way by the social conditions of her life, all of which emphasized rather than produced that in-born predisposition.

Gissing's lifelong conflict can be pictured as a real life parallel to that of Hyacinth Robinson, James's hero in *The Princess Casamassima* who was caught between his aesthetic predispositions and his ideas of social revolution. Only Gissing could resolve his problems in the writing of his fiction. "I can get savage over social iniquities," he wrote to his brother in 1884 (two years before Hyacinth was "born") "but even then my rage at once takes the direction of planning revenge in artistic work." (14)

1 - The two stories by Henry James are "The Madonna of the Future" (1873) and "The Sweetheart of M. Briseux" (1873). In "A Bundle of Letters" (1879) Louis Leverett, the Boston aesthete, has read Pater. Gissing read *The Princess Casamassima* in 1892, two years before writing *Eve's Ransom*.

2 - *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family*, ed. A. & E. Gissing (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1927), pp. 138-139.

3 - *Ibid.*, p. 196.

4 - *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. P. Coustillas (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1978), p. 46.

5 - *Letters to his Family*, p. 226.

6 - *London and the Life of Literature*, etc., p. 104.

7 - *Ibid.*, p. 50.

8 - Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, vol. II (London: J. M. Dent, 1950), p. 164.

9 - Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (New York: New American Library, reprint of 1873), p. 89. Future references indicated by page number.

-- 8 --

10 - George Gissing, *Eve's Ransom* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), p. 50. Future references indicated by page number.

11 - Communication from Professor Pierre Coustillas, dated March 2, 1980: "pp. 39-40 of the Notebook: entry entitled "Monna [sic] Lisa," long quotation from 'La Gioconda is, in the truest sense' up to 'chilled it least'. [Here a cut indicated by four dots.] Then: 'The presence that thus rose' up to 'the eyelids and the hands'. *Renaissance*, pp. 133-36." (In the edition I have used the pages are 89-90.)

12 - Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), p. 300.

13 - *Ibid.*, p. 301.

14 - *Letters to his Family*, p. 139.

* * * * *

The Three Points of View in *New Grub Street*

M. A. Makinen
London

In *New Grub Street*, Gissing specifically portrays three different ways of viewing society. These are the idealistic view, the practical and the realistic. Gissing consistently labels certain of the major characters with these epithets and *New Grub Street* can be seen as the exploration of how fitting, and estimable, these viewpoints are to the "modern" society evolving within the novel.

Milvain is the main exponent of the practical view, which is allied very closely to the rising modern era. Under Gissing's pen the epithet comes to carry derogatory connotations, since it is

-- 9 --

always the exploitative, expedient aspects of the word that are conveyed. Milvain has a rational, cold logic which estimates friends by "Whether [they] could be any use to me or not," and a

cynicism that grasps the importance of reputation in his world and capitalises on it by cultivating useful associations and living in handsome lodgings, even though he can only do so by keeping his mother and sisters “pinching and stinting.” The point is made right at the beginning of the novel that he could live cheaply but that it would be of no “use” to him, and so his family must be “sacrificed to him.” His cynicism makes him claim that “The days of romantic love are gone by. The scientific spirit has put an end to that kind of self-deception ... What we think of now is moral and intellectual and physical compatibility; I mean, if we are reasonable people,” and so he attempts to marry simply for money in order to further his career. For, like Amy who through emulation also acquires the epithet, the practical characters are seen as emotionally frigid and notions of love and warm feelings are scorned as “sentimental.” Reardon complains of his wife’s lack of affection and it is only by her touch or proximity that Marian can warm Milvain, which implies that his feelings are merely sexual. Milvain and Amy are supremely successful because they accept the values of the society they live in and they close the book prosperous and happy, having reaped all the benefits – even, ironically, that of love. However, this does not mean that Gissing is in sympathy with them but rather that society has the citizens it deserves. The author’s defence of Reardon and Biffen in fact disclaims that although their being impractical as regards “the rough and tumble of the world’s labour market” may seem a fault, this does not make them worthless; indeed “view them in possible relation to a humane order of society, and they are admirable citizens.” In other words, those who succeed are the unworthy who “push and hustle, welcome kicks so long as halfpence follow, make a place in the world’s eye – in short take a leaf from the book of Mr. Jasper Milvain.” Biffen’s back-handed claim that “The art of living is the art of compromise,” and that one should

-- 10 --

not foster sensibility and delicacy when the common-sense rule calls for coarseness and vulgarity, also upholds this since delicacy and sensibility are shown throughout the book as the most distinctive characteristics of the worthy. Dora often points to the estimations which Gissing, as author, attempts to be more guarded about, and she roundly condemns Amy’s selfish disregard of Reardon, and Milvain’s of Marian, as “shameful” and “shameless” respectively, the use of the same word indicating the parallel. It is she who finally proclaims “Who ever disputed the value of money? But there are things one mustn’t sacrifice to gain it.” The practical way might be the most expedient, society being what it is, but it is evidently not the most estimable. The practical are also characterized by their optimism (it is this that makes Milvain so attractive to Yule’s daughter and Reardon’s wife) and, given the contemporary direction of society, optimism cannot be laudable.

“Pessimism is sympathy. Optimism is selfishness.” (1) Grant Allen’s statement perfectly paraphrases the view of the author of *New Grub Street*, although Gissing does not necessarily agree with the defeatism and self-pity which the pessimistic may resort to. Reardon, the idealist, is given many worthy traits and these are constantly allied to the old, past way of life. His scruples make him see that being dependent on Amy’s mother in order to keep up appearances is “intolerable” (this is the very thing that Milvain does) and therefore leads to a clash of values, since to the practical Amy the intolerable is to live on a clerk’s weekly wages:

“... you surely can’t know how people of my world regard that.”

“Of your world? I had thought that your world was the same as mine, and know nothing whatever of these imbecilities.” (2)

In fact, Reardon sees his sensitivity as an impenetrable barrier which defeats any attempt to

-- 11 --

communicate his views to the worldly: "he and they had no common criterion by reference to which he could make himself intelligible." Not only does Reardon not have the "forethought" (Milvain's word) to marry for money, but he even refuses to return to his estranged wife because she comes into an inheritance. He is shown as passionate, although this is perhaps too extreme since he is "utterly dependent" upon Amy. He is also often shown comparing her to an "ideal wife" and his own work to the ideal of ancient Greek literature. His scruples, which derive from his idealism, prevent him from adopting the expedients necessary for success and so he fails miserably. When he comes up against the harsh realities of life, his extreme sensitivity and "his natural tendency to dream and procrastinate and hope for the improbable" lead him into defeatism. The result of hoping for the unattainable must be disillusionment, and his takes the form of a withdrawal, not only into self-pity but also away from any pity for other people:

"The mere fact of grave issues in life depending on such paltry things is monstrously ludicrous. Life is a huge farce, and the advantage of possessing a sense of humour is that it enables one to defy fate with mocking laughter." (3)

Biffen condemns this view as taking "the side of a cruel omnipotence," while Gissing's own estimate of it can be judged by the fact that Alfred Yule (whose own social failure is allied to an "antiquated" way of life) reacts to the loss of his daughter's inheritance with an outstandingly cruel "burst of loud, mocking laughter." The author also, when describing how Reardon stood in his poor lodgings "with the sensations of an outraged exile, and laughed aloud in furious contempt of all who censured and pitied him," calls this behaviour an extraordinary arrogance. Idealism is used to condemn the present but it is also shown to contain within itself a fatal weakness when, as it must

-- 12 --

do, it fails in our practical modern society.

Biffen is the character most usually designated as the realist and I cannot completely accept P. Coustillas's opinion that Gissing is simply censorious of this realism. (4) The epithet is usually applied to Biffen's view of his world rather than his book, as for example with his scepticism of outward show, "'I distrust such appearances,' said Biffen in his quality of realist," though his book is never authorially condemned. Indeed, with its concern for the fateful power of the trivial incident, its attempt to treat the characters impartially and unheroically, and its wish to seriously and truthfully show the life of the ignobly decent, (5) this "novel of modern life, the scope of which is in some degree indicated by its title" seems to become the mirror image of *New Grub Street* itself. Certainly Reardon, the idealist to whom such a subject matter is abhorrent, still praises Biffen's "honesty" and "courage" in attempting it. Biffen has the same scrupulous goodness as Reardon, for he refuses to live off a brother who is actually willing to give him money and, despite his severe impoverishment, he turns away students who could not benefit from his teaching. He too is passionate, but he is also clear-sighted and his understanding of the realities of life saves him from Reardon's inherent weakness (6). He has the true independence to live worthily while writing his novel, but this is only attained at great cost; he can have no hope of social success and no possibility of requited love or marriage. Most people, like Mrs. Edmund Yule

... had never conceived of life as something proper to the individual;

independence in the directing of one's course seemed ... only possible in the case of very eccentric persons, or of such as were altogether out of society. (7)

and Biffen describes himself as "Only he who belonged to no class." Independence is only possible if one abandons all ambition and exists outside of society, but in Gissing's view even this brings

-- 13 --

attendant miseries which can only be sustained by the strongest of characters. It is significant that the chapter entitled "Reardon Becomes Practical" deals with his death and also that, when Biffen's love for Amy turns to idealization, he can assess the gap between the unattainable and reality and decide life is no longer worth living. Biffen does not fall into the weak defeatism that occasioned Reardon's self-dramatizing thoughts of suicide; his decision, and the act itself, are accompanied by an unselfish methodicalness and by images of beauty. Reardon is killed by circumstances (as obsolete ideals must perish in a practical society) but Biffen chooses to die. Once his novel has been completed he has no reason to go on battling with the uncongenial existence resulting from his independence. The realistic view leads to the conclusion that the only complete escape is suicide.

1 - *The Woman Who Did* (London, 1895), p. 149.

2 - *New Grub Street* (London, 1891), II, p. 126.

3 - *Ibid.*, I, pp. 266-67.

4 - "Arthur Morrison and Gissing," *Gissing Newsletter*, VI, 1, January 1970, p. 18.

5 - See "The Place of Realism in Fiction" (*Humanitarian*, July 1895), where Gissing states that "Realism, then, signifies nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life" (p. 16); and "It seems to me that no novel can possess the slightest value which has not been conceived, fashioned, elaborated, with a view to depicting some portion of human life as candidly and vividly as is in the author's power." (p. 15)

6 - I agree with Irving Howe that Gissing, to remove "the temptation to shower pity on Reardon," uses "Biffen for the demonstration of his cultural and moral positives," but I disagree with his calling Biffen an idealist – although he does have ideals, these are controlled by his realistic

-- 14 --

viewpoint. "George Gissing: Poet of Fatigue" in *Collected Articles on George Gissing*, ed. P. Coustillas, (London, 1968), p. 123.

7 - *New Grub Street*, II, p. 141, my emphasis.

* * * * *

Gissing as a Romantic Realist

Pierre Coustillas

[A paper read at the triennial Conference of the International Association of University Professors of English in Aberdeen on August 29, 1980.]

The title of the present paper may seem to have been dictated by circumstances, but this is only a small part of the truth. In histories of English literature, which so often reflect second-hand rather than first-hand knowledge of little read authors, Gissing is usually summed up and not infrequently damned as a realist and a pessimist. In the eyes of some critics he was guilty of a further sin, that is, his strongly marked individuality, his disinclination – if one may paraphrase William Plomer's epitaph – to lead or to follow a crowd. This makes sense, if somewhat tediously, but I claim that it amounts to mistaking appearances for reality. A case can be made out for his being a romantic, or, as is said by one of his obituarists, an inverted idealist. As early as 1912, Morley Roberts, a bosom friend of Gissing's and his first biographer, wrote in *The Private Life of Henry of Maitland*: "It was a curious thing that a man who was thus so essentially romantic, should have been mistaken, not without great reason, for a realist." An admittedly controversial statement, but a stimulating one.

Just as Gissing was not born a pessimist, so was he not born a realist. The abundant juvenilia

-- 15 --

from his pen which have been preserved show that his youthful mind readily turned to romance and that his favourite mental explorations led him into a world of mystery, of legendary figures, and of adventurers. The titles of some unpublished poems and plays speak for themselves – for instance "Rabba, the Wizard of the Alps," "The Hidden Treasure," "The Smugglers' Cave," "Epitaph on the Tomb of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza," "The Battle of Roncesvalles." In these precocious and inevitably immature pieces, one feels that young Gissing's mind was feasting on the unrealistic elements of the situation he described. Such themes as guilt, loss and quest combine with a marked taste for the uncommon, the unexpected, the exemplary. His favourite terrain was delimited by the melodramatic and the epic, surely an unconscious reaction to his humdrum schoolboy's life in dreary Wakefield. It would be a mistake to believe that the soul-searing experiences of adolescence obliterated these streaks altogether. Some of the fantastic tales that Gissing published in the Chicago papers in 1877, in his nineteenth year – "The Serpent Charm," "Dead and Alive," "The Death-Clock" – are in that line, and we find manifestations of the same phenomenon in an infrequent, more refined form all through his career. But after his early twenties, with such recently exhumed stories as "Cain and Abel" and *All for Love*, he kept the melodramatic elements of his inspiration under control and at least inserted them within a realistic framework. The adventures of Bob Hewett in *The Nether World* and those of Lord Polperro in *The Town Traveller* are examples in middle and later period.

Gissing's culture was largely influenced by his reading of the romantic poets whose works his father, the pharmaceutical chemist, botanist and poet of Wakefield, had patiently bought and lovingly read. Thomas Gissing was such a devoted admirer of Wordsworth that he married in Grasmere church to pay him homage, and his eldest son was from an early age a reader of the collected editions of Burns, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Scott, Southey and Byron. His own work is studded with quotations from and allusions to these poets, not to speak of Tennyson to

-- 16 --

whose poems Thomas Gissing went to the length of buying a concordance. In the course of years Gissing came to reject Wordsworth's message: "What a gross absurdity," he noted, "is the moral

lesson of Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence.' How can a man strengthen himself by the example of another whose needs and capacities have nothing in common with his own? How can a fiery-hearted youth see an example to be imitated in a bloodless old fellow bent double with infirmities?" But Shelley had a more lasting influence on him. There is no reason to believe that Gissing ever rejected principles he had advocated in his first published novel, *Workers in the Dawn*,² about the relationship between art and morality. To Gissing as to Shelley art had a moral value; it was the fountain-head of morality and exerted greater influence on the human mind than the teaching of stipended moralists; it did more actual good than all the zealous social reformers. The ravings of fanaticism, Gissing thought, whether political, social or religious, matter little in the last analysis; only art is everlasting. The artist is a privileged being because through his perception of the world around him, he rises above it. Many are the statements which dilate on this theme in his early letters and novels. Devotion to art, sincere or not, responsiveness to it, eager or slight, are testing-benches for the worthiness of a number of characters in Gissing's novels: witness Clifford Marsh in *The Emancipated*, Jasper Milvain in *New Grub Street*, or Ross Mallard, again in *The Emancipated*. Furthermore, Gissing's attitudes and adventures on the threshold of adult life remind one of Shelley's chequered career after his going up to Oxford; both men appear to have been in defiant moods which led to their being expelled from their respective establishments; their chivalrous marriages to uneducated girls whom they regarded as victims bear the hallmark of romantic behaviour and in each case they brought alienation in their train. Shelley's schemes of political reform are paralleled by Gissing's Positivist phase, and both men found an exalted ideal in ancient Greece. Self-absorption and narcissism were in each of them the source of an altruism that

-- 17 --

sought spontaneously an expression in art.

If the romantic spirit can be defined as a marked predominance of emotional life, provoked or directed by the exercise of imaginative vision, we may safely assert that Gissing's was a romantic temperament. His former pupil Austin Harrison, who saw much of him regularly for some five years described him as "an artist; a contemplative individualist; a man influenced by the mood of the sky; the procession of the year; by circumstance and environment." More than the average man, Gissing was ruled by his feelings and emotions, a creature of instinct impatient of restraints and deeply sympathetic to human suffering. His enthusiasm for art coloured his attitude to the facts of life. Hearing once of Henri Regnault, who came back from Algeria to fight in the siege of Paris in 1870, he would not join in the praise of this poet's patriotism; indeed he was indignant that the siege of Paris should be deemed worthy of the sacrifice of a poet's life. He lived his own life with an intensity which caused surprise to those of his critics who stumbled on his more realistic work. Artists, poets, writers of any distinction he always expected, before seeing their portraits or meeting them, to be physically pleasant and attractive; no wonder he was disappointed by Verlaine, James Barrie or Harold Frederic. His approach to his own work was strongly emotional; he said he had cried while writing some passages of *Thyrza* and could not reread some scenes in his books without the tears welling up; after he had ceased keeping his diary, he admitted that the incentive to resume his daily chronicling was the emotion he had felt on going through the record of his past struggles. That was in 1902, but twenty years before, his attitude was just the same. A letter to his brother Algernon of 23 May 1883 reads in part : "I return the correspondence of past days. However, the best part of life is sentiment, and, for my part, the pain of many sentiments is redeemed by their emotional value." It is therefore no wonder that learning was to him from childhood a manner of

-- 18 --

romance; an extraordinary journey of the mind which often caused him to lose contact with reality. He was a great mental reconstructor; from the roughest data supplied by history, he would conceive wonderful visions like those imputed to the dying Reardon on his death-bed and which he himself experienced when overtaken by a fever at Cotrone or on his own death-bed in southern France. His early notion of literary life was coloured by the romantic accounts Henry Murger gave of French bohemia; up to his second marriage he cultivated, at least mentally, his role of social outlaw, impatient with prescribed rules and conventions.

The choice of his subjects was naturally influenced by his temperament. There is in the Beinecke Library at Yale a notebook which Gissing kept while in America at the age of nineteen. It is remarkable among other reasons for the number of French romantic quotations about love that it contains. Surely these quotations dispose of Frank Swinnerton's statement that Gissing was sternly unromantic, a statement apparently supported by the number of shrews and crassly unintelligent women we find in his works. From Balzac: "Les grandes passions sont rares comme les chefs d'oeuvre"; from George Sand: "Là où il y a beaucoup à plaindre, il y a beaucoup à pardonner, et là où l'on trouve à pardonner, sois certain qu'il y a quelque chose à aimer"; more rakishly, from Musset: "Aimer est le grand point; qu'importe la maîtresse? Qu'importe le flacon pourvu qu'on ait l'ivresse?" This exalted vision of love, kindled by his encounter with Nell Harrison, the prostitute he tried to reclaim and married when he had lost all hope of success, found its way into all his novels up to his second marriage and flamed out again in *The Crown of Life* (1899) as a reflection of his love for Gabrielle Fleury, his translator and common-law wife. We are bound to concur with W. T. Young who remarked in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* that the delineation of finer feminine characters set free all the latent idealism of Gissing's nature; his native instinct,

-- 19 --

reinforced by the effect of social barriers, was to idealise womanhood. Should we have any doubts, the writer's stance, openly expressed in the early novels, would settle them. Thus, after relating the escapade in Germany of his semi-aristocratic hero in *Demos*, he comments significantly that "a reckless passion is a patent of nobility."

The theme of revolt versus resignation which informs his novels throughout his career also has romantic connotations. The revolt is born of poverty and suffering in the working-class novels, which have affinities with Dickens's and Dostoevsky's as Gissing implicitly admitted in his critical study of Dickens, but the romanticism of his social rebels usually finds an outlet in behaviour which is less grotesque than that of his predecessors'; humorous eccentricity was not consonant with his temper, human or artistic. With his characters, revolt is largely an affair of the mind, and if it assumes a social dimension, violence is usually absent from it; revolt only seeks to come through in nonconformity of social behaviour. It is characteristic that among the projected novels to which he gave titles we find *Revolt* and *The Insurgents*; also that his romanticism was at its lowest in the stories of the mid-nineties when his reputation was in the ascendant and he temporarily came to terms with the literary establishment.

Gissing's exaltation is also conspicuous in his depiction of wronged characters. Although his intellectual exactingness often limited his sympathy, he readily entered into the psychology of those whom native weakness and social pressures have brought to offend the moral law, or of those who suffer in mental solitude, the victims of injustice, of egoism, like Mutimer's jilted fiancée in *Demos*, or Miss Barnes in *The Nether World*. An entry like the following, made in his *Commonplace Book* about 1901 is significant enough: "I do not love the people – true. But my passion of sympathy for the suffering poor." In his analysis of the misery of the deserving poor the emotion with which his

heart brimmed poured itself over reality and invested it with moving eloquence. The classical

-- 20 --

example is the lyrical description of a funeral at Manor Park Cemetery in *Demos*, of which this is the central passage:

Not grief, but chill desolation makes this cemetery its abode. A country churchyard touches the tenderest memories, and softens the heart with longing for the eternal rest. The cemeteries of wealthy London abound in dear and great associations, or at worst preach homilies which connect themselves with human dignity and pride. Here on the waste limits of that dread East, to wander among tombs is to go hand in hand with the stark and eyeless emblem of mortality; the spirit fails beneath the cold burden of ignoble destiny. Here lie those who were born for toil; who, when toil has worn them to the uttermost, have but to yield their useless breath and pass into oblivion. For them is no day, only the brief twilight of a winter sky between the former and the latter night. For them no aspiration; for them no hope of memory in the dust; their very children are wearied into forgetfulness. Indistinguishable units in the vast throng that labours but to support life, the name of each, father, mother, child, is as a dumb cry for the warmth and love of which Fate so stunted them. The wind wails above their narrow tenements; the sandy soil, soaking in the rain as soon as it has fallen, is a symbol of the great world which absorbs their toil and straightway blots their being.

The same novel, which stages the inroads of industrialism on the English countryside, offers an instance of Gissing's semi-ecological, semi-artistic response to nature. His interest in it was primarily that of a poet. Economic factors had little weight with him. His letters, diary and novels abundantly testify to his sensitiveness to the picturesque. They reflect his Englishness, and it might

-- 21 --

be said without undue exaggeration that his love of English landscapes was the most prominent aspect of his patriotism – on this point *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* are pure autobiography enhanced by the nostalgia Gissing felt for his native country at a time when health and domestic reasons obliged him to live in France. The evocation of English landscapes at the end of the book is an admirable purple patch, lyrical and rhythmical, fraught with emotions which were as genuine as his love of the classics or his sensitivity to the fair sex. But it would be a mistake to reduce his passion for nature to national dimensions. The landscapes of southern Europe, with their historical associations, drew from his brain anguished cries of delight – suffice it to recall at random his descriptions of the Rhône valley in the autumn of 1888, the rendering of sunsets over Athens in the following year or of the Calabrian scenery in his travel narrative *By the Ionian Sea*. They are alive with an aesthetic appreciation which combines a vivid sense of time and place, of the eternity of nature contrasted with the transitoriness of man and his material achievements. If a cosmic dimension is occasionally to be observed, Gissing's agnosticism prevents him from indulging in the pantheistic leanings which are so common in romantic verse. He viewed nature with the eye of a painter; his philosophy of life is to be found elsewhere.

There is no doubt that it was his first trip to Mediterranean shores in 1888-89 that awoke his

sense of colour, witness the contrast between *The Nether World* with its pervading greyness, only relieved by a symbolic glimpse of the Essex countryside, and *The Emancipated* with its variegated background which affects English characters so much. His long-repressed imagination could now give itself free rein. He became a sun worshipper in the artistic acceptance of the word; sunshine he viewed as the source of all solace to mind and body. Before going to the Continent for the first time, he had been content to say there was no value in human lives in a world from which grass and trees have vanished; after spending a month in Naples and visiting the old Greek temples at Paestum, he

-- 22 --

pitied his fellow-countrymen for inhabiting a land of fog and rain. This attitude however, was only temporary, as he rediscovered before long an England whose natural beauty also strongly appealed to his aesthetic sense. Speaking for Gissing, Rycroft confesses that he loves and honours even the least of English landscape painters. "If any man whom I knew to be a man of brains confessed to me that he preferred Birket Foster [to Turner], I should smile – but I should understand." Gissing's artistic involvement was so compelling that he almost preferred the artistic representation of nature to nature itself; art at least could not deceive as reality often did. Still, it is fair to say that Gissing's response to southern landscapes was no less ecstatic than to paintings in Neapolitan or Roman galleries. He wrote to his younger sister that in the Museums of the Vatican he walked about in a state of exultation waving his arms and shouting in a suppressed voice at the extraordinary beauties he beheld; his letters from Italy and Greece read in their descriptive parts like a succession of enthusiastic shouts.

To Gissing the Mediterranean countries signified the past – a past he had first visualized as a child in a sooty industrial Yorkshire town – the past, that is ancient civilizations, extinct yet enduring in their glorious sites, literature and art. Antiquity also meant paganism and here was for Gissing, to whom Christianity was thoroughly distasteful, another possibility of escape. In this cherished past he found a freedom which was denied him in the present and not likely to be offered by the future. The passing of time, he came to admit, had transformed ancient history which, for any imaginative person is a record of woes, a nightmare of horrors, into a painless world. A diary entry made while he was staying in Paris and studying the pictures in the Louvre with remarkable assiduity establishes a point which is vital to an understanding of his past-ward yearning. After noting that he had seen a splendid copy by Rubens of a picture of horsemen fighting by Da Vinci,

-- 23 --

he asked: "Why is not this scene horrible to me, like, e.g. the war scenes of De Neuville? Is it not because the costumes are antique, and war can be accepted as an accompaniment of earlier civilization, but is revolting in connection with the present?" As it receded ever further, the world of antiquity had become autonomous, its massacres seeming largely bloodless especially when perpetrated on a large scale. Studying Greek and Latin, particularly scanning Greek verse with Morley Roberts in their days of poverty (a habit transposed in the scenes between Reardon and Biffen in *New Grub Street*), was an attempt to ignore the present for a while. He was elated by the sonorous quality of this rhythmic reading. Reading aloud to a sympathetic listener, as Reardon does to Amy, was a favourite exercise of his. It is well-known that he could not court a woman without at some time or other reading verse to her. Reardon combines the two forms of romantic escape since by reading to Amy he reads himself back into the world of Homer.

Gissing consciously equated the study of ancient times with his own youth, probably the happiest period in his life. "The names of Greece and Italy," he wrote in *By the Ionian Sea*, "draw

me as no others; they make me young again, and restore the keen impressions of that time when every new page of Greek or Latin was a new perception of things beautiful." *By the Ionian Sea* certainly owes its success to the subtly romantic flavour of its intensely felt evocations of the remote past. Its music lulls the sensitive, cultured reader to poetic surrender. The narrative has the music of truth and the truth of music; writing it signified for Gissing a soothing oblivion of the present. The last sentence of the book amounts to such a confession: "As I looked my last towards the Ionian Sea, I wished it were mine to wander endlessly amid the silence of the ancient world, today and all its sounds forgotten." Indeed, the concluding words of his novels would be worth studying as they often are so rich with meaning and so melodious. He used to have them ready in his mind many pages beforehand, perhaps in the best of cases right from the beginning, and enjoyed

-- 24 --

the twinkling of his pen as he drew towards the ultimate word. Sad as in *The Nether World*, ironical as in *New Grub Street*, or joyful as in *The Crown of Life*, these concluding sentences reveal a temperament that was poles apart from that of the dry observer of reality his least perceptive critics thought him to be. Significantly it was not until *By the Ionian Sea* had opened the eyes of reviewers that the forces concealed behind his realism were clearly apprehended. The great success of *Henry Ryecroft* can surely be ascribed to the perception by the reading public of trends in Gissing's work which he had to a considerable extent repressed in his novels of modern life. The book was widely appreciated as a romantic fantasia and Gissing himself admitted that it was "much more an aspiration than a memory." *Veranilda* offers a third variant of escape into the past, but there was no interplay of past and present in this Roman story of the sixth century, and the public frowned on it; readers only came round with *Will Warburton*, subtitled "a romance of real life."

Seen in the correct light, Gissing's pessimism, which is usually represented as an offshoot of his supposedly self-complacent realism, is in fact another form of romantic liberation. He imbibed the pessimistic credo of Schopenhauer and found relief in the contemplation of man's desperate condition. The world, he thought in agreement with the German philosopher, is only a painful illusion. Life is a disappointment, a cheat, and death is the only deliverance. In his darkest moods Gissing delighted in describing a world swaying between suffering and boredom, in which man is an enemy to man, in which love is mistakenly equated with happiness, the root of evil being our attachment to life, what Schopenhauer called the will to live. Just as other, more optimistic thinkers derive self-confidence and hope from the observation of material progress, of man's gradual conquest of his environment, so Gissing found keen intellectual satisfaction – perverse pleasure if you like – in collecting evidence that man is a prisoner of his own condition, for instance that an

-- 25 --

individual's character never changes, that the metaphysical urge in average humanity will not yield to reason. Gissing had a further reason for drawing a romantic pleasure from Schopenhauer's arraignment of the human lot. Schopenhauer viewed the artist as an exceptional, privileged being in this world of pain, because the artist, in the act of creation, transcends his own limitations as a man; his pure perception is not enslaved to the will to live, and his mind is capable of moving freely over the material of his craft. He is thus in a position to apprehend reality in a way which is far above the perceptions of the average person. It would be difficult to define Gissing's views on art, his statements on the subject being widely scattered; but one can safely observe that they were deeply influenced by his reading of Shelley and Schopenhauer. If as a human being confronted with material, sexual and social difficulties he knew that he often blundered, and confessed he did in *The*

Ryecroft Papers, as a thinker and artist he relished his own intelligence of the world and derived consolation from what we may call artistic revenge upon reality. No doubt he viewed, though he never said so, his artistic career as a prodigious mental adventure.

In the light of all this, his few theoretical statements on realism assume a clearer significance. They are to be found in three main places – in an essay entitled “Why I don’t Write Plays” (1892), in a piece on “The Place of Realism in Fiction” (1895) and in the critical study of Dickens (1898). In the first of these he wrote : “The artist, I agree, must not come forward among his characters; but, on the other hand, it appears to me that his novel will be artistically valuable in proportion to his success in making it an expression of his own individuality. To talk about being ‘objective’ is all very well for those who swear by words. No novelist is ever objective, or ever will be. His work is a bit of life as seen by *him*. It is his business to make us feel a distinct pleasure in seeing the world with his eyes.” In the second essay, he is even more explicit: “The novelist works, and must work, subjectively. A demand for objectivity in fiction is worse than meaningless, for apart from the

-- 26 --

personality of the workman no literary work can exist ... There is no science of fiction. However energetic and precise the novelist’s preparation for his book, all is but dead material until breathed upon by the ‘shaping spirit of imagination,’ which is the soul of the individual artist. ... Realism, then, signifies nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life.”

This personal aspect of realism, conceived from a theoretical standpoint, concealed a more idiosyncratic element. If Gissing’s romanticism partook of a compensation for life’s sorrows, his realism was a form of revenge. Thomas Seccombe, who never met Gissing but had a good understanding of his personality and artistic motivation, wrote in 1906 that “in all his best books we have evidence of the savage and ironical delight with which he depicted to the shadow of a hair the sordid and vulgar elements by which he had been so cruelly depressed.” So realism appears to be a secondary product, which was so to speak grafted upon his romanticism by the trying experiences of his adolescence and early manhood. Often enough, romanticism and realism combined harmoniously and the result was a series of satirical stories of which he delivered himself in the mid-nineties. But, in varying degrees, below the harsher as below the softer passages of his prose epic of late Victorian society, one feels the romanticism of youth quivering under the stern self-imposed discipline of a realistic approach.

In an assessment of his work that followed on his death, an anonymous critic noted that Gissing was a realist controlled by an ideal. It might well be more appropriate to say that he was an idealist controlled by realism.

-- 27 --

Obituary

With deep regret I have to announce the death of two dear friends who played a significant part in the Gissing world in recent years – Alfred M. Slotnick and Charles Sidney Collinson who died on October 13 and 22 respectively.

Alfred Slotnick became known to a number of Gissing scholars and collectors in 1975 or shortly afterwards when he declared his enthusiasm for the novelist and very quickly earned for himself a glowing reputation as a most efficient and disinterested propagandist. His unexpected

death in his sixty-fifth year is in more ways than one an irreparable loss to Gissing studies for Al's engaging personality and highly specialised activities had no equivalent.

He was born on November 27, 1915 in Brooklyn, N.Y., and attended primary and secondary schools locally, then New York University and Brooklyn College. At a time when the Second World War was looming ahead he married Shirley Sandler and went on living in Brooklyn until 1943, working at first as a photographer, an occupation which remained a hobby connected with his Gissing investigations. After joining the U.S. Navy (1943-1945) he turned to a new occupation and made a living as a laundry owner for twenty years. From an early age he had been a great lover of music and the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts was nearly a second home to him; but he was also a great reader and book-collector, and these two passions assumed a tangible form in the very important collection of books on the violin which he built up after the war. Thus he not unnaturally drifted to the book trade and it was while he worked at the Gotham Book Mart in New York City (1967-1976) that he discovered the works of Gissing. Wakefield Gissingites will appreciate the fact that *A Life's Morning* was the first of the master's works that he read. Since his retirement his time was devoted primarily to Gissing, whom he followed as it were in any place where he was likely to collect material or information about his life and works – bookshops, libraries, auction rooms,

-- 28 --

private collections, houses in which the writer had lived and places he had visited.

It was above all Alfred Slotnick the indefatigable book collector, bibliographer and scholar that I knew, though I also caught more than a few glimpses of the husband and father, also of the man who, if appealed to, would not refuse his assistance to a stranger if he was in a position to help him. His first letter to me, dated June 29, 1975, offered a spontaneous confession of his enthusiasm for Gissing's writings which, he said, was unbounded. This was to prove no exaggeration, and when I consider all the time and energy he devoted to collecting and studying the novelist's work, in disseminating his work and ideas, in winning over new recruits to the Gissing confraternity, I am led to wonder whether any author, alive or dead, ever had a worthier champion than Gissing had posthumously found in Alfred Slotnick. The present journal owed not a few subscribers to him. If the *New York Review of Books* published a long review-article of a Gissing publication by Julian Symons in 1979, it was largely because Al had taken out a subscription to the *Newsletter* in favour of the editor.

I remember with emotion the days we spent together here in Northern France and in New York two years ago, planning enquiries, checking doubtful points of a bibliographical nature, working together in some institutional libraries. His comments on the physical nature of books sometimes made me wonder whether he had ever been a printer or a binder – his keen eye quickly spotted unrecorded variants and his systematic research in out-of-the-way libraries and bookshops was rewarded by the discovery of many gems likely to be appreciated only by specialists. I can still see him lovingly comparing dozens of states of Modern Library editions of *New Grub Street* or *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, compiling charts of which he sent copies to other experts, reading and pondering over an article on *The Odd Women* in the subway, discussing with a New York friend on the phone an interpretation of a Gissing novel which he thought clever but

-- 29 --

questionable. He had a flair for detecting fakes and disturbed more than one book-dealer or librarian who, with varying degrees of innocence, claimed to have a first American edition of *Ryecroft* in maroon cloth, when he actually had an undated 1912 edition of a title said quite correctly on the

verso of the title-page to have been "first published in 1903." This was one aspect of his care for truth and of his sense of fairness. His keenness as a collector never excluded clear-sightedness. With absurdity he had no patience and his sense of humour easily got the better of a ludicrous situation. I find in one of his last letters a passage which is a good illustration of AI in one of his moods. After inspecting in an antiquarian bookshop a remarkable Gissing collection most of whose items were offered at outrageous prices, he commented: "I told the dealer that there were items in his collection that I'd give one of my arms for but not both arms and a leg."

His attachment to Gissing took a delightful form once a year when he gave a party on Gissing's birthday or on a more convenient day soon after November 22. An account of such a party appeared in the *Newsletter*; I attended that of 1978 which he aptly arranged to coincide with the special Gissing session at the MLA Convention. Any cause that concerned his favourite author became his cause. He followed with his usual passion the progress made in Wakefield to restore the Georgian house in which Gissing was born and his encouragement was not merely moral and epistolary.

I grieve to think of all the forthcoming events in the Gissing world which he will not be able to attend or enjoy, in particular the symposium to be held next summer in Wakefield. He has now joined what George Eliot called "the choir invisible," but this in his case will not mean that he is forgotten. To me as to all those who knew and liked him he will remain an extraordinary example of devotion to the cause of George Gissing. May there be many men like him in future generations.

-- 30 --

In Charles Sidney Collinson we have lost another devoted admirer of Gissing's works. His name appeared regularly in the *Newsletter* in the last ten years and an idea of his abiding interest and unflinching intellectual vivaciousness will be formed if we realize that he was then in his eighties. The publication of his article on *The Whirlpool* and *The House of Mirth* in our last number turned out to be a posthumous one. I knew him for some sixteen years, after C. C. Kohler, whose interest in Gissing had just started in 1964, told me that he had heard from an Englishman living in Paris, who shared our attachment to the novelist's works.

C. S. Collinson was born in Birmingham on June 20, 1890 and educated at Dulwich College, which he attended from 1904 to 1908. From his youth he was a discriminating reader of literature, highly knowledgeable about 19th- and 20th-century fiction, both English and French. It must have been during one summer of those years he spent at Dulwich College that he once caught a glimpse of Meredith in his garden at Box Hill. He could certainly call himself a Victorian in writing and in conversation since the date of his birth refers us to that period when Gissing, staying with his mother and sisters, was vainly trying to write the novel which turned out to be his best, *New Grub Street*.

Shortly after leaving Dulwich College Charles Collinson went to Paris, where he worked for a time for the New York Life Insurance Company and met the French young lady, Berthe Liorat, who became his wife on July 11, 1914. He served during the First World War as a captain in the Royal Horse Artillery and was wounded at Gouzeaucourt in the Somme. In 1920 he took a post in the Passport Control Office (Visa Section) at the British Embassy in Paris and remained there until June 1940 when he was posted to Dublin to open a Permit Office. He would often reminisce about those years and the well-known people he had opportunities to meet in Ireland. The end of the war saw him move to Brussels where he was appointed Head of the Passport Control Office. There he was awarded the O. B. E., and remained until 1952, when he was called back to London (for special

-- 31 --

work). He settled in Surbiton, Surrey, and it was only when he retired definitely from the Service, about 1957, that he sought residence in Paris. There I saw him many times in his sixth-floor flat near the Gare de Lyon; we would discuss for hours literature and occasionally art (for he was a great lover and connoisseur of painting). All major Russian fiction prior to the advent of the Communist régime he had read in French or English translation and his familiarity with the literatures of his country and mine could have been envied by many academics.

During all the years I knew Charles Collinson, he was closely associated with my work, always prepared to read manuscripts and typescripts, to revise translations, and to do any intellectual odd job which was likely to help a friend or correspondent. In his last letter to me, written only a few days before his death, he asked whether he could do something to help me. His promptness was matched by the care with which he made his invariably useful suggestions. The section of the *Newsletter* devoted to "Recent Publications" would have been poorer but for his assistance: he would frequently send references or press-cuttings.

With him the Gissing confraternity has lost another of its most active propagandists and surely one of the last men who could still look back to the years when Gissing was writing his novels and who knew the nineties from personal experience. His was a genial personality, level-headed, modest, humorous, endowed with a wonderful memory, a model of disinterestedness and generosity, a man in whom one could always trust with the certainty of never being disappointed.

Pierre Coustillas.

* * * * *

Notes and News

According to an announcement in the autumn number of the *Dickensian*, a new edition of Gissing's Critical Study of Dickens has appeared under the imprint of George Prior Publishers, 37-41 Bedford Row, London WC1R 4JH.

-- 32 --

A number of new books of Gissing interest are expected to be published in the next few months. The Vision Press in England and Barnes & Noble in America announce a critical anthology, *George Gissing: Critical Essays*, edited by Jean-Pierre Michaux. We are told that the aim of the collection is to present a comprehensive record of the critical response to Gissing's works from his death in 1903 to the present day, a statement which is confirmed by the table of contents. However, when the publishers add, as a justification for issuing the volume, that the student of Gissing has until now had very little collected criticism at his disposal, we must beg permission to dissent. Two critical anthologies which were published in 1968 and 1972 respectively, offer some 750 pages of material while the book just announced will contain about 200. The collection will comprise two parts: in part one, entitled "General Studies," we shall find old essays like "George Gissing, a Character Sketch," by Ellen Gissing, Austin Harrison's oft-quoted reminiscences originally published in *Nineteenth Century*, and one of Morley Roberts's unreprinted articles, "The Exile of George Gissing." Part two will consist of critical commentaries on *New Grub Street*.

The Presses Universitaires de Lille will publish later this year a collection of Gissing short stories in translation, edited by Pierre Coustillas. The twelve stories have been translated by the editor and a number of his colleagues at the University of Lille, including Michel Ballard, author of

a number of articles on Gissing and editor of *The Crown of Life*. All the stories belong to the 1890s and early 1900s.

One of the very last items of Gissing interest sent by the late Alfred Slotnick was an article from the *Boston Phoenix* of September 2, 1980 (section two, page 6), "Life as a moving target – Urban-renewal blues," by David Chute. The article begins and ends with pleasant and appropriate references to *New Grub Street*.

* * * * *

-- 33 --

Recent Publications

A number of the following references have been kindly sent by Ros Stinton, of Sheffield, to whom thanks are due for these and many others sent in the past.

- Anon., "Recent Books," *The Library*, September 1976, p. 275. Review of Michael Collie's bibliography.
- Peter Miles, "Reviews," *The Library*, December 1976, pp. 414-17. Review of Joseph Wolff's bibliography.
- C. B. C., "Short Notices," *Critical Quarterly*, Winter 1978, p. 93. Review of Gissing's *Diary*.
- Laurence Lerner, *The Context of English Literature: The Victorians*, London: Methuen & Co., 1978. Gissing appears on pp. 4, 19, 21, 88, 188.
- Peter Keating, *British Book News*, February 12, 1979, p. 221. Review of Gissing's *Diary* and *George Gissing on Fiction*, by Jacob and Cynthia Korg.
- Patricia Ann Alden, "Literature, English," *Dissertation Abstracts International*, June 1979, p. 7351A. Abstract of a thesis entitled "Studies in Social Mobility: Gissing, Hardy, Bennett and Lawrence."
- Bernard Bergonzi, "Special Book Section: Literature and Criticism," *Encounter*, July 1979, pp. 70-71. Review of John Goode's *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*.
- Anne Catharine Pilgrim, "Literature, English," *Dissertation Abstracts International*, November 1979, pp. 2698A-2699A. Abstract of a thesis entitled "Literary Theory and Practice in George Gissing's Novels of Social Criticism."
- Maria Teresa Chialant, "Recensioni," *Annali*, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Anglistica, Napoli, 1979, pp. 199-202. Review of John Goode's *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*.

-- 34 ---

- T. E. M. Boll, "Morley Roberts at Owens College," *The Library Chronicle* (University of Pennsylvania), Winter 1980, pp. 165-76. Contains many interesting references to Gissing.

- John Powers, "Reviews," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, June 1980, pp. 115-17. Review of Michael Collie's *The Alien Art* and John Goode's *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*.
 - Michael Squires, "Recent Books – British," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Summer 1980, pp. 314-15. Review of Gissing's *Diary*.
 - Carol T. Christ, "Book Review," *Victorian Studies*, Summer 1980, p. 528. Short comment on *The Odd Women* in a review of Gail Cunningham's *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*. See also Bibliography for 1979, pp. 592-93.
 - William Haley, "The New Women," *Books and Bookmen*, July 1980, pp. 20-21. Review of the Virago edition of *The Odd Women*.
 - Anon., "Booklet distils 17-year study of city novelist," *Express* (Wakefield), September 12, 1980, p. 13. Review of Clifford Brook's *George Gissing and Wakefield*.
 - Anon., "Author digs up a novel find," *Yorkshire Evening Post*, September 15, 1980, p. 6. Review of Clifford Brook's *George Gissing and Wakefield*.
 - Pierre Coustillas, "George Gissing," *Express* (Wakefield), September 26, 1980, p. 9. Letter to the Editor.
 - Ernesta Spencer Vollaro, "Le visite del Berenson in Calabria nella traduzione di Ernesta Spencer Vollaro," *Brutium*, July-September 1980, pp. 36-40. Contains allusions to Gissing.
- 35 --
- Paul Barker, "Letters: Grub Street News," *The Pennine Magazine*, August-September 1980, p. 9. Letter to the editor.
 - Pierre Coustillas, "Gissing on Hardy : A Novelist's View of a Contemporary," *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, Studies in Thomas Hardy, no. 12, October 1980, pp. 1-18.
 - Pierre Coustillas and Robert L. Selig, "Bibliographical Notes and Queries: Note 430 – Gissing's American Short Stories," *Book Collector*, Autumn 1980, p. 428.
 - Pierre Coustillas and Robert L. Selig, "Unknown Gissing Stories from Chicago," *Times Literary Supplement*, December 12, 1980, pp. 1417-18.
 - Patrick Parrinder and Robert M. Philmus, *H. G. Wells's Literary Criticism*, The Harvester Press, 1980. Contains many references to Gissing and reprints Wells's review of *The Paying Guest* and his *Contemporary Review* article on Gissing of August 1897.
 - Frank Morley, *Literary Britain: A Reader's Guide to Writers and Landmarks*, London: Hutchinson, 1980. Gissing appears on pp.119, 160, 256, 370, 389.