ISSN 0017-0615

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 XIX, Number 4
October, 1983
****

Gissing, Grant Allen and "Free Union"

Alison Cotes
University of Queensland

At the end of Gissing's novel of 1893, *The Odd Women*, Rhoda Nunn finally shows herself unwilling, in spite of her devotion to the feminist cause, to defy convention totally and enter into a free union with Everard Barfoot. On these grounds, Everard decides against forming a permanent relationship with her, and sums her up in these words:

> He had magnified Rhoda's image. She was not the glorious rebel he had pictured. Like any other woman, she mistrusted her love without the sanction of society … He had not found his

****
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
****

> ideal – though in these days it assuredly existed.[1]

Everard's ideal woman, brave enough to live out her rebellion against the convention of marriage while retaining her moral integrity, had hardly been the subject of serious English fiction before this

date. Sally Mitchell[2] mentions a number of novels of the mid-Victorian period where heroines of this kind occur, notably Matilda Charlotte Houstoun's *Recommended to Mercy*, but they are for the most part novels of minor literary substance and even less influence. However Grant Allen, in his *succès de scandale* of 1895 *The Woman Who Did*, creates in Herminia Barton a fictional representation of the kind of woman Everard wished that Rhoda Nunn had been.

In all the recent critical discussion of the New Woman novels of the 1890's,[3] nobody has yet noted the close similarity between Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* and George Gissing's *The Odd Women*, both of which deal directly with the problem of "free union" as a viable alternative to marriage for emancipated women. Even Patricia Stubbs, who deals with both books in her feminist discussion of English novels, *Women and Fiction*,[4] never makes any links between them. Although the two female protagonists make very different decisions about the roads their lives will take, many of the details in the novels are so similar that one is tempted to suggest a direct influence of one on the other, rather than a mere co-incidental resemblance.

What we know of dates of composition and publication points to the inevitable conclusion that the influence must be of Gissing on Grant Allen, rather than the other way around. *The Odd Women* was written between August and October 1892. According to his diary, Gissing corrected the final proofs on 26 January 1893, and the book was finally published on 10 April 1893. The title page of *The Woman Who Did* states that it was written at Perugia in the spring of 1893. No publisher would touch it at first, as it was so contentious, and

Allen threatened to destroy the manuscript; but it was finally accepted by John Lane and published in 1895.[5] It was an immediate success, going into 20 editions in the first year, and Grant Allen told Gissing in June 1895 that he was earning £25 per week from it, and would soon have £1000.[6] Gissing, uncharacteristically, made no bitter comment about this financial success by a greatly inferior rival.

One fact which I have not been able to establish is whether Grant Allen had actually read *The Odd Women* before he wrote *The Woman Who Did*. Certainly his interest in feminism was not new: he had published an article in 1889 called "Plain words on the woman question,"[7] and H. G. Wells, in a generally unfavourable review of *The Woman Who Did* in 1895, was astute enough to comment that Allen had obviously "written swiftly, hotly, with the suppressed indignation of years."[8] By 1893, Gissing's reputation was at its height, and it is likely that Grant Allen would have read his novels as they were published, just as Gissing frequently read his. Gissing's diary mentions, for example, "The Evolutionist at Large" (February 1891, two days before Gissing's marriage to Edith); *Life of Darwin* (April 1891); *Philistia* (which he called "paltry trash", April 1892); and *This Mortal Coil*, which elicited the comment "The time I waste in reading trash such as this" (June 3, 1893). Gissing was agreeably surprised when he finally met Grant Allen soon after the publication of *The Woman Who Did*, for he "liked him much better than [he] had expected" (*Diary*, 6 June 1895). One cannot use this evidence in reverse, to prove that Grant Allen had read *The Odd Women*, but it seems at least probable that he would have, particularly when the close similarities between the two novels are considered.

The similarities are of detail rather than of general intention, and this itself might be taken as an indication of some kind of specific influence. There are fashionable themes in novel writing as in anything else, and the 1890s saw a spate of New Women fiction, as Gail Cunningham has established so convincingly in her *New Women and The Victorian Novel* (1978). Grant Allen was writing in a currently fashionable tradition,

-- 4 --

and one cannot argue that his general interests were influenced by Gissing more than by anyone else, but many of the close resemblances of detail inevitably lead one to speculate about the possibility of direct influence.

There is, of course, no comparison between the two novels in terms of literary merit. *The Woman Who Did* is a very silly, badly-written book, and to waste any time pointing out its defects would be to dignify it with an attention it does not deserve. The longest and most effective demolition job was undertaken by Mrs. Oliphant in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* of January 1896, but Millicent Garrett Fawcett must be credited with the wittiest. In *The Contemporary Review* (May 1895) she compared Grant Allen's claim that *The Woman Who Did* was his magnum opus to Wordsworth's remark that he could write a play as good as any of Shakespeare's if he had the mind. Charles Lamb's rejoinder to that remark, uttered "with imperturbable conviction," was "Yes, it's the mind you want."[9]

Any modern critic of the novel would be hard put to approach the vitriol of such contemporary critics, and certainly Allen's attempts at fine writing in a passage such as "he would be his Herminia's guardian angel. He would use her love for him – for he knew she loved him – as a lever to egg her aside from these slippery moral precipices"[10] – need nobody to spell out their shortcomings. But for all its literary demerits, *The Woman Who Did* aroused such a storm of outrage, and proved so enormously popular, that it cannot be ignored. Unlike Gissing, who merely toyed with the idea of the free union in *The Odd Women* without working out fully its narrative implications, Grant Allen makes his heroine experience to the utmost the consequences of defying contemporary sexual conventions. Herminia Barton is a martyr to the cause of female sexual revolution as Rhoda is a martyr to the cause of female social and professional revolution.

-- 5 --

The theme of martyrdom is stressed in both novels. Herminia constantly and tediously reiterates her firm resolution to be a martyr to the cause. The following passage is but one of many:

> It never occured to me to think ... [that] my life could ever end in anything else but martyrdom. It must needs be so with all true lives and all good ones. For whoever sees the truth … must be raised many planes above the common mass of men around him; he must be a moral pioneer, and the moral pioneer is always a martyr. People won't allow others to be wiser and better than themselves unpunished. They can forgive anything, except moral superiority … Every great and good life can but end in a Calvary. (p. 42)

The martyrdom here, as in every other instance in the novel, is put in a Christian context, and Herminia speaks in Biblical metaphors constantly. Her lover Alan Merrick, refers to her, in a strange reversal of the biblical metaphor, as "an angel whose white wings he felt himself unworthy to touch with the hem of his garment" (p. 52), a metaphor of which the visual implications are as puzzling as the syntax is awkward. In *The Odd Women*, Rhoda uses no specific metaphors of Christian martyrdom, but she sees the cause for which she is so zealous as analogous to early Christian asceticism in the demands it makes on its followers. "I am seriously convinced," she tells Mary Barfoot, "that before the female sex can be raised from its low level there will have to be a widespread revolt against the sexual instinct. Christianity couldn't spread over the world without help of the ascetic ideal, and this great movement for women's emancipation must also have its

ascetics" (p. 61).

The different way in which the two women use a Christian analogy is as different as the way they actually behave – Rhoda uses it to justify her celibacy, whereas Herminia uses it to explain her overt flouting of

sexual convention. Rhoda sees herself as a martyr to the cause of women's social and professional emancipation, not to their sexual emancipation. The theme of sexual emancipation is raised, instead, by Mrs. Cosgrove, late in the novel, when Rhoda has finally rejected Everard. Mrs. Cosgrove's words could as well be a challenge to Herminia as a theoretical statement to Rhoda, for whom the opportunity has now passed:

> Seriously, I believe that if a few men and women in prominent position would contract marriage of the free kind, without priest or lawyer, open and defiantly, they would do more benefit to their kind than in any other way … We need martyrs. And yet I doubt whether the martyrdom would be very long, or very trying, to intellectual people. A woman of brains who boldly acted on her conviction would have no lack of congenial society. The best people are getting more liberal than they care to confess to each other. Wait until someone puts the matter to the test and you will see. (p. 285)

The idea of free union is one that is central to the love relationships of both Rhoda and Herminia, but in *The Odd Women* the issue is examined in only a theoretical and intellectual way. The plot never suggests that it will actually happen. For Rhoda, the possibility of free union and defying convention appears only *after* she falls in love with Everard: it is not a hypothetical commitment from the beginning, as it is with Herminia. In *The Odd Women* it is Everard who first raises the possibility, and his views are very close to Herminia's: "A free union presupposes equality of position. No honest man would propose it, for instance, to a woman incapable of understanding all it involved, or incapable of resuming her separate life if that became desirable" (p. 145). This statement Rhoda at first considers to be "mere ideal sentiment" (p. 148), but later on she is drawn to the idea, and asks herself whether she was capable of "the love which defies all humiliation? … Powerful was the

incitement to curiosity in a situation which, however it ended, would afford such matter for emotional hypothesis" (p. 213).

Rhoda is more and more tempted by free union (even though her conventional soul makes her really desire marriage) as a way of avoiding the ridicule she would arouse by abandoning her principles for marriage. "For months this argument had been in her mind, again and again she decided that the sensational step was preferable to a commonplace renunciation of all she had so vehemently preached" (p. 264). Interestingly, it is only after she has rejected Everard, who finally and coldly offers her conventional marriage, that she rejects the conventions, and says that she will not marry him "with the forms of marriage," to which he replies that she is playing with a serious matter. Free union has finally become for Rhoda a point of dogma, but only when her emotions are no longer involved.

For Herminia, on the other hand, the idea of free union is from the beginning fundamental to

her theoretical position, and when love comes, in the form of Alan Merrick, it has to fit into her already constructed schema. It is Alan who has to adapt, to be persuaded; Alan who argues for the conventional forms. He is finally conquered, by his own love for Herminia, and accepts her terms. In *The Woman Who Did*, it is the woman who is the stronger partner, but in *The Odd Women*, although Rhoda feels sure that if Everard loved her his theories of free union "would sooner or later be swept aside: he would plead with her to become his legal wife," (p. 148), she does not have the power over him that Herminia has over Alan.

This is one way in which Gissing displays greater integrity in his novel than Grant Allen does in his. Basically the plot of *The Odd Women* bears out the sentiments of male dominance that Everard states as credo early in his discussions with Rhoda: "no man, however civilized, would wish the woman he loves to be his equal. Marriage by capture can't quite be done away with. You say you have not the least love for me; if you had, should I like you to confess it instantly? A man must plead and woo; but there are different ways" (p. 182).

-- 8 --

Finally Everard rejects Rhoda because he recognizes in her a threat to his supremacy: "She had great qualities; but was there not much in her that he must subdue, reform, if they were really to spend their lives together? Her energy of domination perhaps excelled his" (p. 268).

Grant Allen, however, wants to have it both ways. So that the full consequences of the plot can be worked out, Alan must be conquered by Herminia's demands, and submit to a free union which he isn't morally or intellectually commited to; but at the same time, Grant Allen insists on the conventional male/female relationship:

> It must be always so. The man must needs retain for many years to come the personal hegemony he has usurped over the woman; and the woman who once accepts him as lover or as husband must give way in the end, even in matters of principle, to his virile self-assertion. She would be less a woman, and he less a man, were any other result possible. Deep down in the very roots of the idea of sex we come on that prime antithesis – the male, active and aggressive; the female, sedentary, passive and receptive. (p. 83)

This kind of disparity between theory and plot is one of the things that makes *The Woman Who Did* such an unsatisfactory novel.

Too much need not be made of the general theme of women's emancipation in the two novels. Mary Barfoot, Rhoda Nunn and Herminia Barton all take the conventional feminist point of view of the time, and no claim for a particular influence of one novel on the other can be made on these grounds. It is, as I have said, specific minor details which point more towards close identification. Both Rhoda and Herminia live in Chelsea: Herminia in the midst of the bohemian world of journalists and Fabian socialists; Rhoda in Mary Barfoot's

-- 9 --

"plain, roomy old house in Queen's Road" (p. 20). Both are attracted to the idea of suicide by poison: Rhoda, in self disgust at her feelings for Everard, vows that "if she could not crush out her love for this man she would poison herself – as she had so often decided she would do if ever some hopeless malady, such as cancer, took hold upon her" (p. 287); Herminia frees her daughter by drinking off a phial of prussic acid, "that a scientific friend had given her long ago for use in case of

extreme emergency" (p. 240). The original impulse may be from *Madame Bovary*, but the parallel is still interesting. The antipathy of both women to even the idea of marriage is, for this period, extreme: Rhoda "would have girls taught that marriage is a thing to be avoided rather than hoped for. [She] would teach them that for the majority of women marriage means disgrace" (p. 99); and Herminia, when Alan Merrick proposes marriage to her, recoils with "a flush of shame and horror" (p. 35). Not even Sue Bridehead reacts so violently.

The big difference between Rhoda and Herminia, of course, is that Herminia, for all her liberated theories, remains an image of romantic womanhood, with the finest ideals of motherhood and femininity. Unlike Rhoda Nunn, who dresses very plainly, and bears herself "with splendid disdain of common mortals," (p. 256) Herminia's sensual nature is enhanced by her clothing, which "set off to the utmost the lissome grace of her rounded figure" (p. 3). Her beauty may be the "beauty of holiness" (p. 4), but her feminine sexuality is always insisted upon. The fatuous chauvinism and condescension of Grant Allen towards even a woman whose ideals he professes to respect is revealed by his language. Out of context, a phrase such as "principle was still deeper and more imperious with her than passion" (p. 54) may suggest an objective admiration on the part of the author for his heroine's ideals, but the sentence in which the words appear reveals Grant Allen's real attitude: "Passionate as she was and with that opulent form she could hardly be otherwise …"

Yet for all his insistence on her sexuality, Grant Allen is remarkably coy about specifics, except in the romantic haze of the settings. When the big night arrives Herminia dresses herself in white, puts white lilies on the mantel-piece in her Pre-Raphaelite room, and is "aglow with virginal shrinking." But of their first sexual embrace, all that Grant Allen can say is that "Alan caught her in his arms and kissed her forehead tenderly. And thus was Herminia Barton's espousal consummated" (p. 78).

Herminia is really too good to be true. She has all the best of the avant-garde feminist ideals, such as equal responsibility for the child of both mother and father – ideals which she lives out to the full – but she also conforms to the old Victorian ideal of the sanctity of motherhood.

> She knew that to be a mother is the best privilege of her sex, a privilege of which unholy man-made institutions now conspire to deprive half the finest and noblest women in our civilised communities. Widowed as she was, she still pitied the unhappy beings doomed to the cramped life and dwarfed heart of the old maid; pitied them as sincerely as she despised those unhealthy souls who would make of celibacy, wedded, or unwedded, a sort of anti-natural religion for women. (p. 146)

Rhoda Nunn, to use Grant Allen's terms, is one of those "unhealthy souls," and yet she is, perhaps because of this, a much more realistic creation. There is plenty of evidence that she is sexually passionate – her night of solitary agony, with "the passions of her flesh torturing her until she thought of death as a refuge" (p. 283) is the most obvious example – but she is also a totally dedicated feminist, and sees marriage (or even free union) as an obstacle to the cause of women's emancipation. Unlike Herminia, she does not think it would be possible for her to go on working if she threw in her lot with Everard:

> Love of husband – perhaps of child. There must be more than that. Rhoda did not deceive herself as to the requirements of her nature. Practical activity in some intellectual undertaking … – the impulses of her heart once satisfied, these things would again claim her. (p. 270)

So she turns him down, thus proving herself as committed to her principles as Herminia is to hers.

Nobody in *The Odd Women* sees the possibility of educated women continuing to work after marriage. Both Everard and Mary Barfoot agree that if a girl marries "her calling at once changes. The old business is thrown aside" (p. 98). It could be argued that Grant Allen, by making Herminia earn her living as a journalist, is taking women's emancipation one step further, but Herminia at first only remains working until she is visibly pregnant. After Alan's death and her confinement, she takes up journalism only, it seems, as a matter of financial necessity, all other sources of income having been closed to her by a melodramatic combination of circumstances: Alan forgets to sign the will in which he leaves all his possessions to her, his father leaves her penniless in Perugia, and her own father refuses to have anything to do with her. She is never given the choice of not working, so the issue is in fact evaded.

Grant Allen seems to have taken the idea of free union, which Gissing merely explored in a theoretical sense in *The Odd Women*, and worked it through, in a narrative way, to its logical end. But although the narrative in *The Woman Who Did* is bold and trail-blazing in itself, the attitude of Grant Allen towards his heroine and her fate is one of fatuous romanticism and weakens the novel's effect. Contemporary criticism of the novel seizes, correctly, on this point. Professor Fairclough[11] saw the book as "an academic exercise, a problem stated and solved," and the perceptive Mrs. Oliphant snorted that "the wonder is that, in all [Herminia's] crudeness, with her glib arguments and logic of three-and-twenty … she should be taken up by any supposedly reasonable man

as the leader of enlightened opinion, the thinker before her age."[12]

In effect, Herminia operates in a moral and social vacuum. There is no real intellectual debate, no realistic doubt in her own mind, no dramatic tension about her decision. Although society condemns and ultimately destroys her, she operates outside its limits, and makes few attempts to conform to its requirements. In argument Alan is no match for her, though as a true woman she bows to his will: she is an impossible combination of dedicated idealist and submissive womanhood. The debate between Everard and Rhoda, on the other hand, is a product of the demands of society and their mutually strong wills, and is therefore much more urgent and realistic. Rhoda engages in dialogue: Herminia preaches from a pulpit, and hides constantly behind her oft-reiterated text, "Tis the Truth you Know; And the Truth shall make us free." There is no opportunity of reply to her tedious sermon, so the novel becomes a tub-thumper, and it is no wonder that such trivialisation of a serious issue killed off the New Woman novel, as Gail Cunningham suggests.[13]

I have no access to any biographical material which would prove conclusively that Grant Allen had read *The Odd Women* and that it inspired him to produce a fictional version of an idea that had long interested him, but the resemblances between the novels may be thought striking enough to indicate specific influence of one on the other, not simply general affinity.

There are interesting similarities also between *The Woman Who Did* and another of Gissing's novels, *In the Year of Jubilee*. Here, though, the dates appear to rule out the possibility of direct influence. *The Woman Who Did* was written in Spring 1893 (probably March-April) but was not published until early in 1895. Gissing wrote *In the Year of Jubilee*[14] between January and April 1894, and it was published on 1 December 1894. Gissing first met Grant Allen in May 1895, soon

after the publication of *The Woman Who Did*. In August 1895, Gissing

-- 13 --

sent Grant Allen a copy of *In the Year of Jubilee*, a fact which suggests that Grant Allen had not read Gissing's novel by then. Gissing could certainly not have read *The Woman Who Did* while he was writing *Jubilee*, as Allen's novel had not been published, and the two authors had not then met, so that even the chance of Gissing's seeing the manuscript is ruled out.

And yet, for two novels written without any possibility of one having influenced the other, the number of detailed resemblances is remarkable. After she has been deserted by her husband, Nancy Lord, the heroine of *In the Year of Jubilee*, thinks of, and makes some attempt at, supporting herself and her baby through journalism, an endeavour in which she, unlike Herminia, is singularly unsuccessful. (Perhaps the educational advantages fall in favour of Herminia here: Girton is, after all, several rungs above "A day school which was reputed 'modern'" (*Jubilee*, p. 14). Both Nancy and Herminia write novels about their experiences: Herminia's is published, but excites little attention; Nancy's is dismissed by Lionel Tarrant, her husband, as being not "literature, but a little bit of Nancy's heart and mind … Here and there you have a page of very decent English, and you are nowhere on the level of the ordinary female novelist. Indeed … I was surprised at what you had turned out" (p. 428). Herminia's novel too, was "a little bit of [her] heart and mind," for it was "the despairing heart cry of a soul in revolt. It embodied the experiences and beliefs and sentiments of a martyred woman." (p. 149). Herminia wrote hers "with fierce energy" (p. 149) whereas Nancy's "distasteful labour, slow, wearisome, [was] often performed without pretence of hope" (p. 312); but they are both novels written from the heart.

Another conventional but interesting correspondence is in the rural romanticism of the setting of both couples' courtship. Two passages in particular are worth noting.

> Alan led her to a grassy bank where thyme and basil grew matted, and the hum of myriad wings stirred the sultry air. Herminia let him lead her. She was woman enough by nature to

-- 14 --

> like being led. Only, it must be the right man who led her, and he must lead her along the path that her conscience approved of. Alan seated himself by her side, and took her hand in his. Herminia let him hold it. This love-making was pure honey. Dappled spots of light and shade flecked the ground beneath the trees like a jaguar's skin. Wood-pigeons crooned, unseen, from the leafy covert. She sat there long without uttering a word. [*The Woman Who Did*, p. 56]

> The calm of the golden afternoon could not have been more profound. Birds twittered softly in the wood, and if a leaf rustled, it was only at the touch of wings. Earth breathed its many perfumes upon the slumberous air … About the roots of the elm above grew masses of fern, and beneath it a rough bit of the bank was clothed with pennywort, the green discs and yellowing fruity spires making an exquisite patch of colour. In the shadow of bushes near at hand hartstongue abounded, with fronds hanging to the length of an arm.
>
> "Now," said Tarrant, gaily, "you shall have some blackberries." And he went to gather them, returning in a few minutes with a large leaf full. [*In the*

Year of Jubilee, pp. 123-24]

Lionel woos Nancy with Keats, whereas Herminia conquers Alan with theoretical arguments, but both courtships take place in seclusion, surrounded by dappled sunlight, dense foliage, and the song of birds. Herminia's honied love-making is matched by Lionel's gift of ripe blackberries, but Nancy's way back is through briars.

Perhaps the most striking correspondence between the two novels, though, is the interest in the Godwinian idea of separate establishments for man and wife. It had been hinted at in Gissing's novel of 1890, *The*

Emancipated, where Reuben Elgar felt "how absurd it was for two people, just because they were married, to live perpetually within sight of each other! Wasn't it Godwin who, on marrying, made an arrangement that he and his wife should inhabit separate abodes, and be together only when they wished? The only rational plan, that."[15] Reuben, however, is a very disreputable character, who is bored by his wife and child and wants more freedom for ignoble pleasures, so the suggestion cannot be taken as a serious authorial statement. In *The Woman Who Did* this Godwinian ideal is presented from the woman's point of view, and is painted in rosy terms:

> Why should this friendship differ at all, she asked, in respect of time and place, from any other friendship? The notion of necessarily keeping house together, the cramping idea of the family tie, belonged entirely to the *régime* of the man-made patriarchate, where the women and the children were the slaves and chattels of the lord and master. In a free society, was it not obvious that each woman would live her own life apart, would preserve her independence, and would receive the visits of the man for whom she cared – the father of her children? Then only could she be free. (p. 69)

Herminia's arrangement with Alan operates in this way until she has to leave England for her confinement, but they intend to keep up separate establishments when they return. Alan's death makes it impossible, of course, for the arrangement to be put to the test after the birth of the baby, but it is tried, successfully, in *In the Year of Jubilee*.

Lionel Tarrant, who has by the end of the novel become the author's spokesman, sets Nancy up in a small plain house at Harrow, where she lives with the baby and the housekeeper, and is honoured by an occasional visit "whenever he thought fit" (p. 402) that is to say, whenever he can tear himself away from his society

acquaintances. She greets him always with "joyous expectation" (p. 406) and "rational acquiescence" (p. 413) and he occasionally even takes her to a music hall. The point of view is different, but the situation is the same.

Whether Grant Allen actually read Gissing's novels, and if so, whether he was directly influenced by them, must necessarily remain in the realm of literary speculation, unless some evidence about what he read emerges. There is, as I have said, a distinct possibility that Grant Allen read *The Odd Women* before he wrote *The Woman Who Did* – the faint similarity of the titles

perhaps gives added weight to the theory that he did – but the equally specific resemblances between *The Woman Who Did* and other Gissing novels, especially *In the Year of Jubilee*, throw doubt on the idea of direct influence. Whatever the explanation for them, though, the resemblances are interesting, not least in the light of the great disparity between the literary talents of the two men, their very different personalities and life styles, and, particularly, their later friendship. Apart from *The British Barbarians* of 1895, a novel even sillier and less realistic than *The Woman Who Did*, Grant Allen wrote no more novels about free union, so it seems that his interest in the question had worked itself out by the middle of the decade. Gissing, on the other hand, went on to live it out in his relationship with Gabrielle Fleury, to whom he wrote love letters as romantic and effusive as any speech of Herminia Barton's.

The idea of free union was, for Grant Allen, merely an intellectual theory, and his own marriage was contented and faithful on both sides, no matter how grandly he allowed his heroine to berate the institution. Gissing, more timid in his fictional portrayal of unmarried love, eventually came to live out his theories in his own life, even though he did display a characteristic caution by living in exile with Gabrielle in France and revealing the truth about their relationship to only a few close friends. Perhaps Gisssing's ability to envisage a

free union in actuality, not just in theory, may help to explain why his fictional consideration of the matter carries more conviction than Grant Allen's.

1. George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971), p. 269. All future references to the novel will be to this edition, and will be noted by page number in the text.

2. Sally Mitchell, *The fallen angel: chastity, class and women's reading 1835-1880* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981), pp. 108ff.

3. See, for example, Gail Cunningham, *The new woman and the Victorian novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978); A. R. Cunningham, "The new woman fiction of the 1890's," *Victorian Studies*, 17, No. 3, December 1973; Lloyd Fernando, "Gissing's studies in vulgarism: aspects of his anti-feminism," *Southern Review*, IV, 1970.

4. Patricia Stubbs, *Women and fiction: feminism and the novel 1880-1920* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, and New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979).

5. Edward Clodd, *Grant Allen: a memoir* (London: Grant Richards, 1900), p. 154.

6. Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the life of literature in late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 375 (entry for Thursday 6th June 1895). All subsequent references will be to *Diary*.

7. Grant Allen, "Plain words on the Woman Question," *Fortnightly Review*, XLVI, 1889.

8. H. G. Wells, review of *The Woman Who Did*, *Saturday Review*, 9 March 1895, p. 319.

9. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, "The Woman Who Did," *Contemporary Review*, 67, May 1895, pp. 625-31.

10. Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did* (London: John Lane and Boston: Roberts Bros., 1895), p. 54. All future references to the novel will be to this edition, and will be noted by page number in the text.

11. Quoted in William Chislett, *Moderns and near-moderns: essays on Henry James, Frank R .Stockton and others*. (New York: Grafton, 1928), pp. 202-03.

12. M. E. Oliphant, "The anti-marriage league," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, CLIX, January 1896, pp. 135-49.

13. Gail Cunningham, p. 64.

14. George Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1976). All future references to the novel will be to this edition, and will be noted by page number in the text.

15. George Gissing, *The Emancipated* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1977), p. 301.

****

Gissing's Use of Irony

Brian Robert Walker
Wymondham College, Norfolk

[This is the second article reproduced from Brian Walker's unpublished M.A. thesis. See our July 1983 number.]

Although many commentators on Gissing's writings have alluded to his habitual use of irony, there has not yet been any attempt at a detailed examination of his ironic method. Such an exhaustive examination of this aspect of his work must, necessarily, remain outside the scope of this study. However, because irony, as a technique of establishing balance and compromise, is an integral part of much of Gissing's work it is necessary,

at the outset, to examine, if briefly, his ironic technique.

Not only are the novels themselves moulded around an ironic perception of life, but they are also a direct expression of a personality which might be said to embody many of the characteristics which Kierkegaard has defined as "essential irony":

> Irony is an existential determination, and nothing is more ridiculous than to suppose that it consists in the use of certain phraseology, or when an author congratulates himself upon succeeding in expressing himself ironically. Whoever has essential irony has it all day long, not bound to any specific form, because it is the infinite within him.[1]

Gissing possessed "essential irony" not only all day long, but all life long, from the days when he was the "uproarious tutor" at Frederic Harrison's who "could see the amusing side of common things and bring it forward with gentle irony,"[2] through his life-long friendship with Morley Roberts who confirmed "that irony which was ever his favourite weapon"[3] to the entries of his commonplace book which are evidence that his critical tendencies were acutely responsive to the small ironies of day to day living.[4] His reading preferences, in the same way, betray an obsession with those writers in whose work irony is "significantly present," from the aloofness of the classical writers, especially Aeschylus and Sophocles, through to Chaucer, Cervantes, Swift and Gibbon.[5] Morley Roberts, in his *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*,[6] specifically makes mention of Gissing's admiration of Samuel Butler's ironic under-currents:

> I have forgotten to say how much he admired Samuel Butler's books, or those with which he was more particularly acquainted, *Erewhon* and *Erewhon Revisited*.[7]

-- 20 --

Gissing's supposed grim and unhumorous demeanour was, to a large extent, a front, albeit half subconscious, for an internal ironic manipulating of rude reality to a wider, more tolerant, even comic acceptance of things. For example, Morley Robert's statement that Maitland's (Gissing's) favourite and most often repeated expression was "damn the nature of things" has usually been taken, out of context, as being indicative of Gissing's habitual dwelling on a pessimistic determinism. It is revealing to consider this expletive in its entire context:

> "'Damn the nature of things,'" as Porson said when he swallowed embrocation instead of whiskey!" was what I went on to put into his mouth. This, indeed, was one of Maitland's favourite exclamations. It stood with him for all the strange and blasphemous and eccentric oaths with which I then decorated my language…[8]

Gissing's utilization of this expression is indicative of his ironic perception of things. In using it, he was giving typical utterance to an ironic viewpoint which, in nearly all his novels, repeatedly mocked determinism and those who manipulated the idea of Fate as a whipping boy for their own weaknesses and personal failings.[9] It is a point of view which preferred, rather, to see apparently cosmic happenings in terms of human, often comic, fallibility, in this case Porson's ludicrous error with the embrocation and the implied weakness of Roberts's well-known irascibility.

It is through irony that Gissing is able to achieve and preserve a greater distance between himself and his art. Often, he was able to stand apart from and mock the amusing side of things he deeply cherished. His admiration for the great classical writers is well known, yet he makes a consistent point of poking fun, usually light but occasionally quite biting, at classical scholars.[10] All the same even Morley Roberts, who was for a long time a most intimate friend, considered Gissing as misplaced as a novelist and believed that "He would have been in

-- 21 --

his true element as a don of a college,"[11] adding, in support, this account of Gissing's essential "remoteness":

> I went on to make a little fun of his great joy in Greek metres. I remember that once he turned to me with an assured air of strange amazement and exclaimed: “Why, my dear fellow, do you know there are actually miserable men who do not know – who have never even heard of – the minuter differences between Dochmiacs and Antispasts!”[12]

Irony, as a primary literary technique, had assumed new and broader functions in the earlier half of the eighteenth century. Its development was a cultural phenomenon, a response to changes in consciousness and of ways of looking at the world. With the gradual dislodging of the old “closed world” view of life by the new “open universe” conception and with the growth of scepticism, relativism, liberalism and positivism, irony became increasingly philosophical, a way of organizing one’s responses to a world which seemed fundamentally at odds with mankind.

These early eighteenth-century conditions of transition and unease, which encouraged the development of the ironic method that was brought to its highest standard in the works of Swift and Defoe, were paralleled by the renewed crises of uncertainty precipitated by Darwin and the rationalist philosophers towards the end of the nineteenth century. In a situation where a confident challenging of traditional beliefs had failed to provide any satisfactory alternative, the ironic point of view could, and did, provide a measure of certainty, if only by the broadness of its conclusions, the primary one being an acceptance and valuing of basic contradictions:[13]

> [Irony is] a view of life which recognises that experience is open to multiple interpretations,

> of which no *one* is simply right, and that the co-existence of incongruities is part of the structure of existence.[14]

The ironic viewpoint accepts and presents life as a juxtaposition of two mutually incompatible ways of seeing things. It is a “neutral discoverer and explorer of incongruities,”[15] a method not of seeing “true” meanings beneath “false” pictures, but of seeing both aspects as conditioned and determined by the other. Whilst it has many of the qualities of existentialism, the ironic point of view falls short of the absurd, which symbolises the incurable and chimerical hoax of things, and attempts to maintain a positive balance which, when confronted with an apparently unresolvable contradiction, prefers to embrace both aspects of that contradiction rather than draw back into an existentialist attitude of despair:

> Irony is his [the writer’s] recognition of the fact that the world in its essence is paradoxical and that an ambivalent attitude alone can grasp its contradictory totality.[16]

Whilst, however, the nineteenth century provided those conditions for the rejuvenation of the ironic consciousness, the ironist was only superficially interested in these phenomena but was fascinated, rather, by the wider aspects of human nature such temporal manifestations might illuminate:

> Irony in the eminent sense directs itself not against this or that particular

> existence but against the whole given actuality of a certain time and situation … It is not this or that phenomenon but the totality of existence which it considers *sub specie ironiae.*[17]

It is just this wide-ranging, universally acceptable, yet balancing and essentially positive irony which

runs through Gissing's best work. Irony is never negative, never reducing, its comprehensive scope excludes the possibility of misanthropism or despair:

> There is vigour, there is humility, there is sympathy, in the ironist's search, there is judgement finally – but never serene certainty.[18]

If, then, Gissing *is*, fundamentally, an ironist this must necessarily negate that conception of him as a subjective, whining pessimist, "self-pitying, spiritless, resentful, humourless, [whose] lucid bleat drags down his characters and his words,"[19] and must tend to confirm that "remarkable, almost Hardyesque tolerance, a blend of accurate judgement and humane forbearance, Gissing shows toward his characters."[20] Certainly the ironic viewpoint accords much closer with the latter interpretation:

> His [the ironist'sl is an interested objectivity; he is detached but not indifferent, withdrawn but not removed. He may, as an observer of the human scene, be moved to compassion, disgust, laughter, disdain, sympathy or horror – the whole range of reaction is evidently his: what distinguishes him uniquely is a rare and artistically fruitful combination of complexity, distance, implication.[21]

It is this distanced, yet involved and caring subjective objectivity which Alan Lelchuk perceives to be at the centre of Gissing's view of life:

> The prevailing, realistic spirit informing Gissing's work is often conveyed through the broad perspective of irony, penetrating enough to lift the pathetic into the tragic and generous

> enough to protect against extremes of cynicism and fatalism. ... His work satirizes society's impostors and charlatans and he attacks the cheap and spurious forms of philosophicalities that debase the real things. ... Irony, as the controlling fictional voice, generates a kind buoyancy that militates against the almost overbearing greyness of the content … it ensures a generosity of spirit when Gissing is confronted with the implacable truths of social and economic reality. … The ironic method enables him to detach himself from his character and thereby avoid a dangerous self-pity.[22]

Irony often approaches tragedy. High tragedy and deep irony are closely related. However, just as tragedy is able to rise above pathos and despair by transfiguring and transmuting the tragic

experience onto another plane of reality,[23] so irony, through its inherent qualities of balance and toleration infuses the ironic situation with the warming light of a thoughtful compassion. Writing on Jane Austen in his study *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure*, Andrew Wright defines her ironic viewpoint in just these terms:

> Of the contradictions in human experience, Jane Austen has a perception which yields a detachment, and a detachment which grants a perception. There is, in her disengagement, an objectivity which is not scientific, because not disinterested. In fact she is deeply concerned with both aspects of the contradictions she perceives: searching the orchards of human experience she finds the bittersweet fruit of confusing appearance and ambiguous essence – and she becomes a person of the divided, the ironic vision.[24]

Similarly, Lionel Trilling, writing about the same author, pinpoints her ironic method:

> Jane Austen's irony is only secondarily a matter of tone. Primarily it is a mode of comprehension. It perceives the world through an awareness of its contradictions, paradoxes, and anomalies. It is by no means detached. It is partizan with generosity of spirit – it is on the side of "life," of "affirmation."[25]

Jane Austen's literary world might, at first glance, seem far removed from that of George Gissing. In essence, however, their ironic awareness of the world and their fictionalized expression of that awareness are similar enough to allow the application of both the above quotations equally well to Gissing's novels. The sombre *The Nether World* is as much on the side of life, of "affirmation," as is Jane Austen's seemingly hybrid *Mansfield Park*. Both novelists balance antithetical qualities in a mutually enriching harmony; pride and prejudice, reason and passion, the individual and society. Equally, whilst both saw life not as a well-ordered whole but as a set of irreconcilable antinomies, both insisted on the essentiality of complete self-awareness, for a positive connection to life. Both embody an ironic balance not only within books but *between* books, Jane Austen's two antithetical positives, Fanny Price and Elizabeth Bennet, paralleling Gissing's Jane Snowdon and Lyddy Trent.

Gissing's consistent utilization of irony went strangely unperceived by the majority of his contemporaries but, whilst he repeatedly expressed his dismay at the failure of his critics to appreciate his work, he rarely bothered to correct these misinterpretations, preferring, with appropriately ironic resignation if not satisfaction, to paste the grosser reviews in his collecting book.[26] Once, however, in a letter to Gabrielle Fleury, he did feel compelled to protest against the ubiquitous lack of appreciation of his ironic method:

> The truth is, girlie, that very few people in England have intelligence in art. *My motives are too subtle*. You know that I constantly use *irony* and this is never understand [*sic*]; it is all taken in the most stupid literal sense.[27]

Various ironic techniques are utilized. Gissing often exploits dramatic irony to expose a character's self-deception. For example, *The Odd Women* "begins with Gissing's favorite irony – the decision made too late"[28] and continues to echo the fatuity and irresponsibility of Dr. Madden's myopic opening page pronouncement regarding the necessity of women avoiding any contact with financial matters:

> "I don't think girls ought to be troubled about this kind of thing," he added apologetically. "Let men grapple with the world; for, as the old hymn says, 'tis their nature to.' I should grieve indeed if I thought my girls would ever have to distress themselves about money matters … No, no; women, old or young, should never have to think about money."[29]

More significantly, Gissing manipulates an ironic viewpoint to achieve a complexity of meaning which, as is the case with some eighteenth-century novelists, can be confusing or even misleading:

> Another characteristic of Mr. Gissing makes his books very difficult to criticize. There is an undercurrent of subtle irony running through them which, failing all guidance from the intonation of a sentence, or a sudden flash of facial expression, renders it not always easy to feel here whether he is speaking himself or not.[30]

Denzil Quarrier appears to be the typical novel of "progressive significance"[31] ending, typically, with evidence of Quarrier's growth to self-knowledge. Thus, Quarrier's statement, assertively stressed, at the end of

the novel – "Now I understand the necessity for social law"[32] – should embody the novel's "intention" of reducing, ironically, the central character's previously assertive belief that one should live according to a more deeply felt personal morality. Certainly, on the surface, the narrative vindicates the necessity for social man to adhere to social morality, even though this works against natural justice, mutual faith, purity and love. Denzil and Lilian have attempted to defy social shibboleths and have suffered society's vengeance. Lilian commits suicide to avoid social disgrace, Denzil's social conscience drives him to drink.

Yet the insistent undercurrent of the narrative works directly against this thesis, against seeing the novel as a moralistic, reproaching tract for the times. Lilian's love for Quarrier, a love which defies social law, is the only unquestioned positive in the story. Despite Quarrier's own "enlightening," the internal truth, the felt life of the novel, vindicates the defiance of social morality. The reader's vague perception of the truth is crystallised, by the very certainty of Quarrier's final assertion, into a reaction against it.[33] Is not the tragedy a consequence of sexual jealousy, of thwarted ambition? Are these to be confined by any social rules? Is there not a greater need for the reform of the laws of personal integrity and of individual relations? What is the relationship between the individual and social life? Must one condition the other or could they be

complementary?

It is through irony, through the recognition of the fact that "experience is open to multiple interpretations of which no *one* is simply right, and that the co-existence of incongruities is part of the structure of existence,"[34] through the balancing and maintaining in their tension of antithetical views of life that allow *no* final, incontrovertible judgement, that Gissing stimulates this questioning reaction in the reader.

The complexity of his ironic viewpoint is, perhaps, best seen in *New Grub Street*. Here, persons and

destinies are so balanced that one stands in ironic or tragic juxtaposition to the other until all the elements are fused in that image of human potentiality wasted that is Gissing's dominant perception. In that novel, the organic effect is a consequence of a dialectic of contrasts which gradually become a fusion of identical passions. Gissing's undisguised admiration for the Milvain type of actively practical intelligence, for the prose of life against the passion, and his obvious self-identification with his suffering, artistic alter-ego Reardon leads him to balance his position so precisely that the reader reacts, alternatively, for and against both positives. Is Gissing's novel an *attack* on the Romantic conception of creative isolation or is it an attack on the modern practical man, or both? The "dreamy bliss"[35] of Jasper's final appearance in the novel is unconvincing yet its positioning as the closing vignette forces the reader back into a reconsidering of Reardon's own dreamy bliss, his romantic evocation of the Greek sunset, which is an equally unconvincing positive.[36] It is the unease created by this delicate balancing of unresolved alternatives, this concern with "both aspects of the contradictions"[37] perceived which gives Gissing his primary quality.

In the same way, the authorial balance of sympathies in *Our Friend the Charlatan* is equally subtle. Dyce Lashmar, the charlatan of the title, is certainly a trickster, a hypocrite, superficially vain, yet he is, as certainly, "our friend." Lord Dymchurch, whose practical answer to life's difficulties is to escape, to follow the Romantic "back to nature" ideal, is certainly "good," almost pure, but, as his name suggests, he is surely not intended as an unqualified positive. Like Swift's Houyhnhnms, he has all the virtue but Dyce, like the Yahoos, has all the life.

The balanced delicacy of Gissing's ironic method is nowhere embodied in more succinct form than in an early essay, "On Battersea Bridge" (1883).[38] It is, at first glance, the archetypal descriptive vignette so beloved

by the readers of the serious Victorian periodicals. The narrator poetically describes the beauty of the river and its wharfs and inlets at twilight. Self-assured in the conviction of his powers of appreciation and percipience of the nuances of light and shade which the river manifests, he turns his attention to the working man who stands beside him and who appears equally intent in contemplating the wonders of this natural phenomenon:

> I said that no one of those passing over the bridge seemed observant of the beauties of earth and heaven. Yet, as I stood leaning on the parapet, a man paused in his walk, and came, he also, to lean and gaze, a working man, who, as a glance showed me, was more awake to leisurely sympathies than his fellows. He did not seem to pay much attention to the phenomena of the sky, but kept his look fixed on a piece of foreshore I have mentioned, apparently watching the tiny ripples at its edge, perchance admiring the patches of various light which lay about in the shallow pools left by the tide. After some minutes I felt a certain curiosity to discover whether my neighbour really was a kindred soul to whom these things spoke intimately. When darkness was already drawing in around us I turned my face in his direction. He noticed my appeal, looked at me in a friendly way, then nodding downwards, said gravely – "Throws up a deal o' mud don't it?"

The passage is full of ironic implication. The narrator's shock, and probable disgust, at the workman's "ignoble" response is unstated but is the more intensely conveyed in being so. He feels that he can safely leave his reader to be appalled and to share his consternation at this further example of contemporary cultural regression without more comment. Yet, surely, the main effect of the passage is both to devalue this type of descriptive vignette with its forced archaisms and over-figurative diction and, more significantly, to question

the position of the narrator. Against the meditant's remote, pretentious and condescending attitude Gissing balances the suggestion, through the direct, instinctive, ungrammatical diction of the labourer, that there are other, less aesthetic, more elemental and equally profound levels of perception, a suggestion which is set as a counterpoint to the narrator's myopic view of things. In an industrial age, few people have time to develop "leisurely sympathies" or to appreciate the beauties of a sunset or the variegation of the colours and tones of a landscape, but their capacity for wonder remains as vital. Certainly, the Thames can be a thing of beauty; equally certainly it can astound by its power to be unbeautiful, to throw up "a deal o' mud." To be incapable of seeing the beauty is only as short-sighted as an inability to see the filth or to be impressed by the filth. Gissing offers no judgement about either viewpoint but, rather, allows each to stand in complementary but ironic opposition.

Yet "on Battersea Bridge" is usually taken as a typical expression of the prejudiced Gissing, of Gissing the snob, the classicist who is out of touch with the realities of his time, as evidence of "his disillusionment with the potentialities of human nature."[39] Perhaps Gissing appreciated the irony of this misrepresentation of his thought, for certainly it is a misrepresentation. The urbane balancing of attitudes in this slight article is unmistakable.

In a letter to his sister, Ellen, Gissing wrote: "I am able to look at both sides, and to laugh at the weaknesses of both."[40] This, too, is the essential perspective of the ironist, the position of Gissing who wrote of his social position: "We hung between two grades of society – as I have done

ever since in practical life."[41] It is a position of involvement and distance, of objectivity and subjectivity similar to that attained by Scott Fitzgerald through his narrator Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* who was conscious of being "both within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life."[42]

Gissing's irony is, like Jane Austen's, the expression of a deeply felt subjectivity, a transfiguration of

personal experience into objective, universal expression, a duality of perspective which he recognised and often commented upon:

> Yes, I am inclined to think that the purely impersonal method of narrative has its advantages. Of course it approximates to the dramatic. No English writer that I know (unless it be George Moore) has yet succeeded in adopting this method. Still, I shall never try (and you do not wish me) to suppress my own *spirit*. To do that, it seems to me, would be to renounce the specific character of the novelist. Better, in that case, to write plays.[43]

1. Soren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postcript*, translated by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, 1941), p. 450.

2. Attributed to Austin Harrison by Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography*, p. 4. A similar example of Gissing's resigned and restrained ironical outlook is that given by Austin Harrison in his *Frederic Harrison: Thoughts and Memories*. There he recalls some childhood memories of his former tutor: "He had no punishments. When we offended he would address us in Latin or Greek, or just stare until we felt ashamed, then he would burst out laughing. … I remember telling him I wanted to be a novelist, at which he shouted with mirth, 'It's the trade of the damned,' he said; 'far better be a crossing-sweeper" (pp. 81-84).

3. Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (London, 1958), p. 48.

4. *George Gissing's Commonplace Book*, ed. by Jacob Korg (New York Public Library), 1962.

5. D. C. Muecke suggests that irony is “significantly present” in the writings of these authors, *Irony*, The Critical Idiom Series (London, 1973), p. 2. Gissing professed a knowledge of the first four of these writers, claiming that they were “the indispensables” in a letter to Ellen (2 August 1885), *Letters to Members of His Family*, pp. 160-61. Gibbon was, throughout his life, perhaps his favourite reading.

6. This, of course, is a thinly veiled biography of Gissing.

7. *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, p. 229.

8. *Ibid*., p. 68.

9. Kingcote in *Isabel Clarendon* is the most obvious example.

10. The “ponderous pedantry” (*Sleeping Fires*, p. 13) of Worboys is presented with an amused tolerance. Casti, in *The Unclassed*, is more critically regarded and Christopherson in the short story of that name in *The House of Cobwebs* almost allows his love of books to destroy his marriage.

11. *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, p. 105.

12. *Ibid*., p. 68.

13. The most obvious ironic contradiction is that embodied in the Shakespearean (especially) tragic hero whose
seed of greatness is also the germ of his destruction.

14. Samuel Hynes, *The Pattern of Hardy’s Poetry* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961), pp. 41-42.

15. Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defence and Discovery* (Berkeley, 1968), p. 3.

16. Friedrich Schiegel, quoted by René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950: The Romantic Age* (London, 1955), p. 14.

17. Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*, translated by Lee M. Capel (London 1966), p. 271.

18. Andrew H. Wright, *Jane Austen’s Novels: A Study in Structure* (Penguin, 1964), p. 36.

19. V. S. Pritchett, *The Working Novelist*, 1965, pp. 62-67. Reprinted in *Collected Articles on George Gissing*
(1968), p. 126.

20. Irving Howe, “George Gissing: Poet of Fatigue,” Introduction to the Houghton Mifflin edition

of *New Grub Street*, 1962, pp. xv-xxi. Reprinted in *Collected Articles*, p. 123.

21. *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure*, p. 38.

22. Alan Lechuk, "George Gissing: The Man and the Novelist" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1965), p. 121.

23. In *King Lear*, for example, Shakespeare's tragic art lifts the reader through the plane of pity onto a new level of consciousness where the death of Cordelia and the agony and eventual death of Lear lose their usual significance in a world of higher spiritual values.

24. *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure*, p. 35.

25. Lionel Trilling, *The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism* (New York, 1955), p. 181.

26. For example a most uncomplimentary and superficial review of *The Unclassed* from *Graphic* (13 September 1884), p. 286, which ended "He was bound to be either unwholesome or dull; and, to his credit be it said, he has chosen the latter alternative," was pasted in his album of press clippings. Review reproduced in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 70-71.

27. *The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*, ed. by Pierre Coustillas (New York Public Library,
1964), p. 119.

28. Mabel C. Donnelly, *George Gissing: Grave Comedian* (Cambridge, Mass, 1954), p. 168.

29. *The Odd Women* (London, 1980), pp. 1-2.

30. Anonymous reviewer, "Contemporary Literature," *Scottish Review* (July, 1887), pp. 196-97.

31. Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context* (London, 1975), p. 8.

32. *Denzil Quarrier* (London, 1892), p. 341.

33. In the same way in which the reader's nodding acquiescence of Gulliver's statements in the Fourth Book of *Gulliver's Travels* is finally jolted, especially through Gulliver's relationship with Don Pedro, into a reaction against Gulliver's simplistic interpretation of his experience.

34. *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry*, pp. 41-42.

35. *New Grub Street* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 551.

36. *Ibid*., p. 406.

37. *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure*, p. 35.

38. "On Battersea Bridge," *Pall Mall Gazette* (30 November 1883); reprinted in *Selections Autobiographical and Imaginative from the Works of George Gissing*, ed. by A. C. Gissing (London, 1929), pp. 54-58.

39. Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography*, p. 41.

40. Letter of 3 April 1890, *The Bulletin of the Boston Public Library*, November 1947, p. 335.

41. *George Gissing's Commonplace Book*, p. 24.

42. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 42.

43. *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz*, ed. by Arthur C. Young (London, 1961), letter of 17 March 1892, p. 149.

****

The Odd Women on T. V.?

To Gissing supporters, a message from Jacob Korg:

13 August 1983

231A Woodstock Road
Oxford OX2 7AD

As many of you know, the exciting prospect of Gissing on television has arisen. For some time now, Jane Weiner, an independent television producer in New York, has been working on a production of *The Odd Women* in the form of a series of half-hour episodes. She has enlisted the co-operation of a prominent Swedish director and an American script-writer, and hopes to interest the TV officials of a number of countries in her production. What Jane has in mind is not a commercial venture, but a series like the dramatizations of novels by Galsworthy, James and Lawrence that have been seen on BBC and public television in the States. She has the task of convincing the authorities in various countries where she has worked and is well known that *The Odd Women* would be a worthwhile addition to their programming.

Jane asks that all of us send her letters stating our interest in and support of the TV *Odd Women*, being as specific as possible about our reasons for thinking the novel deserves to become a TV series. These letters

would then be used as evidence of *The Odd Women*'s popularity and importance. Jane does not think the feminist argument carries much weight, but asks that we relate our comments to our own countries, if possible. (For example, I would mention that Gissing spent some time in America). The letters should be addressed to Jane, but as you fully realise, they should be aimed at persuading

TV officials who know little or nothing about Gissing that there would be an audience for the production.

I hope that you will be able to write and send your letters promptly. It should go to: Jane Weiner, The Odd Women Production Company, 198 West 10th Street, New York, N.Y., 10014, United States. (Incidentally, the Oxford address above will be my address until June of 1984, while I am on leave.)

****

Reviews

Index of English Literary Manuscripts, volume IV, 1800-1900, Part I Arnold-Gissing. Compiled by Barbara Rosenbaum and Pamela White. Mansell, London and New York, 1982. £80.

Allusions to this book have been made in the *Newsletter* on one or two occasions, especially when the most elusive short story known to have been written and published by Gissing was at length identified thanks to the work of Pamela White for the *Index*, but few Gissing scholars have so far become acquainted with the relevant section of the volume, and it is of supreme importance that anyone genuinely interested in the life and work of the novelist should realise that the fifteen quarto pages devoted to him in a volume which stops at p. 831 contain vital information, much of which is not easily to be found elsewhere, and nowhere in this form.

Vol. IV, Part I, the second volume to appear after Vol. I, is part of a five-volume set which will cover a

selection of English writers from 1450 to 1900. Vol. I (1450-1625) was published in two parts in 1980. Vol. II (1625-1700) and Vol. III (1700-1800) are in preparation; so are Parts 2 and 3 of Vol. IV (G- Z). Vol. V will consist of an Index.

The present volume lists the literary manuscripts (not the letters, although the main repositories of autograph letters are mentioned) of twenty-three British and Irish authors whose literary production belongs mainly or exclusively to the nineteenth century. Gissing happens to be the last author included chronologically and it is clear that he is in excellent company. The twenty-two other figures are Matthew Arnold, Jane Austen, the three Brontë sisters, the Brownings, Samuel Butler, Byron, Carlyle, Lewis Carroll, John Clare, Clough, Coleridge, Wilkie Collins, De Quincey, Dickens, Disraeli, Maria Edgeworth, George Eliot, Edward Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Gaskell.

After the Publishers' Note, which it would be a mistake to skip, are to be found a Preface, where it is said that scholars interested in privately owned manuscripts should write first to the publishers of the *Index*, the Acknowledgements, an eight-page List of Repositories with the full addresses of hundreds of institutional libraries, a List of Auction Houses and Booksellers, a glossary followed by some symbols, a list of abbreviations and 23 facsimiles, the last of which is the first page of the MS of "A Freak of Nature," published as "Mr.Brogden, City Clerk" in *Harmsworth's Magazine* for February 1899. This is a fine specimen of Gissing's minute handwriting in the mid-nineties (the story was composed on 7-8 March 1895) and it carries very few corrections, but there are many discrepancies between the manuscript and the printed version, which can perhaps be accounted for by revision at proof stage.

The Introduction to the Gissing section attempts a historical survey of the story of Gissing's

manuscripts

-- 38 --

after his death, or rather from about 1912 onwards, when Algernon Gissing began to sell his brother's manuscripts. I gave a short account of these sales in the April 1968 number of the *Newsletter* and in my introduction to *Essays and Fiction*, to which Pamela White refers the reader. She also discusses the fate of the missing manuscripts, ranging from *The Unclassed* to "Among the Prophets" (the last completed novel that Gissing is supposed to have destroyed, or rather to have had destroyed, since he sent his agent, Pinker, a request that he should burn this particular manuscript), the status of the juvenile verse, such manuscript material as is not included in the *Index* (Gissing's accounts of books at Yale and in the Pforzheirner Library) and what is known of the novelist's Library, namely the main collections in public and private libraries. Miss White also gives much useful information on Gissing's correspondence.

The writer's MSS proper are divided into verse (items 1 to 65), prose (Titled Works : items 66 to 158) and miscellaneous and untitled works, which include what may be called Gissing's private papers (items 159 to 175). In this last section we duly find the diary (1887-1902) published five years ago, the Yale-held poetical commonplace book from which the six sonnets on Shakespearean heroines published in 1982 were taken, the American notebook, the commonplace book edited and published by Jacob Korg in 1962, a memorandum book in the Huntington Library, in which the Ryecroft Papers appear in an embryonic state and the commonplace book of quotations entitled "Extracts from my Reading," just edited for publication by the Enitharmon Press, but we do not trace so easily the scrapbook in the Pforzheimer Library. This extraordinary combination of press-cuttings and notes taken from newspapers or derived from Gissing's meditations, or again inspired by personal experiences, appears as "notes with newspaper cuttings on various subjects," headed "The World of Art," "Landlordism," "Trade of Letters," "Woman," etc.

The MSS listed include not only, as expected, the novels and the short stories, the juvenilia to be found at

-- 39 --

Yale and in the Pforzheimer Library, but also the introductions to Dickens, the essays written at Owens College, and various notes on Dickens, on drawing, on Italian and French, etc. The length of most MSS is given, but not their size, and they are dated as accurately as possible. When a manuscript is unlocated its last appearance in a saleroom is generally noted. This is the case for the MSS of two short stories, "Humble Felicity" and "Joseph" (corrected typescript). A cursory glance at the list of repositories of the 175 MSS mentioned will go a long way to disprove the common enough belief that the only three libraries which hold manuscript material by Gissing are the Yale University Library, the New York Public Library (Berg Collection) and the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library. There are at least nine other libraries which hold significant manuscripts, let alone largely ignored batches of letters.

To the present reviewer Pamela White's skilful compilation has seemed to be as accurate and reasonably complete as possible considering that some private owners did not wish their material to be listed. However, in response to the publisher's request it may be relevant to mention four items overlooked by the *Index* : a proof of "Fate and the Apothecary" (a short story published in *Literature* on 6 May 1899) held by the Berg Collection; a proof of the introduction to *David Copperfield* (Autograph Edition) discovered by Richard Dunn at Dickens House, and published in the *Dickensian* for Spring 1981; the MS of Chapter III of *A Life's Morning* (which surfaced earlier

this year among W. H. Hudson relics owned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds); and the MS of the introduction to *Martin Chuzzlewit* (privately owned and currently in America).

The publishers and editors of the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* are to be congratulated on having produced such a major tool for research. No serious scholar can afford to ignore it. It is to be hoped that, as

new manuscripts will naturally go on reaching institutional and other libraries, supplements will be published from time to time. As far as Vol. IV, Part I is concerned, the first supplement might include the addenda to the present volume (pp. 825-31) as well as the new discoveries reported by those scholars who do not have too selfish a notion of research. – Pierre Coustillas.

George Gissing, *The Unclassed*, ed. Jacob Korg, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1983. Paperback, £4.95.

It is good to have Gissing's second published novel, *The Unclassed*, available in paperback. First issued as a hardback in 1976, the Harvester Press edition reproduces the text of the 1895 one-volume revision. It is edited, with a perceptive introduction and useful notes, by Jacob Korg. Almost a hundred years after its first appearance (in its more extensive, three-volume form), it still has the power to arouse controversy – no longer for its "daring" portrayal of sex, but rather for its rich ambiguities.

The novel is quintessential early Gissing, packed with his customary ingredients: intelligent and sensitive young people condemned to degrading and ill-paid jobs; a background of slums and social vices; love affairs vexed with jealousy and introspection; a pervasive note of personal bitterness about poverty, injustice, class displacement and orthodox morality. It is also undeniably autobiographical – though this is where interpretative problems arise. At first sight the originals seem obvious enough. The novel's two heroes, Waymark and Casti, are constructed from opposite sides of the author; the two heroines, Maud Enderby and Ida Starr, embody his contrasting feminine ideals. Waymark, tutor, novelist and cynic, represents the more resolute energies in Gissing; Casti, marital victim and idealist, acts out his despairing fears. Between them they even carry the

burden of the novelist's bifurcated literary interests. Waymark writes "desperately modern" fiction on the sordid miseries of contemporary life. Casti plans an epic poem or drama on a subject from a classical source. The two women, one a prostitute, the other respectable, are reminiscent of Carrie and Helen in *Workers in the Dawn*. For Waymark, as for Gissing, they symbolise distinctive aspirations : "Each answered to an ideal which he cherished, and the two ideals were so diverse, so mutually exclusive."

As we might expect, these tidy antitheses soon dissolve into something more complex. Since both Waymark and Casti are based on Gissing, their separate identities begin to fuse. Waymark's sexual feelings, like Casti's, are ignited by pity and protectiveness: for Gissing, passion and compassion were never far apart. Saddled with this susceptibility, Waymark eventually gets similarly entangled. By the end of the book, worn down by misjudgments, squirming in a self-imposed impasse (he loves Ida but feels committed to Maud), he sounds as depleted as his fagged-out friend: "Unconsciously he had struggled to the extremity of weariness, and now he cared only to let things take their course …" With the women, the expected moral contrast begins to go into reverse. Ida's "vehement, original nature" increasingly exposes the frailties of Maud's "timid conventionality." The prostitute, with her honesty and hygienic zeal, becomes a morally laundered version of what Nell Harrison might have been (what she was is represented rather by the snivelling malevolence of Harriet Smales). Conversely, Maud Enderby is no Helen Norman: what begins as a paean to the middle-class soul, with its virtues, refinements and delicacies, turns into an unsparing

case-report on the warpings of the puritan psyche.

At every point, then, the raw materials of Gissing's life are processed by his imagination into a more intricate finished product. To assert this is presumably uncontroversial; yet where real argument might still arise is over the question of the novel's treatment of its larger "philosophical" issues. As with several of Gissing's

early books, a prominent theme in *The Unclassed* is the conflict between art and social reform. In the early 1880s Gissing himself, in recoil from his dalliance with reformist groups, adopted an aggressively aestheticist stance. How far is the novel, in this respect, straightforwardly autobiographical? When Waymark announces his fervent belief that art alone offers full satisfaction, in terms very similar to Gissing's avowals in letters of 1883-4, it is tempting to conclude that Waymark is Gissing, and *The Unclassed* an advocacy of pure aesthetic detachment. This is the conclusion that, for example, John Halperin has recently underscored (in *Gissing: A Life in Books*). The objection to this is that the novel's structure is designed to undermine Waymark's credo. Admittedly, though, this structure is less evident in the shortened second edition.

Gissing revised *The Unclassed* in 1895. As Jacob Korg says in his introduction, most of the changes were advantageous. Especially needful were the large-scale excisions. A painfully wooden and ramshackle sub-plot (to do with the Enderby family) was pared down to a melodramatic splinter. Yet, as Korg also correctly insists, some of the deletions led to a loss of clarity and roundness. Chipping away at superfluous phrases, Gissing loosened some structural joints. A number of these were connected with Waymark's increasing disillusion with art. Waymark is characterised from the beginning as reckless, uncaring, irresponsible, but it soon becomes plain that this willed indifference, this vaunted art-for-art's-sake composure, is largely a cultivated pose. It's a pose directed towards things that disturb him – the horrors of slum life that he has to witness, especially in his role as rent-collector, and the tensions implicit in his dealings with Ida: towards, in fact, the two areas where the novel is concerned with reform. Both bring out aspects of his cynicism. Deadened to the pains of its denizens, he writes cool articles about Elm Court; and though he can't relish his role in eviction, he tries to turn even this to account

– "it cost him a dark hour now and then. But it was rich material; every item was stored up for future use." He attempts to be similarly unidealistic about his relations with his prostitute girl-friend: "Confidence in her he had not … outcome of the cynicism which was a marked feature in his development." In the first edition his indifference to the slums is much more pointedly conjoined with his would-be indifference to Ida. For example when, speaking about his own fiction, he declares that only art can satisfy, in the first edition he not only adds, "I repeat that I have absolutely no social purpose in this novel," but continues with a very ninetiesish speech (reproduced by Korg in the Introduction) to the effect that his interest in prostitution is purely that of an aesthetic connoisseur. Lack of interest in social reform is linked with lack of pity for Ida. Elsewhere it is suggested that his artistic attitudes are just as self-deceiving as his amorous ones. The whole thrust, in fact, of the love story is Waymark's growing recognition that he does indeed love Ida (and not merely desire her) despite the factors that have held him back – his poverty, his anxiety not to raise false hopes, and later his engagement to Maud. The climax of this recognition, and the moment when his nonchalant posture is dropped, is when Slimy ties him to a garret-floor.

At first he tries to see this, too, as a "situation" (in the first edition he has Slimy in his novel). He reflects serenely that "to an artist it might well be suggestive of useful hints." Pain and time disabuse him and also "open his eyes" about Ida. He realises his "introspection was at fault." By the end of the novel he has had to tear up his cavalier, art-for-art's-sake manifesto: "Waymark's mood was bitter, but, in spite of himself, it was no longer cynical … His enthusiasm for art was falling away; as a faith it had failed him in his hour of need." With respect to Ida, at any rate, Waymark's cynicism melts away. Given the thematic yoking just noted, we might expect that by the end of the book, he would also repudiate his indifference to the poor. But Waymark embraces only Ida. lt is she who devotes herself to reform – though like him she finds no cause satisfying without the

fulfilment of love.

Jacob Korg remarks of Waymark: 'The character was, for Gissing, a trying-out of a pose of detachment he could not really sustain." To this I would only wish to add that Waymark could not sustain it either. *The Unclassed* is a more critical and complex novel than a straight biographical reading might allow. Gissing was a tortured, sometimes muddled man, but his fiction is frequently more controlled, more intelligently ambivalent, than he himself was in real life. *The Unclassed* is an early testimony to the skilfully transfigurative power of his art. Rendered more accessible in paperback, it should win him many new readers. – David Grylls.

George Gissing, *Demos: A Story of English Socialism*, ed. Pierre Coustillas, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982. Paperback, £5.95.

Some 25 years ago, when I was studying English literature at Columbia University, a friend presented me with a copy of the first edition of *Demos*, published in three volumes by Smith, Elder in 1886. What he paid for it I do not know; nor have I followed its market value over the years. Recently, however, I noted that the catalogue of a Philadelphia rare book dealer lists two first editions of *Demos* for $l,000 each. One has book plates and is a "fine set" except for some weak hinges; the other, with "prelims foxed," is nevertheless "an unusually fine copy, enclosed in a half-morocco folding box."[1] My own copy combines features of both: weak hinges, slight foxing, and a book plate picturing a house made of books called "The Temple of Knowledge" beneath which are the words "Welcome to the Temple, and when you leave, leave my book." The volumes are bound in the original plain brown cloth and boxed in an apparently more recent case, gold-stamped and of brown cloth and leather. Curiously, the case as well as the spines of all three volumes carrying the erroneous subtitle,

“A Tale of English Socialism.” When the novel acquired its case is not known to me. What would Gissing have said about such care taken to preserve his novel, on which his name does not even appear and for which he received only £100?

The original buyers paid 31 shillings and 6 pence for *Demos* ; the new copy sent me for review costs £4.95. It is a thick paperback volume bound in light gray. The front cover presents the title and the author’s name in black on orange panels and also a black-and-white drawing apparently reproduced from a Victorian source. It shows an excited, disheveled crowd pressing against a well-fed gentleman in top hat who is handing out tickets for the soup kitchen advertised on a placard in the background. This is a distinctive and appropriate cover for *Demos*, in which, after all, a rioting crowd, cheated by an associate of Richard Mutimer, kills him with a flying stone. The more elegant but less interesting cover of the 1972 Harvester hardback edition was a red cloth binding, with the gold lettering and embellishments uniform for the series “Society and the Victorians.”

The contents of this latest edition of *Demos* have been reproduced from the edition of a decade ago, except for the correction of a few misprints in the contributions of the editor, Pierre Coustillas. The text, photographed from the 1897 edition, is in type small enough to allow one page to substitute for two of the 1886 edition – 906 pages are reduced to 477 – but it is still quite readable. Professor Coustillas’s Notes to the Text elucidate 45 passages, demonstrating Gissing’s erudition – and the editor’s. His Bibliographical Note discusses textual changes made at three different times: when Gissing was writing the novel; when James Payn, Smith, Elder’s manuscript reader, was editing it; and when proofs were corrected. Professor Coustillas assures us, however, that the manuscript of the novel, now in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, shows so few changes that it ranks “among the least interesting” in Gissing’s canon. The Bibliography lists 30 articles and

reviews dealing with the first edition, 17 books on Gissing that discuss *Demos*, 14 articles that contain material on the novel, and 16 titles for background reading. No one knows better than the editor that the decade since he assembled these titles has produced many new works, both biographical and critical, which might well have been added had Harvester Press allowed for substantive revision.

Professor Coustillas's Introduction, on the contrary, is still eminently useful. It covers topics that might well be the substance of a review: Gissing's life, the historical context of the novel's composition, its publishing history and reviews, and its themes. We cannot expect to learn a great deal more of significance about the first three topics, but the fourth, its themes, will always bear discussion, especially in these days of "reader-centered criticism," in which personal responses are given full rein.[2] So rapidly changing are the perceptions a reader today can gain from psychology and social studies that in the decade since Professor Coustillas wrote his introduction we have become sensitive to certain issues in the novel that he did not emphasize.

One such topic is the stress experienced by women in modern society. The proliferation of studies about women has heightened our awareness of their special vulnerability to stress due to their relative powerlessness. In Gissing's story, Richard Mutimer's mother exemplifies the middle-aged woman in new circumstances for which she is not prepared. One of the first reviews of *Demos* called her "pitiable" in her "complete inability to adapt herself, even passively, to circumstances of any novel kind."[3] Modern discussions of the psychological and social implications of housework[4] help us to appreciate her unwillingness to turn over her household responsibilities to servants and her inability to enjoy her new and more comfortable house.

Stress is also well-depicted in Alice Mutimer, who wastes the new-found leisure that, like her mother, she

gains when her brother comes into an inheritance. She becomes addicted to a kind of "escape literature," the cheap formula romance that has had an explosive resurgence in the past decade. A recent study of this genre points out that women, and especially those who have been nurtured on such reading, feel "romantically towards a man and then attempt to translate those feelings into sexual desire," but they experience a good deal of sexuality as "adversity and pain.[5] We see this in Alice; her romantic idealism leads her to marry Willis Rodman, who "reminded one of a hero of polite melodrama on the English-French stage." Because with him she has "her own romance," he can keep her emotionally enslaved even when it becomes apparent that he is "jocosely cynical of everything women prize." Eventually his violence towards her destroys her fantasies and with them goes her interest in romance fiction; she can no longer even understand it. Nor can she accept the sordid realities of her existence (her working-class family has always called her "Princess"), and the revelation of her husband's bigamous past reduces her to "the borders of idiocy" and crazed self-destructive behaviour.

The physical as well psychological abuse of women, a topic of major interest to feminist activists and social workers today, is seen not only in Alice's mistreatment by Rodman but in Richard Mutimer's cruelty towards his wife Adela. His "thin crust of refinement" shatters after he begins to suspect her of infidelity. Lacking the place of refuge that some communities now provide for battered wives, Adela must endure her husband's changing moods; and eventually she becomes more tolerant of his faults because she admires his strength of character under duress. She retreats into compliance, whereas Alice retreats from her husband's abuse into madness. Like most male Victorian novelists, Gissing is less willing to depict strong, self-directed women who attain their

goals than weak, dependent women who come to grief. Indeed, he confesses that he rejoices in Adela's "imperfection" – seen when her moral indignation at her husband's desire to keep his

inheritance illegally is colored by her love for Hubert Eldon, the rightful heir. This, says Gissing, shows her at her "most womanly" – that is, more swayed by romantic feelings than by ethical values. Gissing may have scorned romance fiction but he was not entirely free of its sentiments.

In contrast to these examples of feminine insecurity and stress, Gissing depicts the well-to-do Mrs. Westlake as a lover of poetry and music, emotionally secure in her marriage, and so socially confident that she can join her husband in not expecting dinner guests to dress "like waiters." These ideals embody values of the author, who since his earliest published novel had depicted art as a more worthy vocation than social service, whose own marriage had failed, and who would one day sell his dress suit and then feel he could no longer accept formal dinner invitations.[6] (Once, when the wealthy Frederic Harrisons had their son Bernard, whom he had tutored, issue their invitation to dinner, Gissing decided in pique at not being asked directly by them that he would go in "evening uniform" to show them that "the invitation must be a proper one or none at all."[7] Gissing was capable of being more bourgeois than the bourgeoisie.)

In the past decade our perception of conventional organized religion, like that of women and social obligations, has undergone changes that *Demos* in some measure anticipates. We have seen an intensification of religion's social mission at the expense of theological teaching. Such a shift is reflected in the Rev. Mr. Wyvern in the novel, though the character type is not unique to Gissing. Even the suspicious and intolerant Richard Mutimer knows him to be a "clergyman of other than the weak-brained type." Wyvern thinks Mutimer's scheme to industrialize the valley is wrong, for Wyvern shares the conservative values of Hubert Eldon, who, when he gets the chance, rejects the plan. Alfred Waltham's contemptuous comment about women "getting the vicar to pray for rain" is not meant to call to mind a clergyman of Wyvern's mentality. In his benign picture of the

church and contrastingly harsh images of socialist agitation we see a side of Gissing that could be called conservative, though much qualification is needed in applying the term.[8]

Another reviewer could easily find themes of contemporary social interest in *Demos* beyond those I have mentioned: the despoiling of the countryside by industry; the health hazards of the workplace; problems of poor households headed by women; alcoholism as both cause and symptom of social ills; the gullibility of the uneducated and the exploitation of the poor by political demagogues (a term, incidentally, suggesting yet another dimension of the novel's richly indeterminate title). The density of its social and psychological detail, even apart from its purely literary qualities, still justifies John Morley's judgment of *Demos* upon its publication as showing the author's "genius throughout."[9] – Martha Vogeler.

1. Cat. no. 278, *English Literature D to He* of George S. MacManus Co., 1317 Irving Street, Philadelphia, Pa.
19107, entries no. 2194 and no. 2195.

2. See, for example, Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980).

3. *Spectator*, 10 April 1886, pp. 486-87, in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (London and Boston, 1972), p. 83 (the author of the review, unidentified here, was R. H. Hutton according to the check-list of his writings by Robert H. Tener in *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, XVII (September 1972), p. 180.

4. See, for example, Ann Oakley, *Woman's Work: The Housewife, Past and Present* (New York, 1974), entitled *Housewife* in England.

-- 50 --

5. Quoted from Helen Hazen, *Endless Rapture* (New York, 1983), in Carolyn See's review in the *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 1983, Part V, pp. 1 and 10.

6. Entry for 5 December 1890, in *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks, 1978), p. 231.

7. Gissing to his brother Algernon, 28 December 1886, Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

8. On Gissing's politics see John Goode, "Gissing, Morris and English Socialism," *Victorian Studies*, XII (December 1968), pp. 201-26, and Alan Lelchuk, *ibid*. (June 1969), pp. 431-38, and Goode's rejoinder pp. 438-40.

9. Gissing to his sister Ellen, 20 August 1886, in *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family*, ed. by Algernon and Ellen Gissing (London, 1927), pp. 184-85.

****

Notes and News

The eighteenth novel to be reprinted by the Harvester Press will be *A Life's Morning*, edited with an introduction by Pierre Coustillas and historical and topographical notes by Clifford Brook. The book is being printed and will be published in hardback in the usual format at £9.95. Four paperbacks of Gissing's works are available in the same new format – *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, *The Nether World* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* – in addition to the five-year-old edition of *Born in Exile*. *Thyrza* and *The Whirlpool* are soon to be added to this new series. These two titles will perhaps be followed by *The Town Traveller*. The next hardback

-- 51 --

reprint to appear under the same imprint will be *Workers in the Dawn*.

An anthology of criticism on Gissing's work, edited by Francesco Badolato, has been announced by Herder, the Roman publisher, for this autumn. Details about the contents will be given in our next number.

Mrs. Shirley Slotnick has kindly sent a long article by Walter Kendrick in the current issue of *Village Voice Literary Supplement* (see Recent Publications) in which the author, who has just read three of the four Harvester paperbacks available across the Atlantic from Methuen U.S.A., expresses his great intellectual satisfaction in discovering the work of Gissing. Like Oliver Twist, he asks for more – more paperbacks, that is. "I'd love to have copies of a few I know only by title, like *Our Friend the Charlatan*." Although Walter Kendrick mistakenly declares that seventeen Gissing titles are available in paperback from Harvester Press, he has collected valuable information from out-of-the-way sources, for instance the existence of a Chinese translation of *Ryecroft* as *Szu Chi Sui Pi* (*An Essay on the Four Seasons*). Kendrick's article is illustrated with one of the writer's portraits taken by Alfred Ellis in September 1893 and a drawing of a destitute woman and her child which is strongly reminiscent of Gustave Doré's work.

The ninth pamphlet published by the University of Queensland in its useful series of *Victorian Fiction Research Guides* is devoted to the *Pall Mall Magazine*. This popular monthly appeared from May 1893 to September 1914 when it was merged with *Nash's Magazine*. It was in the *Pall Mall Magazine* that Gissing's most widely translated short story, "A Poor Gentleman," was originally published in 1899. The author index and the chronological index confirm that no other Gissing story appeared in the Magazine.

Frank Woodman has sent as a curiosity an article which achieved publication in the parish magazine of the

city of Exeter, *Lens*, for June 1982. The author, Sheila Venn, pleasantly refers to Gissing and his work connected with that city, but she is apparently unaware of the existence of Bill West's valuable pamphlet on Gissing and Exeter, published in 1979 by Exeter Rare Books.

****

Recent Publications

Volume

George Gissing, *The Unclassed*, edited with an introduction by Jacob Korg, Brighton : The Harvester Press, 1983, pp. xxiii + viii + 322 + 5 (unpaginated). This new impression is available in three forms: (1) a grey and black paperback with the author's name and the title in rectangular purple panels on the pictorial front cover, and black titling on the spine; (2) a paperback similar in all respects except the spine, where the author's name is, as on the front cover, inside a purple panel, both author's name and title being in smaller type; (3) a hardcover volume in purple cloth gilt with title and author's name on a light blue panel on spine. The paperback edition is published at £4.95, the hardback at £10.50.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Donald W. Rude, "Some Additions to the Bibliographies of Joseph Conrad, Stephen Crane, Ford Madox Ford, and George Gissing," *Publications of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 75 (1981), pp. 347-49. Lists three of *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* and one of *The Whirlpool* in American newspapers (1898).

Mario Curreli, "Dickens, Gissing e la società italiana dell'Ottocento," *Studi dell'Istituto Linguistico*, V (1982), pp. 103-23. This annual is published by the University of Pisa.

Gilbert Venn, *Discovering Exeter: 2/St. Leonards*, Exeter Civic Society, 1982. Gissing and *Born in Exile* are mentioned on pp.10, 13 and 35.

John Tittensor, “Writing Glued Body and Soul,” *The Age*, (Melbourne), 21 May 1983, p. 13. Review of *Gissing: A Life in Books*.

L. R. Leavis, “George Gissing’s Life in Books,” *English Studies*, June1983, pp. 218-24. Review article. The same number contains an article by Adeline R. Tintner, “*Denzil Quarrier* : Gissing’s Ibsen Novel,” pp. 225-32.

Anon., *Choice*, XX, June 1983, p. 1483. Review of Robert L. Selig’s book in the Twayne English Authors series.

Anon., “Rome Relives La Dolce Vita,” *Guardian*, 26 July 1983. Again “paparazzo” and *By the Ionian Sea*.

John Michell, “Grumbling,” *Spectator*, 30 July 1983, pp. 24-25. Review of the three Harvester paperbacks, *Demos*, *The Nether World* and *Henry Ryecroft*.

Walter Kendrick, “Love’s Labour Lost,” *Village Voice Literary Supplement*, September 1983, pp. 18-19. A long article on the life and works of Gissing in which some novels like *New Grub Street* and *The Odd Women* are discussed at some length.

Jacob Korg, “George Gissing,” pp. 103-19 of *Victorian Novelists after 1885*, ed. Ira B. Nadel and William B. Frederman (Vol. 18 of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*), Detroit, Michigan : Gale Research Company, 1983. This is a superb survey of Gissing’s life and works with a number of pleasant illustrations : one of the Mendelssohn portraits of the novelist, a portrait of Eduard Bertz, the first page of the MS of *New Grub Street*, the photograph taken in Rome on which Gissing appears with Hornung, Conan Doyle and H. G. Wells, a facsimile of the first letter to Gabrielle Fleury, the 1901 portrait of Gissing first published in *Literature*, the sketch of Gissing by Mrs. Clarence Rook (misattributed, as has so often been the case, to H. G. Wells, who signed the portrait with Gissing), a facsimile of the first page of the first draft of *Veranilda*, and the familiar photograph of Gabrielle with Bijou.