

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 XXI, Number 1

January, 1985

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Gissing and the Positivists: The *Vestnik Evropy* Articles

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Students of Gissing’s life have rightly declined to view his “Letters from London” in the Russian journal *Vestnik Evropy* (*Messenger of Europe*) in 1881 and 1882 as evidence of any real interest in British politics. They were, we know, merely the consequence of his desperate need for money and an understandable deference to his new middle-class mentors Frederic Harrison and Professor Edward Spencer Beesly, who in their concern about his poverty and their trust in his abilities and political soundness, had urged the assignment upon him.

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Subscriptions

Private Subscribers: £3.00 per annum

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Scholars have done much to explain the circumstances of Gissing’s temporary diversion from his true vocation as a writer of fiction. Harry E. Preble discussed, printed, and annotated Gissing’s London Letters in a doctoral dissertation at the University of Illinois in 1960, and summed up their contents and importance in *The Victorian Newsletter* in 1963. (1) Two years later, Royden Harrison and Joseph Strmecki, collaborating in an essay on Turgenev’s Russian politics towards the close of his life, published the six letters he wrote to Beesly about Gissing’s commission. (2) Then in 1970 Pierre Coustillas published Turgenev’s two letters to Gissing about the assignment, and in 1981

reprinted them in an essay, *Gissing and Turgenev*, reviewing the circumstances for the Enitharmon Press Gissing Series. (3) All this scholarship has shed new light on Turgenev's relations with the Positivists in London (where he met Harrison but not Beesly), France (where he lived in exile), and Russia (where the Positivists were far less orthodox than in other European centers). What remains to be considered are Gissing's *Vestnik Evropy* articles as an index of his ties with the English Positivists.

When in mid-November 1880, Gissing, not yet twenty-three, undertook to send his quarterly political reports to St. Petersburg, he had no regular income apart from tutoring. (4) He had just agreed to give lessons to the two eldest sons of his new friend, the forty-nine-year-old Frederic Harrison, a wealthy barrister of Lincoln's Inn whose connections in legal, university, political, and literary circles would soon bring Gissing still other pupils. Harrison had already obtained a commission for Gissing to write articles for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. (5) The story of Harrison's benefactions, beginning with his encouraging response to *Workers in the Dawn*, a copy of which Gissing had sent him the previous July, is too well known to readers of this *Newsletter* to require attention here. What is perhaps not so well known is that two years before their first meeting, which took place in the late summer of 1880, Harrison had emerged from a schism within the English

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Positivist movement as leader of the dissident faction. (6) How much Gissing heard about this embarrassing episode is unclear. Perhaps not very much. Hoping to obscure the sectarian nature of the Positivist movement so as to make it seem the natural outcome of philosophic, religious, and social developments of decades, Harrison, Beesly, and their associates were saying as little as possible in public about the quarrel. Gissing did not mention it in his letter to his brother on November 3, about attending a meeting of the London Positivist Society, a men's political discussion group under Beesly's direction that met at various places, sometimes at Harrison's house or his law chambers. Gissing said he "henceforth" belonged to the group. (7) Confident that he was getting to know "useful" people, he began dating his letters according to the system devised by Auguste Comte, the founder of the movement, and worrying about having to converse in French with Pierre Laffitte, the leader of the Paris Positivists, when he came to London in May 1881 to open Newton Hall, the new Positivist center under Harrison's direction. (8)

All this being the case, what would be more likely than for Gissing to turn to his Positivist friends when he needed information and ideas for his *Vestnik Evropy* articles? Until then he had been too preoccupied with writing his fiction, tutoring, and caring for his alcoholic wife to take much interest in politics, and, according to Morley Roberts, he was not in the habit of reading newspapers regularly. (9) Of course, his assignment, which called for thirty pages of text four times a year, forced him to rely on the press for detailed information about Parliamentary affairs and foreign policy. Preble's annotations to Gissing's London Letters suggest probable sources of this kind, matching specific newspaper articles with passages in Gissing's text. Preble also identifies themes and attitudes in the articles to show that Gissing did not present his facts with complete objectivity. For help in making sense of the conflicting viewpoints and details of his sources, it

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would have been easy, and in the circumstances most likely, for Gissing to follow leads offered in two ongoing Positivist publications.

The first were the Positivist Society's short position papers called Positivist Comments on Public Affairs. They appeared irregularly but at least several times a year following discussions on

urgent political events at the Society's meetings. (10) The second were the articles, very comparable to Gissing's eight *Vestnik Evropy* articles, except shorter, that Harrison had begun to write at the time of the Positivist schism in 1878 for *La Revue Occidentale*, the official organ of the Paris Positivists. Under the title "Bulletin: Grande Bretagne," he had published five such articles before Gissing accepted his similar commission, and would publish three more while Gissing was writing his. Gissing's English text was translated into Russian (the originals have been lost, but Preble's dissertation prints an English re-translation). The French text of Harrison's Bulletins is very probably his own. (11)

And there is another difference, Gissing must have written with an eye on the £8 he received for each installment, whereas money played no part in Harrison's motivation. He wished to oblige his Paris colleagues; one cause of the schism in the English Positivist movement had been the differences in opinion as to what the relations of the English and French Positivists should be, and Harrison and his associates had argued for closer ties. In formulating his views for his French readers, Harrison must also have found relief for his extreme frustration at much in British politics. His Bulletins contain the same opinions he expressed elsewhere, but there is an occasional note of rancor not revealed to his English readers lest it offend his good friends in Gladstone's circle. At this time Harrison was accepting no payment for any of his journalism. Certainly none would be forthcoming from *La Revue Occidentale* because, indeed, the Paris Positivists who published it were receiving a subsidy from their English colleagues. In any case, Comte had banned

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remunerative journalism, and so disliked newspapers altogether that he looked forward to a Positivist era in which large placards would suffice to keep the public informed! Yet it is not to be thought that Gissing's farewell to paid journalism at the end of 1882 was of Comtean inspiration. Rather, he was anxious to return to his true vocation. By encouraging Gissing to take time from the writing of fiction for political reporting, Harrison and Beesly probably did not feel any remorse over the possible loss to the world of the kind of fiction their young friend might have produced. After all, Comte, and to some extent his English followers, argued that the great works of literature, comprising Comte's Positivist Library, adequately expressed Humanity's literary attainments, and they feared that such "Great Books" would be neglected in favor of lesser modern works. (12)

Whether or not the Positivists ever saw the English text of Gissing's London Letters—or, for that matter, the Russian, which Gissing received—is not known. Since Gissing was so regularly at Harrison's London house during this two-year period, and occasionally in the company of other Positivists at their meetings, it is likely that he kept them informed of his progress and that he would have hesitated to advance opinions contrary to theirs. At any rate, he had been drawn to Harrison in the first place because his own Liberal instincts, nurtured by his father, were quite in accord with those of Harrison and his friends, if not backed up [by] their concrete political knowledge. The fact that the heroine of *Workers in the Dawn* espouses some Comtean notions also suggests that Gissing had originally sought Harrison's help because he thought their views of society would be compatible. Hence it is not surprising that the main topics Gissing covers in his London Letters, and the political attitudes they embody, correspond to what we find in Harrison's *Revue Occidentale* Bulletins and the *Positivist Comments on Public Affairs*.

Take the Irish problem, the topic that occupies by far the most space in Gissing's London

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Letters. "Irish Affairs" is even in subheadings of two of them. This emphasis was entirely

reasonable, of course, considering the domination of Parliament by the “Third Party,” the Irish members who sought to attain their ends by obstructive tactics. Gissing provided a detailed chronicle of Gladstone’s struggle with them, and with the demands of his own radical party members for land reform in Ireland. Gissing’s journalistic naiveté is suggested by his failure to understand that his Russian readers might not appreciate the plethora of details he included to explain the mutations in Gladstone’s legislation. Though we can agree with Preble’s assertion that Gissing’s analysis of the Prime Minister’s heroic labors is “very perceptive,” we might also suspect that Gissing’s understanding owed something to Harrison and Beesly, who monitored Parliamentary affairs closely. (13) At one of the earliest Positivist Society meetings Gissing attended, Irish affairs were discussed. (14) The English Positivists had long supported the claims of the Irish for better treatment and had even come round to endorsing Irish Home Rule, which Gladstone was not yet prepared to do. Harrison’s earliest *Revue Occidentale* Bulletins had set forth the Liberals’ proposals, and each of the three Bulletins he wrote while Gissing was composing his London Letters supported the Prime Minister’s measures. (15)

Gissing’s account of the “cruelty” of the Government’s “severe repressive measures” imposed in Ireland along with its land reform measures is no harsher than Harrison’s comparison in his Bulletin of January 1882 of the suspension of Habeas Corpus in Ireland to the *ancien régime’s lettres de cachet*. (16) The Positivists had deplored the Irish Coercion Bill in one of their position papers, and as individuals they also echoed the Third Party’s objections to it. (17) Yet instead of discussing the Positivists’ views in his London Letters, Gissing chooses to comment on those of their long-standing critic Matthew Arnold. He finds Arnold’s idea of expelling the bad Irish

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landlords simply not practicable (had not Harrison derided the Apostle of Culture as politically naive?) but welcomes his notion of permitting Roman Catholics to have more influence on Ireland’s political and educational institutions. (18)

Perhaps the most obvious parallel between the political commentary of Gissing and of Harrison is identified by Preble. He points out that Gissing’s complaint in his London Letter published in May 1882 about the inadequacies of the Parliamentary system exposed during the debates on Irish issues probably came directly from Harrison’s *Nineteenth Century* article, “The Crisis of Parliamentary Government,” published in January of that year. (19) It reflected a dissatisfaction with the machinery of law-making that, though common to radicals, was analogous to Comte’s rejection of democratic processes.

There is nothing comparable in Gissing’s letters to Harrison’s occasional appeals to the peculiar political sensibilities of his foreign readers, such as his mention of “*lettres de cachet*.” Indeed, in reporting Gladstone’s decision to withdraw the army from Kandahar, Gissing makes no comment on the special importance of the decision to Russia. Yet the British had precipitated the war in Afghanistan during the previous, Conservative administration because of the belief of the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, that a stronger British presence in that country was needed to protect India from Russian aggression. Gissing reports that the resolution opposing the evacuation, introduced by Lytton in the House of Lords, was “naturally” passed by that Conservative body, and he calls the Liberals’ defeat of a similar challenge in the Commons “satisfactory.” (20) Thus Gissing insinuates, without emphasis, his disapproval of the war, which he also points out has been very costly. He warns his Russian readers not to take the former Prime Minister’s latest novel, *Endymion*, seriously as a political statement—it had already been translated into Russian—because Disraeli had been content with caricatures, treated politics as a game devoid of noble aspirations, and wrote

deplorable prose. (He probably did not know that Disraeli was paid £10,000 for the copyright, the highest sum ever given by a publisher up to that time for the copyright of a work of fiction. (21)) Gissing's criticism may have owed something to discussions with Harrison, who had said much the same about Disraeli's *Lothair* in 1870 and would echo the sentiments in an essay on him in 1894 and in a later article. (22) In his negative treatment of the Afghan War, Gissing may well have drawn upon the Positivist Society's position paper decrying it. (23) Harrison and his friends had also published articles, organized protests, and mounted a petition to Parliament calling for an investigation of the treatment of Afghans by British soldiers. These activities contributed to the public sentiment against the Conservative Government and so helped to bring the Liberals back to office in March 1880.

The Positivists' well-known opposition to other wars of empire would certainly have been in Gissing's mind when he turned to two other foreign policy episodes in his London Letters. As individuals and in a paper issued by the London Positivist Society, Harrison and his friends had opposed the Transvaal War which Gladstone's Government wound down with concessions to the Boers, thus earning Gissing's approval. (24) Similarly, the British intervention in Egypt in the summer of 1882 provoked cries of anguish from the Positivists all the fiercer since it was a Liberal Government that was taking the initiative against a nationalist uprising. Gissing voiced similar objections, even concentrating, as did they, on the role of British economic interests in causing the conflict. (25) Of course, many radicals of all stripes were condemning British imperialism. Yet can we consider it pure coincidence that in every one of Harrison's *Revue Occidentale* Bulletins and in six out of Gissing's eight London Letters there is some anti-imperialist formulation?

Another subject in Gissing's articles enabled him to apply Positivist principles to current

affairs: the right to freedom of thought and expression. Gissing gave extended coverage to Charles Bradlaugh's difficulties in taking his seat in the House of Commons without the religious oath. Gissing's dismay at Parliament's punitive treatment of Bradlaugh was like that expressed in the Positivists' endorsement of the Affirmation Bill ending the controversy in 1883. (26) The sympathy Gissing expressed in his London Letter for Johann Most, the German socialist tried for libel in an English court in 1881, has even clearer Positivist parallels. We know from a letter of Gissing's that at a meeting of the Positivist Society at which the prosecution of Most was discussed he was the only one present able to translate from Most's German language newspaper. (27) To both Gissing and the Positivists—and to most radicals, of course—attempts to limit free speech were anathema. Ironically, Gissing probably had more sympathy with both Bradlaugh's atheism and Most's socialism than did the Positivists, but on the principle involved here they were entirely at one.

The last of Gissing's *Vestnik Evropy* articles appeared in November 1882, the last of Harrison's Bulletins the previous May. But almost every issue of *La Revue Occidentale* thereafter carried some account of the English Positivists' activities or translations of their publications, and Harrison and his colleagues continued to flood English newspapers and journals with political statements. Finally, in 1893 they founded their own monthly, *The Positivist Review*, to carry them. Gissing, after demonstrating in his articles the remarkable powers of intellectual assimilation that had so impressed his teachers years earlier, once again declined to apply his abilities whole-heartedly to a pursuit that might have led to a better livelihood. Moreover, his diary entries and letters show that he took no more interest in politics after discontinuing his *Vestnik Evropy* articles than he had before undertaking them.

Preble writes of Gissing's moving away from radicalism and from Positivism after 1882. (28) The first of these assertions is somewhat misleading. Gissing apparently became

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increasingly doubtful about the value of political measures altogether, but then, nothing he wrote in his London Letters or elsewhere suggests that he ever had much faith in politics. His criticism of the Parliamentary system demonstrates that. But he certainly never adopted the main articles of faith associated with political conservatism: admiration of imperialism, suspicion of free trade, support of employers in their struggle with labor, and reliance on private philanthropy. Admittedly, not all political conservatives held all these tenets, but as tests of political allegiance they seem valid. Temperamentally, perhaps, Gissing gradually came to have something in common with people holding such views, for like most of them he came to respect middle-class conventions and disdain the conduct and social values of the poor.

Ironically, such attitudes made Gissing more like the Positivists, who, despite their political radicalism, had conservative, middle-class social values. In 1882, while he was about to end his contributions to *Vestnik Evropy*, he expressed his dissent from some of Comte's major philosophic and religious assumptions in an essay, "The Hope of Pessimism," which he declined to publish lest it offend Harrison, still his employer and friend. (29) In later years Gissing probably considered his attachment to Comte's philosophy only the temporary aberration of a youth who had been befriended by men older, richer, and better educated than he who purported to have found the answers he was seeking to the great questions of life. Perhaps his eventual alienation from Positivism and its advocates stemmed in part from their role in diverting him from his true vocation by providing him with needed but unwanted journalistic work. Ironically, his impatience with journalism and intolerance of politics brought him closer to the founder of their movement than they were.

Notes:

1. "Gissing's Contributions to *Vyestnik Evropy*," (hereinafter cited as "Preble"); "Gissing's

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Articles for *Vyestnik Evropy*," *Victorian Newsletter*, 23 (Spring 1963), pp. 12-15.

2. "Turgenev's Later Political Commitments: Six Letters to Beesly, 1880," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 9, no. 4 (1965), pp. 400-19.

3. *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 Sept. 1970, p. 974.

4. Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (University of Washington Press, 1963) is the source of biographical information unless otherwise specified.

5. Reprinted in *Notes on Social Democracy by George Gissing*, edited by Jacob Korg (Enitharmon Press Gissing series no. 1, 1968).

6. See my *Frederic Harrison: The Vocations of a Positivist* (Clarendon Press, 1984).

7. Gissing to Algernon Gissing, 3 Nov. 1880, Yale University.
 8. *Ibid.* (quoted); *Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family*, ed. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (Houghton Mifflin, 1927), pp. 90-92, 95-96.
 9. Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (1958), p. 100, cited by Preble, p. 33.
 10. *Positivist Comments on Public Affairs: Occasional Papers Issued by the London Positivist Society, 1878-1892*, pp. 14-15, hereafter cited as *Positivist Comments* with title and date of paper.
 11. *La Revue Occidentale, philosophique, sociale et politique* was published in three series; my references will be to *RO*, 1st series (1878-1889), by volume and date; for an index I am indebted to the late Dr. Paulo E. de Berrêdo Carneiro.
 12. See my "The Victorians and the Hundred Best," *Texas Quarterly* 11 (Spring 1968), pp. 184-98.
 13. Preble, p. 256, fn. 2.
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14. *Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family*, pp. 90-91, letter of 30 Jan. 1881.
 15. *RO* 6 (Jan. 1881), p. 457; 7 (May 1881), pp. 282-7; 8 (Jan. 1882), pp. 82-83.
 16. Preble, p. 313, London Letter 5, pub. Feb. 1882; *RO* 8 (Jan. 1882), p. 82.
 17. *The Irish Coercion Bill*, 10 Feb. 1881, *Positivist Comments*, pp. 14-15.
 18. Preble, pp. 52-53, London Letter 6, pub. May 1882; see my "Matthew Arnold and Frederic Harrison: The Prophet of Culture and the Prophet of Positivism," *Studies in English Literature* 2 (Autumn 1962), pp. 441-62.
 19. Preble, p. 325, fn. 1, citing *Nineteenth Century* 11 (Jan. 1882), pp. 9-28; see also Frederic Harrison, "The Deadlock of the House of Commons," *ibid.*, 10 (Sept. 1881), pp. 317-40.
 20. Preble, pp. 178-80, London Letter 2, pub. May 1881.
 21. *Ibid.*, pp. 169-75, London Letter 1, pub. Jan. 1881; Annabel Jones, "Disraeli's *Endymion*: A Case Study," in *Essays in the History of Publishing in Celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the House of Longman, 1724-1974*, ed. Asa Briggs (Longman, 1974), p. 141.
 22. "A Romance of the Peerage," *Fortnightly Review*, 13 (June 1870), pp. 655-67, rpt. in *The Choice of Books* (Macmillan, 1886); "Disraeli's Place in Literature," *Forum* 18 (1894), pp. 192-203, rpt. in *Studies in Early Victorian Literature* (Edward Arnold, 1895); "Disraeli's Last Joke," *Westminster Gazette*, 28 Jan. 1905, p. 2.
 23. *The Afghan War*, 27 Nov. 1878, in *Positivist Comments*, pp. 11-12.

24. *The War in the Transvaal*, 10 Feb. 1881, in *Positivist Comments*, pp. 12-13; Preble, pp.180-82, London Letter 2, pub. May 1881.

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25. *The Aggression in Egypt*, 14 July 1882, *Positivist Comments*, pp. 20-24; *The Trial of Arabi Pasha: Address to the Rt. Hon. W. E. Gladstone*, 11 Oct. 1882, *Positivist Comments*, pp. 24-25; Preble, pp. 387-95, London Letter 7, pub. Aug. 1882.
26. Preble, pp. 202-04, London Letter 2, pub. May 1881; Preble, pp. 214-19, London Letter 3, pub. Aug. 1881; Preble, pp. 270-72, London Letter 4, pub. Nov. 1881; Preble, pp. 328-29, 342-47, London Letter 6, pub. May 1882; *Parliamentary Affirmation Bill*, 27 Apr. 1883, *Positivist Comments*, pp. 28-29.
27. Preble, 204-08, London Letter 2, pub. May 1881; Preble, pp. 244-50, London Letter 3, pub. Aug. 1881; Gissing to Algernon Gissing, 4 May 1881, Berg Collection, New York Public Library; *Punishment for Blasphemous Libel*, 27 Apr. 1883, *Positivist Comments*, pp. 27-28 (on the trials of George W. Foote and others).
28. Preble, pp. 66, 71.
29. "The Hope of Pessimism," 28 pp. mss published in *George Gissing: Essays in Fiction*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970); *Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family*, p. 120, 6 Oct. 1882.

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Authorial Intrusion in Gissing's
New Grub Street

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George Gissing's *New Grub Street* poses for the reader the problem of dealing with the numerous authorial intrusions that result from the novelist's social concerns and from his expounding of personal values and beliefs. As Jacob Korg says "[T]he reader is aware of the author at his shoulder, pointing to one detail after another as illustrations of an implicit lesson. Gissing's views [are] ... in the passages of comment ... in the tone ... and [in] his vocabulary."¹

Critics' reactions to such intrusions vary from Henry James' ideal of the invisible, inaudible author to George P. Elliot's view that intrusions are harmless as long as they do not violate character. Holding a view similar to that of James, Walter Allen says that the artist ought to be like God in creation—omniscient, omnipresent, but invisible. Allen sees both Joyce's *Portrait* and Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, for example, as flawed because of author intrusions that make characters act, say, or think contrary to reader expectations based upon character qualities.²

On the other hand critics such as Percy Lubbock, Norman Friedman, and George Elliott view

intrusions much differently. Lubbock maintains that since the general panorama the author displays is a representation of his own experience, the author must be present to assemble and arrange that experience into a tale.³ Friedman argues that at times the personality of the author has a definite functional role in his work and that “he need not retire behind his work so long as his point of view is adequately and coherently maintained.”⁴

George P. Elliott, whose view is similar to Friedman’s, indicates that numerous novels considered to be “great representatives of the form are impure and imperfect.” He suggests that

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intrusions consist of several kinds: harmless interruptions to “expound [authors’] theories ... directly to the reader” so that the reader better understands; harmless, open “separable from the novel proper,” the author tells that reader “This is what you ought to think”; descriptions of nature or of man-made things to present character; shifts of point of view from within the story to authorial omniscience; comments on the behavior of characters. All of these are open and are easily separable from the text, so Elliott says, they are harmless. However, if the author imposes his values on a character at the moment of action, of speaking, of thinking, or of choice, he damages the authenticity of the character and, therefore, the artistry of his work.⁵

These other intrusions—open, separable, and relatively obvious—may be amusing, tedious, irritating to the reader, but they do no essential harm. It is only this last type, this imposition of authorial values at crucial moments of speech, action, thought, or choice that is objectionable.

Because of the nature of the Victorian novel, Elliott’s criteria seem especially appropriate for *New Grub Street* and are applied in this essay. Essentially, this essay assumes that the intrusions in the novel are a consequence of the times in which it was written, of the makeup of the author himself, especially his autobiographical bent and his reformer mentality, and of the length requirements of the three-volume novel.⁶ The essay concentrates on the quality of the intrusions, specifically or whether they are harmless or harmful, and intends to illustrate that most of the intrusions are harmless, varying from interesting to tedious but doing no serious damage to the novel itself. The essay also intends to illustrate that at least a few of the intrusions, however, may be harmful, that they may represent Gissing’s imposition of his values on characters at crucial moments of thought, speech, choice or action.

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One type of usually harmless intrusion in *New Grub Street* is the plot interruption, those instances in which Gissing inserts extraneous portions of exposition, description, narration, or dialogue. These materials are sometimes interesting because of the background they provide, such as the Yule family history (pp. 48-70)⁷ and the description of Yule’s literary friends (pp. 133-34), but such material has little to do with the human conflicts of the main plot. Another similar interruption is the Whelpdale American episode (pp. 426-31). While this episode may offer comic relief and is certainly of interest if one is giving *New Grub Street* a biographical reading, the affair is irrelevant but essentially harmless.

Evidence that these and similar passages are extraneous and may have been inserted to meet the demands of the “three-decker” is supplied by Gissing himself. When Gissing revised *New Grub Street* for Gabrielle Fleury’s French translation, he deleted enough material to shorten the novel by the equivalent of 110 pages (of the Penguin edition). His deletions include the three portions cited above. While it is probably true, as Michael Collie states, that Gissing improved the novel by purging it of such material, the reader can easily separate these parts from the plot.⁸ He can read

them or ignore them; they impose no values on character or reader.

Gissing's comments about his characters are also fairly common and generally harmless. In most cases the comments are easily identifiable, though they may not always be compatible with the readers' view. Such harmless comments abound throughout the novel. Typical are these: "As for the poor author himself, well, he merely fell in love with Miss Yule at first sight, and there was an end of the matter" (p. 94). "Mrs. Yule, of course, understood, in outline, these affairs of the literary world; she thought of them only from the pecuniary point of view, but made no essential distinction between her and the mass of literary people" (p. 118). "His [Reardon's] position was illogical—one result of the moral weakness which was allied with his aesthetic sensibility" (p. 239).

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One may not agree with certain of these comments about characters, but they are open and do no violence to the characters. The reader may accept, reject, or ignore.

A passage of commentary on character that may seem objectionable is the following:

Marian often went thus far in her speculation. Her candour was allied with clear insight into the possibilities of falsehood; she was not readily the victim of illusion; thinking much, and speaking little, she had not come to her twenty-third year without perceiving what a distance lay between a girl's dream of life as it might be and life as it is. Had she invariably disclosed her thoughts, she would have earned the repute of a very sceptical and slightly cynical person.

But with what rapturous tumult of the heart she could abandon herself to a belief in human virtues when their suggestion seemed to promise her a future of happiness! (p. 219)

Collie calls this passage subversive because "Marian does not ... have a 'clear insight into the possibilities of falsehood'—she is thoroughly misled by Milvain ..." Collie claims that Gissing intends Marian to be naive, that skepticism, cynicism, and awareness of the "possibility of falsehood" are incompatible with her being.⁹ However, the novel does not seem to support this view. Numerous references are made to Marian's awareness of the quality and basis of Jasper's feelings for her: "He scarcely loved her yet ..." (p. 360). "His voice was not convincing... He did not love her as she desired to be loved" (p. 361). Jasper is quite candid with Marian regarding fame and personal and social aspirations and the necessity of money to achieve these. Only at the very end, when he is trying to break the engagement, does he show some signs of deviousness. Marian's

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knowledge and understanding of the relationship always includes a significant portion of skepticism. Hungry for passionate love, Marian appears to delude herself. She grasps what Jasper offers, perhaps temporarily shutting out her doubts, doubts which re-emerge even before her (presumably) sexual encounter has ended (pp. 365-66). The battle between Marian's doubts and her hunger for love continues until Jasper breaks the engagement. By this time Marian may seem to have abandoned herself to belief in Jasper's truthfulness and in his love for her; however, the doubts have periodically intruded into her consciousness throughout the relationship (see pp. 333, 367, 452, and 507). When the final breakup occurs, Marian admits, "I have felt it for weeks—oh, for months... You don't love me Jasper ..." (p. 538).

So Marian temporarily deludes herself, momentarily abandoning her doubts. The passage is

not subversive. When Gissing says “abandon” he obviously refers to Marian’s willingness to be deluded and her cooperation in such delusion. But, as the material immediately following the passage in question illustrates, Marian is so hungry for love that she deludes herself at times, but relinquishes her skepticism only partially and only for a brief interval.

Another comment Gissing makes about his characters may not be as harmless. Gissing says of Alfred Yule’s friends, “These men were capable of better things...; in each case their failure... was largely explained by the unpresentable wife. They should have waited; they might have married a social equal at something between fifty and sixty” (p. 134). This passage is almost certainly ironic and openly reveals something of the author’s bitterness. It seems harmless enough on the surface. However, the concept of wives in this passage might also be viewed as an imposition of values. The passage is the basis for the breakup of the two central relationships and may be the author’s justification for Biffen’s suicide.

Passages scattered throughout chapter thirty-five state that the initial cause of Biffen’s

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suicide is his recognition that he will never have Amy or a woman like her. Whether one can accept this and the fact that Biffen, the dedicated artist, changes so rapidly (in approximately five weeks) and so drastically from one who has endured horrible privation to live for art to one without the desire to live at all is another matter. Biffen has exhibited no previous suicidal tendencies. He has been content with the income he earns from tutoring. He is dedicated to writing pure realism. He does not seek wealth or literary fame. He has literally risked his life for art by rescuing his manuscript from the flames. Then, “a beautiful woman had smiled upon him ... There was an end of ... peace, ... labor, ... endurance of penury” (p. 523). Consequently, he loses all hope, begins to desire death, and calmly realizes the desire by poisoning himself.

If Edwin Reardon had committed suicide, the reader would probably accept the act as consistent with his character as Gissing develops it. However, Gissing seems to have shifted Reardon’s traits to Biffen. One suspects that Gissing wishes to dramatize the plight of the poverty-stricken author who is unfit for the competitive literary world and who, worst of all, falls in love with an educated woman. But Biffen’s character does not support this final act of despair. One also may suspect that Gissing wishes to attack those women unwilling to share, dutifully and willingly, the poverty of their husbands, but that makes Amy a monster, and Gissing certainly does not portray her as such. While he may portray Amy as faithless and materialistic, Gissing does not portray her as someone desiring to do harm.

Gissing also intrudes to express his views on various world concerns such as the aforementioned marriages between unequals (pp. 124, 134); people trying to better themselves economically by passing examinations (p. 173); the “worthlessness of current reviewing” of literature (p. 239); self-pity (p. 373); the importance of appearance (p. 383); personalities “wholly

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unfitted for the rough and tumble of the world’s labour market” (p. 462); the “quarter-educated” and “literature to their taste” (pp. 514-15).

Again, these intrusions are easily identifiable. The reader is free to accept, reject, or ignore. The passages intrude, but do not harm the plot—with at least one exception. That possible exception is found in the views Gissing expresses regarding marriage. Gissing says:

Many a man with brains but no money has been compelled to the same step.

Educated girls have a pronounced distaste for London garrets; not one in fifty thousands would share poverty with the brightest genius ever born. Seeing that marriage is so often indispensable to that very success which would enable a man of parts to mate equally, there is nothing for it but to look below one's own level, and be grateful to the untaught woman who has pity on one's loneliness. (p. 124)

However, as cited earlier, Gissing blames the failure of many capable men on unpresentable wives (p. 134). So, Gissing believes that marriages between social unequals (Alfred Yule and his wife) and economic unequals (Edwin and Amy Reardon) are almost certain to be disastrous. Either the unpresentable, inferior wife will doom the career of her husband, or the intelligent but poor husband will not be able to satisfy the social and economic aspirations of a wife who is his intellectual equal. These are Gissing's stated views, but the reader is not left free to accept, reject, or ignore them because, of course, these views are an essential part of the very texture of the novel. The actualizing of these beliefs is the basis for the two major desertions—Jasper's of Marian and Amy's of Edwin—that are the heart of the novel.

The issue here is whether the desertions are compatible with the characters Gissing has presented. In the case of Jasper, his rejection of Marian seems compatible. He is a man of some

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honor, but he also wants literary and social success. He has clearly stated that he must marry wealth to achieve that goal, that the goal takes precedence over love. That is why he finds his initial attraction to Marian dangerous—she is poor. That is why he schemes and plots to find reasons and means to end the engagement, including his proposal to Miss Rupert while still unofficially engaged to Marian. He may be dishonorable, faithless, a cad, but he is not inconsistent.

Gissing suggests, as noted above, that when a poor man such as Edwin chooses to marry an educated girl such as Amy, the marriage is doomed because "not one in fifty thousands would share poverty with the brightest genius ever born" (p. 124). Amy does seem to leave Edwin because of his poverty and her aspirations. Her leaving him seems reasonable enough in that light. However, the impediment is removed when Amy receives her legacy. Yet she and Edwin remain separated. Gissing attributes this circumstance to the ravages of poverty, Edwin's appearance and the failure it implies, and stubbornness, among other things. He also implies that the marriage may have been doomed from the start, for other reasons: Edwin seems to have fallen in love with and married "ideal womanhood," not Amy (p. 95). Also, Amy seems to have married "literary fame," not Edwin (p. 95). Both are disappointed when the other fails to live up to that which is impossible for each. Then, poverty delivers the *coup de grâce* to the union. On that basis, marriage on false premises and ensuing poverty, Amy and Edwin's inability to reunite seems compatible with their characters. If that is what Gissing had in mind, his imposition of values and his beliefs regarding marriage are not harmful, but are open and harmless intrusions.

Finally, there is that ambiguous episode with which the novel closes, those two scenes depicting the social and private lives of Amy and Jasper (pp. 547-551). Certainly Gissing intrudes here with his views of the literary world of Jasper and Amy and their ilk and with his views of

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winner and losers in that world. But the episode can be read either literally or ironically.

If one reads the passages literally, as do Gillian Tindall and Irving Howe,¹⁰ Gissing seems to

say that artists lose while those who pander to popular taste and publishers' demands win. In personal relationships the faithful are deserted, die, are banished, but the faithless win happiness. Such a reading suggests either that Gissing sees this conclusion as an inevitable product of social Darwinism (heavy handedly presented) or that Gissing cannot resist the urge to vent his bitterness over injustice.¹¹

If one reads these passages as ironic, Gissing may be intruding in another way. Then, the words of Jasper and Amy about Fadge may reveal Jasper's insecurity and the kind of duplicity one must practice to survive in that literary world. Read ironically, the words of Amy and Jasper about Marian may reveal a fragility in their relationship, a haunting guilt, and a struggle to be happy in the midst of these. Then, Amy's music and song may represent a sort of deluding drug for the memory and the emotions. If such be the condition in which Gissing leaves Amy and Jasper, one wonders whether the author has intruded to avenge Edwin Reardon, Harold Biffen, and Marian Yule. While occasional, shame, and guilt appear compatible with the characters of Amy and Jasper, haunting fear, shame and guilt do not and may represent a harmful imposition on character.

On the one hand, Gissing's intrusions certainly cannot be overlooked. They tend to be annoyances and they make the novel a flawed work. Yet, with few exceptions they are rather harmless. They are easily detected; they are easily accepted or rejected. They are probably best viewed as Gissing's seeming compulsion to instruct his readers. Finally, they likely make *New Grub Street* more typical rather than atypical of late Victorian fiction. While the novel will probably never share the position of *War and Peace*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Jones*, *et al*, as "great represen-

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tatives of the form," it does share with them the authorial intrusions that make it and them "impure and imperfect," yet artistically successful and significant.¹²

Notes:

1. Korg, "Division of Purpose in George Gissing," in *Collected Articles on George Gissing*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (London: Frank Cass, 1968), p. 78.
2. "Narrative Distance, Tone and Character," in *The Theory of the Novel: New Essays*, ed. John Halperin (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 324-30.
3. "The Craft of Fiction: Picture, Drama and Point of View," in *Approaches to the Novel: Materials for a Poetics*, ed. Robert Scholes (San Francisco: Chandler, 1961), pp. 87-88.
4. "Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," in *The Theory of the Novel*, ed. Philip Stevick (New York: Free Press, 1976), p. 133.
5. Elliott, "The Novelist as Meddler," in *Critical Approaches to Fiction*, ed. Shiv K. Kumar and Keith McKean (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968), pp. 334, 336-48. Elliott lists as "impure and imperfect" but "great representatives of the form" *War and Peace*, *Bleak House*, *The Red and the Black*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Remembrance of Things Past*, and *Tom Jones*.
6. A discussion of the first two of these ideas is in John Halperin, "How to Read Gissing," *English Literature in Transition*, 20 (1977), 188-98. Also see Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context*

(Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975).

7. George Gissing, *New Grub Street* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980). Parenthetical page numbers refer to this edition.

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8. Michael Collie, "The Emancipated and *New Grub Street*," *The Alien Art: A Critical Study of George Gissing's Novels* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon, 1979), p. 120.

9. Collie, pp. 122-23.

10. Tindall, *The Born Exile: George Gissing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), pp. 177-187; "George Gissing: Poet of Fatigue," in *Collected Articles on George Gissing*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (London: Frank Cass, 1968), pp. 119-25.

Speaking of this scene, especially Jasper's recollection of Marian, Tindall says it is a consequence of Gissing's own confusion of sexual attraction with love, his attitudes regarding wealth and position, and his social Darwinism. Tindall seems to imply, therefore, that a literal reading be given.

Concerning the same scene, Howe also suggests a literal reading: Amy and Milvain, no longer troubled by the memory of Reardon, bask and coo in their genteel success. It is [Gissing's] vision of disenchantment with the values of modern life and ... it asserts the power of 'that injustice which triumphs so flagrantly in the destinies of men.'"

11. This seems to be suggested by Poole [*Gissing in Context*, p. 155]: "In the final scene we see Amy and Jasper firmly ensconced within the camp of the 'victors' ... Certain virtues are possible within this circle, but the remarks they make about ... Marian ... strike us as vicious; but Jasper and Amy must confirm their absolute distance from her. It is not possible, however, for us to fully share in the progress of an individual across the sharp frontier between success and failure. This final scene, so neat, so glib is not the one demanded by the novel's internal logic. Gissing's deep, humane identification with those ... left outside

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requires that the final scene should belong to Marian and her lonely, loveless vigil in the provincial library."

12. Elliott, p. 334.

Apropos of *H. G. Wells: Aspects of A Life*

Pierre Coustillas

The relationship between Gissing and Wells is well known to have been a difficult one and even more so the intercourse between Wells and Gissing's family after 1903. One might have thought that the successive quarrels triggered by the appearance of Gabrielle Fleury in Gissing's life, by the publication of such books as *Veranilda* (1904), *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (1912)

and *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), were now, if not forgotten, at least little more than a subject for occasional polite disagreement among scholars. But this view of things—it became apparent last year when Anthony West published *H. G. Wells: Aspects of a Life*—would be an optimistic one. The book was widely advertised and in at least one advertisement special attention was drawn to the pages on Gissing—about thirty in a book which stops at page 406 with a note about West to the effect that since 1970 “he has been fully occupied with the production of this biography, which he decided he had to write sooner or later as long ago as 1948, and which he has had on his mind as his ultimate goal ever since.”

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The book was severely reviewed in most journals as an unreliable biography of his father in which Wells's former friends—Shaw and Dorothy Richardson among others—are most unfairly dealt with. Several reviewers, notably John Gross, waved aside West's treatment of Gissing as a fanciful account which had little enough to do with reality. Peter Kemp tackled the subject with commendable directness: “Crooked records are an *idée fixe* in this book. West finds doctored documents everywhere. His grandmother apparently concocted an ‘appalling fabricated diary.’ His mother, he claims, bequeathed to posterity a trumped-up tissue of falsifications about her relationship with Wells—drafts of summaries of letters that never existed, invented incidents, fake quotations ... Even a male friend of Wells's, the novelist George Gissing, gets denounced as a ‘veiled and secretive fraud,’ an obsessive ‘fabulist’ for whom ‘the transformation of the truth was the name of the game’... Constantly, people are rapped over the knuckles for taking hearsay on trust. Yet this is West's habitual procedure: most of his story of Gissing's relations with his second wife, Edith, for instance, consists of West's account of Wells's account of a doctor's account of Gissing's account of his dealings with Edith—the resulting hodge-podge, being, unsurprisingly, grotesquely at variance with Gissing's direct record of events in his diary. Quotations from Gissing's letters are scrambled too—up to five distortions in six lines—giving a misleadingly unpleasant slant to things: he's made to refer to his son as ‘it’ not ‘he’, his wife as ‘the woman’ not ‘the poor woman’” (*Nature*, 14 June 1984, pp. 643-44).

Equally appropriate was David Grylls's letter to the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* (12 October 1984, p. 1159) after Philip Larkin failed to mention Gissing in his review (28 September, p. 1075). Grylls denounced West's presentation of Gissing as “a lying, syphilitic egotist, pathologically secretive and compulsively confessional, who deceived his friends and beat his wives.” He also pointed to the absurdity of the account given by West of Gissing's relationship with

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Edith and Walter, in which chronology is cast to the winds and West's inventiveness is at its most riotous. Then I in turn wrote a letter to the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, showing up West's strategy of distortion: “Anthony West tries very hard to prove that his father heard only gradually, and with horror, mostly after 1903, about the unseemliest phases in his fellow-writer's life, and he himself expresses his contempt for the author of *New Grub Street*, with much spite and venom. Unfortunately for this mistaken view of things masquerading as fact, it is contradicted by West himself who tells us that the story of Gissing's life had been related to Wells by their common friend Dr. Henry Hick as early as 1898, and by a letter from Wells to Edmund Gosse of January 4, 1904, written a few days only after Gissing's death, in which Wells appears to have been fully informed about his friend's expulsion from Owens College, Manchester, and about his first two ill-fated and ill-advised unions. The truth is that in Gissing's lifetime Wells had been one of the few

people who were familiar with his matrimonial difficulties, past and present. Indeed, as Wells's correspondence with Gosse demonstrates, he was regarded as an authority on the subject" (2 November 1984, p. 1249).

Refuting *all* West's irresponsible statements about Gissing would be a daunting task as he obviously set out to reshape the facts of the novelist's life so that they should fall into a pattern fitting his own obsessions. Glib though he is, West is not above self-contradiction. He gives us a fine example of his method in the first two pages devoted to Gissing where he writes that Gissing first met his father in the summer of 1896 then, in the next paragraph, "on a Tuesday late in November 1896." As the two writers are not known to have met in the southern hemisphere one is bound to disagree with the biographer's notion of the seasons. The Omar Khayyám dinner to which he refers is remodelled so as to suit his purpose: he alters the day of the week from Friday to

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Tuesday, confuses Robertson Scott with Robertson Nicoll and promptly reveals that, for some details of the dinner, he has in mind, not the dinner at Frascati's where Wells and Gissing became acquainted, but another (a more famous one) which took place the year before at the Burford Bridge Hotel (not Inn), since it was indeed on that occasion that Edward Clodd inveigled Meredith into addressing the members of the Club, thereby earning for himself the nickname of Sir Reynard. Shortly after relating the anecdote of his father's first meeting with Gissing he embarks on a flashback in which we hear that Edith was the daughter of a day labourer, and that she had begun to drink (an obvious confusion with Nell who, on another page, is called Mary Ann Harrison). Furthermore it is inaccurate to say that Edith was barely literate. She did read one or two of her husband's novels in the early Exeter days though one would not like to say to what extent she understood what she read, and some letters in her handwriting are extant which testify that she could write without making more than an occasional spelling mistake. When West declares that during the summer of 1897 Gissing was one of the more frequent visitors to Heatherlea he is manifestly confusing that particular summer with the next. It was after the two novelists had returned from Italy that they saw much of each other. The account of their sightseeing together in Rome is again badly distorted. Of course it was not in Siena that Gissing met Conan Doyle and Hornung, as his diary and correspondence makes clear, but West thinks he knows better: "They had done Siena *en bande*, and they came on to Rome as a jolly bunch of inseparables." He also hints that Gissing was plotting against H. G. and Jane Wells and that Wells did not enjoy finding himself in the company of such men as Conan Doyle, Hornung and Gissing. His comment on the photograph of the four men standing in a line in a Roman street gives an idea of West's style and intentions: "My father did not enjoy finding himself in situations in which he could be seen in that

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light, and always felt a degree of discomfort in such line-ups. He fairly radiates his feelings on this occasion. Gissing, sweating it out at the other end of the line, has a twofold cause for his uneasiness, my father's which he detects but doesn't fully understand, and his own, which is a matter of longing for another soul-baring closed session with my father's credulity. He knows that with these two, and the Brian Boru Dunne of the simplicities and the enthusiasms, sticking like glue, he isn't likely to get it." Meanwhile, West goes on, Edith Gissing was getting madder than ever and he implies that both Walter and Alfred were then living with her, but anyone familiar with Gissing's life knows that Walter had been in the care of his aunts in Wakefield since the Spring of 1896.

These latter falsifications occur on p. 244 and the reader, unless he flings the book away in

anger, has to put up with further distortions for another thirty pages. Gissing is maliciously turned into a systematic liar; he is blamed for giving Edith an insufficient weekly allowance (while in fact it was Brewster, the solicitor, who suggested he should not give her more than 25 shillings a week); he is accused of living in the South of France for his sole pleasure (not a word is said of his health at that time), and as though slanderous statements about the later years were not enough, inaccurate statements about the past are introduced. For instance we are told that Gissing spent eighteen months in America and that he borrowed his fare home from his brother Algernon, a youth of seventeen with no money of his own! The ludicrous story, lifted from a notoriously inaccurate biography published in 1975, of Gissing marrying Edith when the latter was fourteen, is repeated with gusto. The whole affair of Nell's death and of its circumstances, including the part played by Roberts, is altered almost beyond recognition. West blandly asserts that Hick had not met Edith Gissing until 1898, that Roberts never met her and repeats that she was a drunkard, that Gabrielle's existence was known to the Gissings of Wakefield only after George's death, etc. etc.

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These examples, taken at random among dozens of others, will, it is hoped, give some idea of the sort of book Messrs. Hutchinson are offering for £12.95. Let readers of this journal be aware that the pages devoted to Gissing and all the members of his circle (his two wives, Gabrielle Fleury, Morley Roberts and Frederic Harrison among others) are the most unreliable and unscholarly currently available. Only one thing in it struck me as new, but I wonder whether it can be trusted. It was apparently from Henry Hick that Wells had heard about Gissing's expulsion from Owens College, and Hick was greatly displeased when he read Wells's notorious article in the August 1904 *Monthly Review* and realised that his confidence in Wells had been betrayed. Hick henceforth refused to have anything more to do with him. "It was no fun," says West, "to be rounded on by such a person and told that he should have stayed below stairs, where he belonged, if he wasn't willing to try to behave like a gentleman." As I closed this worthless and thoroughly exasperating volume, it occurred to me that if Wells was not a gentleman his son has little more claims to being one.

Obituary

Heather Lawrence (1934-1984)

Her many friends have been shocked to hear of the sudden and unexpected death last October of Mrs. Heather Lawrence. She was an inaugural member of the committee of the Gissing

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Trust and, as with all her many activities, she gave valuable help in the continuing attempt to create a study centre in George Gissing's childhood home. She was a representative on the Trust from the Wakefield Historical Society which she had served as President from 1980-83, continuing since that time as a member of its committee.

Ten years ago she received national recognition when David & Charles published her definitive work on the Yorkshire pottery industry, *Yorkshire Pots and Potteries*. Then in 1977, when the Wakefield Historical Society joined with the Wakefield Metropolitan District Council to form

the Wakefield Historical Publications Group, she contributed most usefully to its activities. With her keen eye for good design, she was instrumental in the production of the seventeen volumes published under that imprint, not to speak of their marketing. The list includes *George Gissing in Wakefield* and *Christopher Saxton: Elizabethan Mapmaker*, written jointly by Heather with Ifor Evans. This latter book led to speaking engagements at international cartographical conferences and to articles by her in specialist journals. Recently she had been engaged in writing a major study of another famous cartographer, John Speed. Amongst her other voluntary interests she was archivist for the Society of Friends centred at Ackworth School.

Her father, John Kilburn, was a pupil at the Misses Gissing's school and by his lectures on George Gissing introduced many of us to his writing.

Our condolences go out to her husband Brian, her children Simon, Penny and Toby and her mother, Mrs. Helen Kilburn.

Clifford Brook

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Book Reviews

George Gissing: Antologia Critica, ed. Francesco Badolato, foreword by Pierre Coustillas, Roma: Herder Editrice, 1984, pp. xxiv + 270, Lire 30,000.

This is not the first time that Francesco Badolato has contributed to the knowledge and appreciation of Gissing. Here he brings together, under the covers of this well-chosen anthology, sixteen essays by British, American, French, Japanese and Italian scholars covering biographical and critical aspects of Gissing's life and art. This timely volume fills a gap which is particularly noticeable at a time when—thanks to the efforts of a few dedicated critics and scholars, like Maria Teresa Chialant, Carlo Pagetti and Francesco Badolato himself—interest in Gissing in Italy has been slowly but steadily growing. Evidence of an increase in interest in Gissing comes from the several reissues of the only text by him that has been uninterruptedly available in Italy, namely Margherita Guidacci's fine translation of *By the Ionian Sea*,¹ from critical appreciation of collections of stories edited and/or translated by Badolato, and from the inclusion of Gissing's works in the syllabuses of students of English literature at several Italian universities.

Declaring itself to be a "critical anthology" this collection indicates its orientation and keynote. Its originality lies in providing smoothly unfolding and generally very stimulating interpretations of Gissing's novels seen in the context of late nineteenth-century literary and social ideas. This background is insightfully covered by Part I by Dr. Badolato in a 30-page bio-bibliographical opening section, whose unusual length is justified by the fact that this is the best informed sketch of this kind ever published in Italy.

The anthology itself (Parts II and III) opens with "G. Gissing: Humanist in Exile," a sound essay by Jacob Korg, the doyen of Gissing studies (re-printed from Richard Levine's *Victorian*

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Experience [1976]), providing a useful reassessment of the most important works and themes. This is followed by Pierre Coustillas's "Gissing as a Romantic Realist," a paper given at the 1980 Aberdeen Conference of the I.A.U.P.E., which stresses Gissing's rejection of Wordsworth's moral teaching, the lasting influence exercised on him by Shelley and Schopenhauer, and the romanticism

of Gissing's social rebels, whose idealism is controlled by a realism which, as Gissing himself puts it in his 1895 essay on "The Place of Realism in Fiction," is "nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life." In the third essay (reprinted from *Gissing in Context* [1975]), Adrian Poole describes the literary world in which, like his own characters in *New Grub Street*, Gissing moved, while a chapter from Samuel Vogt Gapp's 1936 book provides an examination of the influence of the classics on Gissing's novels of modern life, in which cultured protagonists stand in sharp contrast to the uncultured members of the proletariat, who, given the novelist's pessimistic outlook, are almost always beyond any hope of social improvement.

The task of showing Gissing's division of mind and purpose between social reform and art is assigned to another pivotal article by Jacob Korg, published in *PMLA* in 1955, where we are reminded that Gissing endorsed Shelley's idea that art is ethical by nature, and that he found in this theory an explanation of the differences in morality between the poor and other social classes, seeing the former as having no chance to learn a true morality, owing to their inevitable narrowness of experience and their ignorance of beauty. Typical examples of this didactic treatment of social themes, which was the cause of misunderstandings between the novelist and his readers and critics, are to be found in *The Unclassed* and *Demos*, where, according to Professor Korg, "the faults of character resulting from proletarian environment and inheritance are not easily eliminated by changes in social status" (p.133).

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The remaining chapters of Part II are devoted to close examinations of single novels. Pierre Coustillas writes (in French) on *Born in Exile*, J. W. Blench on *Thyrza*, C. J. Francis on the Italian novel *The Emancipated*, and J. H. Buckley and David Eakin provide an essay each on that major achievement *New Grub Street*. The British novelist and critic Gillian Tindall contributes a review-article on the first of so many recent reissues of the proto-feminist *The Odd Women*, "Women's Lib 1892," which appeared in *The New Statesman* three years before she gave a fuller treatment of "the woman question" in *The Born Exile* (1974).

Gissing's own younger son, Alfred (1896-1975), is represented by a short note on the unfinished *Veranilda*, which had cost his father years of extensive reading and patient research on an obscure period of Roman history. Professor Osamu Doi closes Part II with a short but vivid account of the early reception and wide acclaim of Gissing's works in Japan and of the banning of his books from the shelves of schools and bookshops when, at the onset of World War II, words like freedom and concepts like socialism became taboo.

Part III, the final and shortest section, reprints two newspaper articles in Italian, one by the late Mario Praz (1896-1982), who, following in Lenormant's and Douglas's footsteps, describes a trip he made from Crotona to Capo Colonna, where a solitary column, seen from a distance, had reminded Gissing of the temple of Hera Lacinia and of the massacre of Hannibal's mercenary troops; the other article, reprinted from the *Osservatore Romano*, "Gissing in Calabria" by Gabriele Armandi, focuses on the great lover of that southernmost and most neglected part of the Italian peninsula, to which Gissing dedicated some of the best pages of an inspired book, *By the Ionian Sea* (not currently available in an English edition, but one is being prepared by Jacob Korg) whose qualities refute the disparaging overtones associated with the expression "travel literature." Desmond MacCarthy's vintage article "An English Chekov" reviewing Gissing's integrity of

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artistic purpose, closes this remarkably inclusive body of criticism which makes up a fitting tribute

to a great novelist who visited Italy three times and understood its people, traditions, virtues and faults as few other travellers, writers and artists had done before.

In collecting these often challenging articles and notes from scattered sources that are not always easily accessible in this country, Dr. Badolato has concentrated not only on aspects closely connected with Gissing's visits to Italy as they are convincingly reflected in his literary creations, but, more importantly, as Professor Coustillas suggests in his foreword, on studies which deal authoritatively with essential areas of Gissing's production.

Mario Curreli, University of Pisa.

1. *Sulla riva dello Ionio*, Bologna: Cappelli, 1957 (rptd. 1962, 1971). Earlier Italian translations, of *Thyrza* in 1939 and of *Born in Exile* in 1955, were soon consigned to oblivion.

Two other appreciations of *George Gissing: Antologia Critica* have reached the editor. Professor Bernard E. Dodd, of the University of Messina, thinks that Dr. Badolato's book has a most useful introduction in Italian, "followed by a brief but concentrated and objective analysis of the life and works of the novelist." "The compiler believes," Dodd goes on, "that the life helps appreciation of the works. With this one could only quarrel over his excessively charitable view of a young man, who as an unfaithful servant, robbed to give money to a prostitute who caught his eye." This makes strange reading. The idea that Gissing was at any time "an unfaithful servant" is something of a novelty. However, Dodd thinks that *George Gissing: Antologia Critica*, "beautifully printed on excellent paper and pleasingly free of printing errors ... is a volume which complements

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the Critical Heritage volume" and that "they are two works which should be on the shelves of any English library."

Ernesta Spencer Mills observes that although the title of the book is in Italian, it contains only four pieces in that language, and should therefore be of use to all scholars who can read English. She also reminds us of Edmund Gosse's prediction (1927): "Gissing's books will continue to be read and he himself to be talked of when more dignified and sententious authors are forgotten."

George Gissing, *Thyrza: A Tale*. Edited with an introduction by Jacob Korg. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984. Paperback reprint of Harvester's 1974 edition. £7.95.

Harvester Press has now added *Thyrza* to its seven other Gissing paperbacks —*The Nether World*, *Demos*, *The Unclassed*, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, *Born in Exile*, *The Whirlpool*, and *The Town Traveller*—reasonably priced reprints selectively drawn from its hardbound editions of Gissing's works. Why has Harvester chosen *Thyrza* in particular for paperback distribution?—not one of the author's supreme achievements. The answer seems obvious enough. The book deals with the working classes, and it does so with a sympathy unusual both for Gissing and for his time. As a result, *Thyrza* complements Harvester's paperback editions of *The Nether World* and *Demos*. Among these three novels, only *The Nether World* ranks with Gissing's very best work, but they all have much interest for students of literature and also of social history.

Carried over unchanged from the 1974 hardcover edition, Professor Korg's intelligent introduction avoids exaggerated claims for *Thyrza*'s literary merits. It weighs the book's "respectful curiosity and even affection" for its working-class characters against the sentimental idealization of

Thyrza herself and of her love for Egremont. As Korg suggests, the novel's strength lies in its

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emphatic depiction of a supporting cast of characters as they go about their working-class lives. In short, the secondary elements in *Thyrza*, rather than its central ones, show Gissing at his best.

One might point, above all, to Totty Nancarrow, an irrepressible Lambeth tomboy who drops her word endings, in contrast to the hat-trimmer heroine's unconvincingly smooth English. Gissing endows Totty with considerable dignity and shrewdness, instead of clucking over her lack of middle-class polish. One might also single out Luke Ackroyd—a sympathetic portrayal of a good-hearted artisan who remains untouched by the author's own literary and aesthetic concerns. Unlike the novel's Gilbert Grail—a bookish version of Gissing himself barely disguised by overalls—Luke has little in common with his creator. Luke disdains great literature and loves science instead: he performs chemical experiments in a make-shift bedroom laboratory. Yet Gissing treats him without the condescension shown to similar artisan characters in *Demos*.

One of *Thyrza's* finest scenes occurs when Luke is arrested in a fist fight as Totty looks on, and she must hurry to his brother-in-law and sister to plead for bail. They treat her as little better than a prostitute, yet, in spite of her humiliation and dismay, this decent working girl returns to the lockup to make absolutely certain that Luke's haughty relatives will come to get him out. And Luke in turn responds to her actions with full-hearted gratitude. Although both Totty and Luke reject the high aesthetic credo preached elsewhere in the novel, Gissing shows them as sensitive and even lovable human beings who keep their zest for life and their essential good nature even in the midst of Lambeth's dreary poverty. In spite of Gissing's sentimentalization of his lower-class heroine, *Thyrza*, the resilient and unmawkish other working-class characters, such as Totty and Luke, give the work its considerable value.

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Appropriately enough, Professor Korg has chosen for reproduction the revised and extensively cut later version of *Thyrza* rather than the 1887 first edition (he has used the one-volume Smith, Elder edition of 1892, itself based on the 1891 revised second edition). This pruned and polished text represents a literary advance over the digressive and wordy original. Korg provides useful footnotes about literary allusions and also about relevant biographical matters. His concluding bibliography of *Thyrza* criticism is still quite useful, though it remains unupdated from the 1974 hardback. The paperback's attractive front cover consists of a well-chosen late-Victorian illustration of a frilly young woman standing beside the sea—a good approximation of *Thyrza* at Eastbourne. One wishes success to this new Gissing paperback, but one would also like to see other Gissing works in this low-priced series: *The Emancipated*; *The Paying Guest* and, perhaps after the eventual hardbound edition, a volume of Gissing's collected short stories.

Robert L. Selig.

Victorian Novelists After 1885 (Volume 18 of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*) ed. Ira B. Nadel and William E. Fredeman, Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1983, pp. x + 392, \$ 76.00.

This is a splendidly produced quarto volume which anyone interested in the late Victorian novel will want to buy. It provides thirty-three biographical-critical articles on novelists whose production falls for the most part within the years 1885-1901, and is a companion volume to Vol. 21, which covers *Victorian Novelists Before 1885*. In addition to the essays proper the book

contains a foreword on the novel of the period in which the revolution in the forms of fiction is discussed authoritatively and an appendix which consists of a series of significant texts by

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well-known authors on the art of fiction. No table of illustrations is provided but a rough count indicates that there are about two hundred, which include portraits, facsimile title and text pages, letters and drafts as well as photographs of first editions. Each entry also includes a bibliography of primary and secondary works; it is highly selective, and, some users will possibly think, the selection is rather arbitrary. A useful cumulative index to Volumes 1-18 of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* will be found at the end.

The entry on Gissing covers pp. 103-19 and it is the work of Jacob Korg. It begins with a table giving the salient facts of the novelist's life and a full list of his books, from *Workers in the Dawn* to *George Gissing on Fiction*, which is not really a book by Gissing, although it contains many hitherto unpublished letters by him on literary matters and his college essay on the English novel in the eighteenth century. This list, which may well have been compiled by the general editors and not by Korg, supplies useful information on the early history of Gissing's works, in particular the dates of the first English and American editions. This is the policy which was adopted for the whole volume, but there are in the present case occasional inconsistencies. An uninformed reader might believe that the first English edition of *Demos* was published in one volume or that *The Odd Women* did not appear in America in 1893 or that *Thyrza* never achieved publication across the Atlantic. Also *The Immortal Dickens* should have been dated 1925, not 1924.

Jacob Korg's essay is, as one would expect, informative and suggestive. It is a distinguished short survey of the life as well as a well-balanced assessment of the artistic value of the works. Some twenty years have passed since Professor Korg published his critical biography of Gissing, that is since the end of the period when *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* was viewed as the author's major achievement. The novels have at long last come into their own and Korg now rightly

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gives them pride of place without attempting to minimize the merits of *Henry Ryecroft*. The opening paragraph of his conclusion is a good sample of this stimulating essay: "For Gissing, sincerity meant a vision of life that was, on the whole, pessimistic if not despairing. His world is blighted by injustice to the poor, to women, and to artists. It suffers from evils generated by competition, science, religion, commercialism, and egotism. None of the remedies proposed for eliminating social injustice seemed viable to him, and the industrialization and democratization which most people welcomed as signs of progress threatened the fragile humanism he valued. His own ideals offered no solution to the evils he lamented. But his sustained examination of the failure of society to encourage what he considered to be the best potentialities of human nature makes him one of the most sensitive and conscientious observers of social life among the English novelists".

The illustrations are varied and of excellent quality. Besides three portraits of Gissing (photographs taken by Mendelssohn and by Elliott & Fry in 1895 and 1901 respectively, as well as the drawing by Mrs. Clarence Rook, unfortunately ascribed to H. G. Wells, who signed it together with Gissing) there are portraits of Eduard Bertz and Gabrielle Fleury, and the well-known picture taken of Gissing, Hornung, Conan Doyle and Wells in Rome in 1898, while three facsimiles of MSS show the novelist's handwriting in 1890, 1898 and 1900 or 1901. The appendix offers "The Place of Realism in Fiction" (*Humanitarian*, July, 1895) together with George Moore's *Literature at Nurse*, a pamphlet with which Gissing was familiar. The other pieces in the appendix are famous

essays on the novel by Wilde (“The Decay of Lying”), Hardy (“Candour in English Fiction”), Saintsbury (“The Present State of the English Novel, 1892”) and James (“The Future of the Novel”).

The volume contains other attractions for the Gissing scholar, notably the presence in the

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book of a number of fellow novelists who in some way or other entered into his life—Conan Doyle, Hardy, Meredith, Ouida, James Payn and Anne Thackeray Ritchie, let alone many others, like Eliza Lynn Linton, William Morris or R. L. Stevenson whom he read and sharply criticised. Even George’s brother, Algernon, makes an unexpected appearance when the editors of the volume mention in their discussion of the fall of the three volume novel that *The Scholar of Bygate* (1897) is the latest of the three-deckers in the Robert Lee Wolff’s collection at Harvard.

A book which will be serviceable to students and scholars and would do any publishing firm proud. — Pierre Coustillas.

Notes and News

The H.G. Wells Society has sent the following announcement:

“WELLS UNDER REVISION”
International H. G. Wells Symposium
Imperial College, London
July 24-27, 1986
CALL for PAPERS

The Executive Committee of the H.G. Wells Society invites proposals for papers to be read

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at the 1986 Symposium, which will include a lecture by our Vice-President Brian Aldiss. It is envisaged that the Symposium will be divided into four sections, covering “Wells as Novelist and Scientific Romancer,” “Wells as Educationalist and Utopian,” “Wells and Ideology,” and “Wells To-day and To-morrow” respectively. Proposals for 20-30 minute papers under these four headings, and consisting in the first instance of a title and a brief résumé (not more than 2 sheets of A4 typescript), should be sent to

Christopher Rolfe,
Hon. General Secretary
The H. G. Wells Centre
Polytechnic of North London
Prince of Wales Road
London NW5 3LB, England

Deadline for submission is 15th November, 1985.

Mrs. Ernesta Spencer Mills draws our attention to a judgment on *By the Ionian Sea* by Norman Douglas's biographer, Mark Holloway. In his book (1976) Holloway refers pleasantly to Gissing's travel narrative on p. 217: "not that *Old Calabria* supplants Gissing's limpid and immaculate, though lightweight, account of Calabria." Mrs. Mills thinks it is a pity *By the Ionian Sea* is one of the very few books by Gissing which is not currently available. Already, years ago, it failed to win adequate recognition while Bourget's *Sensations d'Italie* (1891), a vastly inferior book, was praised outrageously. It was not until 1957 that *By the Ionian Sea* was made available to Italian readers. Edward Lear's travel books seem to have fared better than Gissing's only travelogue. Mrs. Mills has sent a leaflet announcing the publication (in October 1984) of *The Cretan Journal* by Edward Lear, a clothbound volume of 120 pages with 14 colour plates and 42 black and white illustrations. The published price is £14.50. U.K. orders and enquiries to Golgonooza Press, 3 Cam-

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bridge Drive, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP2 9EP. Orders from outside the U.K. to: Denise Harvey & Co., Lambrou Fotiadi 6, Mets, 11636 Athens, Greece. The book is edited with an introduction by Rowena Fowler of the University of Bristol.

In one of its numbers published last autumn the *Wakefield Express* had an article on Clifford Brook, the new chairman of the Wakefield Bench of Magistrates. An account of his career is given as well as a recent photograph. Mr. Brook is also a vice-president of the Wakefield Historical Society and, as is well-known to readers of this journal, the authority on the Gissings of Wakefield and the honorary secretary of the Gissing Trust.

The publication of the Harvester Press critical edition of *Workers in the Dawn* was recently announced for 21 February.

The Presses Universitaires de Lille currently have five Victorian titles in their catalogue *La Nouvelle Bohème* (*New Grub Street*), *Femmes en trop* (*The Odd Women*), *Nouvelles choisies de George Gissing* (Selected Short Stories), *Nouvelles anglaises de la Belle Epoque* (English short stories of the years 1890-1914 offering a variety of female characters ranging from the upper classes to the underworld) and *Sous le Regard du Berger* ("What the Shepherd Saw"), by Thomas Hardy, another collection of 11 short stories.

Joe Clay's *Drawings of Wakefield* (Wakefield Historical Publications, 1984) contains a number of attractive drawings of Gissing interest, notably The Gissing House, Westgate (July 1977), Westgate, Back Lane and St. John's.

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Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *A Life's Morning*, edited with an introduction by Pierre Coustillas and with historical and topographical notes by Clifford Brook, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1984. Pp. liii + 348. Hardback: £18.95, paperback: £6.95. Distributed in the United States by Methuen Inc., 733 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

George Gissing, *Nouvelles Choisies*, edited with an introduction by Pierre Coustillas, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires de Lille. Pp. 203. FF. 90. This is the second edition of the volume reviewed by Sylvère Monod in our October 1982 number. The twelve stories, which have been translated by eight members of the University of Lille, are "Lou and Liz," "The Day of Silence," "An Inspiration," "The Schoolmaster's Vision," "One Way of Happiness," "A Poor Gentleman," "Humplebee," "The Scrupulous Father," "A Charming Family," "A Daughter of the Lodge," "Christopherson" and "Miss Rodney's Leisure".

Nouvelles anglaises de la Belle Epoque, edited with an introduction by Pierre Coustillas, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires de Lille. Pp. 270, FF. 110. A collection of 14 short stories by Kipling, Crackanthorpe, George Egerton, Arthur Morrison, Gissing ("Our Mr. Jupp" and "Comrades in Arms"), W. J. Dawson, Wells, Henry James, Bennett, Lawrence and Saki. These stories have been translated by twelve members of the University of Lille. Gissing, Bennett and Saki are represented by two stories each.

Articles, reviews, etc.

W. Eugene Davis, "Recent Books – British and Irish," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 29,

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no. 4, Winter 1983, pp. 763-64. Review of John Halperin's *Gissing: A Life in Books* and of Gisela Argyle's *German Elements in the Fiction of George Eliot, Gissing and Meredith*.

Zdzislaw Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*, Cambridge University Press, 1983. Contains seven short passages on Gissing.

Margaret Stonyk, *Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Macmillan History of Literature), London: Macmillan, 1983. Gissing's books are discussed on pp. 243-45, and his work is mentioned in other places on eight occasions. It is unfortunate that some dates of publication are given incorrectly both in the text and in the chronology.

Martha Vogeler, "Frederic Harrison and the Higher Journalism: A Review," *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 17, no. 1 & 2, pp. 57-63. With a portrait of Harrison in 1880 and a paragraph on Gissing on p. 61.

David Grylls, "Letters: H. G. Wells: Aspects of A Life," *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 October 1984, p. 1159.

Anon., "Brief mention," *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 27, no. 4, p. 339. Notice of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* and *The Unclassed* (Harvester/Methuen).

Pierre Coustillas, "Letters: Wells and Gissing," *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 November 1984, p. 1249.

Gabriele Armandi, "Le Rassegne di oggi e domain," *Oggi e Domani*, Anno 12, no. 11, November 1984, p. 27. Review of Francesco Badolato's *Antologia critica*.

John Sutherland, "Victorian Fiction: Reprints and Critical Commentary," *British Book News*, December 1984, pp. 711-14. Gissing in general and the Harvester critical edition of *Demos* are mentioned.

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Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate, *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. IV, 1909-1913, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. Gissing and *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* are mentioned in a letter to James Douglas on 10 November 1912.

Anthony West, *H. G. Wells: Aspects of A Life*, London: Hutchinson, 1984. Gissing's relationship with Wells is discussed almost continuously on pp. 238-76. Among the many illustrations are two portraits of Gissing and one of C. K. Shorter. See the article on this book in the present number.

Bernard Loing, *H. G. Wells à l'oeuvre: Les débuts d'un écrivain*, (1894-1900), Paris: Didier Erudition, 1984. The hundred letters printed as an appendix contain various references to Gissing's activities. This is an important study of Wells's early fiction.

Joe Clay, *Drawings of Wakefield*, Wakefield Historical Publications, 1984. See "Notes and News."

John Halperin, *The Life of Jane Austen*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1984. Contains a few allusions to Gissing.

Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Turning Key: Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse since 1800*, Harvard University Press, 1984. *New Grub Street* and *Henry Rycroft* are discussed on pp. 117-19.