

“More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”  
– George Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*.

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-- 1 --

Prisoners of Illusion:

*Isabel Clarendon* and the Ideal of “Literature”

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*Isabel Clarendon* is a novel of ideas in which the intellectual hero is presented for the first time in Gissing’s work, not as disinherited or *déclassé*, but as a distinctively male version of Charlotte Brontë’s cultured, “petty-bourgeois” protagonists. One interesting consequence of this arrangement in *Isabel Clarendon* is the prominence given to the problem of the hero’s social inferiority to the refined woman with whom he falls in love. It is a situation which prevents a romantic resolution of the conflicts of lower-class aspiration in the convention of “hypergamy” which Ian Watt has identified as a feature of the English novel.<sup>1</sup> The novel’s unhappy ending is

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-- 2 --

to some extent the consequence of a refusal to transgress the conventions of the sexual code which forbid a woman to marry beneath her.<sup>2</sup>

It is the novel’s inconclusive ending, its refusal to leave behind it “a sense of imaginative satisfaction,” which struck early reviewers and evoked comparisons with Henry James.<sup>3</sup> Yet that this disappointment of “imaginative satisfaction” reaches even deeper than the unhappy ending is evident in the sense of superiority and occasional bewilderment felt by contemporary reviewers and later critics towards a hero variously described as “abnormal,” “morbid” and “woefully feeble.” What this would seem to indicate is the degree to which the hero’s final renunciation of the world is denied the kind of spiritual authority generally granted it within the

patterns of the *Bildungsroman* to which the novel would seem to adhere — patterns which tend to endorse the hero's superiority to the world even in the representation of his inevitable defeat.<sup>4</sup> If *Isabel Clarendon* fails to provide such imaginary supersession, it is because the very terms of its ironic privilege involve a return to those wholly illusory ideals whose mystifications the novel itself has exposed — in *Isabel Clarendon*, a combination of rural radicalism, female beauty worship and “Paterian” aestheticism. Yet the effect as we read is not simply of illusion turning into reality in a way that exposes Gissing's essential pessimism and conservatism. Such a view tempts John Goode, for example, to class the novel as “an updated version of the romantic ‘confession’ ... a kind of *Werther*” which provides “a valuable guide to Gissing's thinking in the ‘eighties.’”<sup>5</sup> Rather, the novel disturbingly confronts the absence of intellectual autonomy at the heart of English life in a way that makes visible its hidden traumas and contradictions.

It is revealing in this context to consider Turgenev's influence on *Isabel Clarendon*, which was openly acknowledged by Gissing<sup>6</sup> and which has been made the basis of some

-- 3 --

critical attention.<sup>7</sup> It is clear that Turgenev had an important influence on Gissing's work as a whole; but the debt to Turgenev was never simply a superficial matter of setting or character — the relationship of Kingcote and Isabel as an echo of Bazarov's relationship with Anna Sergeyevna, for instance, or Kingcote's resemblance to Rudin. The true significance of that debt lies in the creation of representative characters as bearers of topical ideological forces at work in society — a method of showing character which Dostoevsky was to make the basis of his “realism in the highest sense.” Character in these terms is not reducible to a merely empirical or psychological reality; nor is it to be viewed allegorically as a mere personification or idea; rather, it has an almost figural quality in which psychology and individual action are seen as manifestations of society's hidden laws. It is this method, together with a preponderance of intellectual types, which gives Gissing's work its strangely European quality. Yet the specific form of that figuration in *Isabel Clarendon* — in particular, the novel's regression to demonstrably anachronistic ideals — is warning against superficial comparisons which obscure the peculiarly English nature of Gissing's work.

*Isabel Clarendon* expresses an attachment to the ideal of an organic pre-industrial England which Gissing inherited from Carlyle and the nineteenth-century social critics. This retrospective rural radicalism, with its ideal of a functional aristocracy directing a cohesive and hierarchical class structure, does in fact go much further back. It is to be found in the Neo-classical celebration of the “great house” in Pope's *Moral Essays*, for instance, or a century earlier in Jonson's “To Penhurst.” Culture, seen as “a whole way of life,” functions in all these instances as a critical category. In the poetry of Jonson and Pope, the ideal of the country house as the seat of civilized life merges with a traditional, “pastoral” critique of the cultural debasement and lack of cohesion of urban life. In the writings of the nineteenth-century social

-- 4 --

critics, the idealization of the organic life of the Middle Ages is directed in a similar manner against industrialism and *Laissez-faire*. Yet in nineteenth-century England, as Raymond Williams has argued, this critical idea is riven by an abstract and contradictory conception of culture as a “separate entity” from society.<sup>8</sup> In the Neo-classical ideal, the aesthetic component of culture remains firmly lodged in the whole way of life, supporting aristocracy, patronage and the “great house.” In the writings of nineteenth-century social critics such as Carlyle and Ruskin, it shifts from an affiliation with a social class to a devotion to beauty and personal feeling opposed to society and the demands of the “market.” Culture as a critical idea comes to engage a contemporary ideal of a pre-industrial past, and at the same time an essentially a-historical devotion to art.

The pitfalls of rural-intellectual radicalism as a critique of industrial society are, as Williams argues, the indifference and reactionary idealisations which emerge when

retrospective radicalism is made to

carry humane feelings and yet ordinarily attach them to a pre-capitalist and therefore irrecoverable world. A necessary social criticism is then directed to the safer world of the past; to a world of books and memories, in which the scholar can be professionally humane but in his own real world either insulated or indifferent.<sup>9</sup>

The focus of the argument is not on whether rural-intellectual radicalism is a genuine critique of industrial capitalism; rather it is on interrogating the consequences when this critique of the present “must choose its bearings, between past and future.” In *Isabel Clarendon*, Bernard Kingcote not only chooses the past, but imagines he finds it undisturbed.

In some respects, Gissing’s hero resembles Goethe’s Werther. Winstoke, like Werther’s

-- 5 --

Wahlheim, is a rural retreat from the corruptions of city life. Here, Kingcote finds solace talking to the peasants, the “worthy clodhoppers” who in his view are as happy as oxen, since they lack imagination and townish radicalism. (I. ix, 178) The novel’s own account of Winstoke is, by contrast, hedged round with a sense of reality. Kingcote’s country cottage is a damp, unhealthy place. (I. x) Moreover, the rural world which Kingcote enters has not been immune to industrialism and external influence; it has already seen the passing of silk manufacture. (I. i)

This demystification of the naive hero’s poetic view of rural life also applies to the legend of “The Knight’s Well.” The legend provides an ironic focus on the hero’s idealization of the great house and its mistress. It also serves as an anti-realistic element, a symbolic device prefiguring Kingcote’s fate. Isabel Clarendon, the mistress of Knightswell, is not Kingcote’s Petrarchan lady but the daughter of a country solicitor who has managed to escape the “social limbo” by a fortunate marriage. (I. ii) Clarendon himself is a “novus homo” from the commercial classes and one of a long line of “inglorious” tenants of Knightswell. The unfolding pattern of the narrative is one in which the protagonist moves towards a knowledge which the novelist and reader have shared all along. By placing the reader in a position of knowledge, the novel would seem to ensure the reader’s identification with the renunciations of Kingcote at the close.

There is clearly a strong temptation to view *Isabel Clarendon* in these terms. It is in this respect that the novel would seem to conform to the pattern of the *Bildungsroman*, which ends characteristically with the hero’s abandonment of his search while still refusing the world of convention. In fact, the relationship between the ideal and the actual in *Isabel Clarendon* is more impassable than this reading would allow. Kingcote’s ideal serves as a critical focus on the superficial world of Knightswell, but in the end it is the ideal which is shown to be illusory, and

-- 6 --

what is more, an imaginary distortion of the real relations of existence. It is not simply a question of disappointment, of Kingcote’s ideal confronting the actuality of a Knightswell inhabited by a sham grande bourgeoisie and parvenus from the commercial classes. There is a recognition that the very means by which he attempts to negotiate, and finally refuses that degradation is itself the fiction and illusion which supports it.

The novel’s subversion of its own moral centre is also evident in its rendering of the Romantic notion of literature itself as a means to a higher reality and truth. All the characters define themselves or are defined in relation to literature. One of the novel’s key dichotomies, for instance, is the opposition between the gregarious, anti-intellectual concerns of high society and the moral earnestness of the petty-bourgeoisie. To the former belong Isabel Clarendon and her suitor, Robert Asquith; to the latter, Kingcote and Mr. Vissian, the country parson who

impoverishes himself by subscriptions to literary societies. (I. x) The novel also represents the world of literary London in the character of Thomas Meres. To the extent that his literary attachments remain uncontaminated by commerce, Kingcote tends ultimately to be treated as more exclusively cultured and humane. The initial contrast, however, is between the antiquarianism of Kingcote who finds the world of newspapers and advertisements preposterous and unreal (I. ix), and the anti-intellectualism of Asquith and Isabel who find newspapers and society magazines healthily “concrete.” (I. iii) If Asquith is capable of looking ironically on the “social economy” of the *décolleté* costume, he nevertheless remains like Isabel within a world which prefers Marryat or the newspapers to George Eliot. (II. ii)

It is the novel’s claims for the moralizing and humanizing effects of literature which underlie its central structuring metaphor of “society as a stage.” It is a motif which arises in part from the Romantic tradition that the material world is illusion, and only the spiritual world has

-- 7 --

reality. Here, the vision of life as a series of roles is one which supports Kingcote’s refusal to “play the walking gentleman.” (I. x) Isabel, for instance, objects to Rhoda Meres, the daughter of an impoverished literary man, going on stage because “ladies don’t do such things.” (I. iii) She dismisses the stage as a place for the “unsuccessful ones” who have “lost their place in society”; but in expressing a conventional view, she appears to miss the ironic light it throws on her own position.

A consciousness of this irony emerges in her relationship with her ward, Ada Warren. Ada, who is Clarendon’s illegitimate daughter, is the living accusation of the “refined insincerity” of her marriage without love:

“That I should take the child and rear it to inherit his property, or else lose everything at once. With a woman of self-respect, such a scheme would have been empty; she would have turned away in scorn. But he knew me well; he knew ... that I would rather suffer through years, be the talk and pity and contempt of everyone, face at last the confession to her, — all that rather than be poor again!” (I. xiii, 283-84)

Her punishment lies in the awareness of her dependence on material things, a dependence which threatens her conception of her ideal self. This wound is opened by the appearance of Lacour. To Isabel, his attentions to Ada are merely those of a fortune-hunter, but the fortune he seeks is the one she herself sought to win in the same marriage market.

Lacour too considers going on stage. (I. v) His theatre, however, remains society itself. One of the striking features of the novel’s characterization is that Lacour remains in many ways an attractive, even a sympathetic figure in spite of his unattractive qualities. The novel attaches

-- 8 --

no moral blame to his selfish calculations. The novel’s ironic view of Lacour’s heartless manoeuvres is directed not against his sincerity as such; rather, it demonstrates the disparity between self-justification and motivation. The shift is from man as an “essence” to man as an actor. Even Lacour’s confession that he is a “frank egoist” and thus “of necessity sincere” (I. viii) is shown to be directed as much by the forces of egoism and self-idealization — by the need to secure his own identity — as to the attainment of specific ends. Man’s actions and words are seen to involve a calculation of effects whose roots nevertheless lie beyond conscious intention; all finally situate the individual as a “subject” within a way of seeing opposed to the realities of existence. Yet in the end this is no less true of Kingcote, who refuses “the theatre of the world” in his search for, and assertion of his essential self. His literary aestheticism also breeds distortions of reality and disembodied ideals. His existential denial of “identity” and the past is in the end a rejection of his social origins in a traditional, class-conscious society in which the conflicting doctrine of individualism has nevertheless taken root.

The frailty of the hero's position is especially evident in the separation of town and country life. Admittedly, there is a palpable lack of irony in the account of Kingcote's return to London which would seem to endorse his contrast between the hideous welter of the town and the tranquillity and spiritual obligations of the country. (II. iv) Yet the hero's question, "Was *that* a dream of joy, or *this* a hideous vision?", is not simply rhetorical. In a sense they are both dreams, both literary versions of the world. Kingcote's London with its rush and welter and predatory relations is no less fictional than his pastoral ideal; both are shaped in the enduring tradition of "town and country" fiction which, in exposing urban evils, disguises the homologous relations of oppression uniting both worlds. Isabel's London after all is the world of the "season" in which the city traditionally serves the ruling class as marriage and business

-- 9 --

market, as well as social distraction. It is from the polite and flippant world of the "season" that Kingcote turns away in horror, seeking to free the essential Isabel from its artificialities. (II. viii) He finally recognises, however, not only the impossibility of abstracting Isabel from her social milieu, but the interdependence of town and country life in terms of class and social relations. It is not that Kingcote's ideal of refinement and cultured sensitivity does not exist, an ideal criticising the atomism of urban industrial life; the final irony is that its very existence is seen to depend on the support and ordering of that very society. It is this which pinpoints the illusory nature of Kingcote's ideal. Isabel's sincerity is not a sham; nor is it the "selfish calculation" of a conscious hypocrite; it is a virtue of character which depends on the social and material advantages she has won from life.

This in a sense is what Ada Warren "knows." Ada is the novel's internal dramatic perspective on Kingcote's ideals. She is the enigma which confronts him, the bearer of the secret he will possess at the close. It is Ada who first mocks the antiquarian tendencies of Kingcote's literary cultivation:

Isabel presented him to Miss Warren, then took the volume from his hands and looked into it.

"You know Sir Thomas Browne, no doubt, Ada," she said.

"I know the 'Urn-burial,'" Ada replied calmly examining her visitor. (I. vi, 121)

On one level, Ada's intellectual resistance to society and its forms refuses that identification of the conventional with the natural which is the basis of Isabel's "practical virtues." Yet on another level — and this is one of the most interesting features of *Isabel Clarendon* — Ada's refusal also stems from her sense that femininity itself is a "fiction."

-- 10 --

Plain, bookish, indifferent to compliments: Ada's "masculine" characteristics repel and unnerve Kingcote. Later he will discover that she represents a truer, more authentic type of woman than either his own hopelessly fictional ideal of the "fair, sweet, queenly woman," or the collusive, pragmatic, wholly feminine Isabel. Ada's final renunciation of society and the country house is not only a political rejection of a world that is no longer the genuine centre of wider social and moral values. It is also a refusal of woman's dependent and parasitical status in that world. Unable to silence her inward ironic voice, unwilling to accept the humiliating self-suppression and denial of identity that the conventions of the sexual code would seem to indicate, Ada heralds the emergence in Gissing's fiction of the image of those "hybrids" or "men-women" caricatured by journalists and ardent anti-feminists of the period.<sup>10</sup> This is not to suggest that Ada is in any sense a militant separatist. Her desire for a man's love and her burning "Who am I?" indicate her innermost sense of lack, insignificance, supplementarity. Her

childhood has significantly been overshadowed by an absent father, a deficit which may be seen to have left unresolved or undecided that moment of “castration” and repression of phallic sexuality which one has come to identify, since Freud, as the symbolic, ideological, psychoanalytic basis of feminine sexuality.<sup>11</sup> Yet Ada does not simply serve the novel as an image of unfulfilled and incomplete womanhood. Isabel’s “Poor Ada” may denote the world’s condescending, disingenuous pity for what is seen to be Ada’s repulsive, jarring sexlessness, but it also expresses a fear of one who resists incorporation within the symbolic securities of gender. The radical primacy of woman’s bisexual nature which feminist theorists have constructed in the psychoanalytic writings of Freud<sup>12</sup> is here fictionally prefigured in the suspended, undecided sexuality of Ada Warren. In choosing Chelsea rather than Knightswell, struggle rather than ornamental womanhood, Ada represents the possibility of a new type of woman — one who

-- 11 --

refuses to accept her incompleteness, and who asserts with heroism her “double” undecidable self.

It is here, however, in its very gesture of radical “otherness,” that the novel also makes visible the strangely disabling nature of its own ideological perspectives. In the contrasting attitudes of Ada and Kingcote to their “superfluosity,” Gissing gives a particularly English direction to the two oppositional tendencies of the intelligentsia in the nineteenth century, idealism and nihilism, vividly depicted in the novels of Turgenev and Dostoevsky. Ada in this context is the anti-idealist voice in the novel, the “atheist” and new intellectual type who ridicules Kingcote’s reverence for the old order. Yet in choosing a literary career in London, Ada ultimately confines her energies to an aesthetic realm of ideology that cannot fundamentally challenge the existing structure of English ideological class formations. This in the end is what Kingcote “knows.” Kingcote too is forced more and more to identify with the artistic London of Meres, the literary editor, and Gabriel, the bohemian artist. If Kingcote finally refuses Chelsea, it is because he recognises the ultimately marginal nature of Bohemia in its material and intellectual dependence on the very society to which it represented a reaction.

In this reading of *Isabel Clarendon*, I have traced a contradiction or disjunction in the narrative. On the one hand, there is an attempt to grant moral privilege to the idealistic hero. The novel’s ironic opposition of culture and refinement, for instance, is clearly in accord with the hero’s faith in the humanizing influence of literature. Yet Kingcote’s discourse, in particular his finally bombastic parody of Shakespearean passion (I. xiii) and medieval *fin amour* (II. iii), is allowed no ultimate authority among the plurality of competing discourses generated by the novel’s literary motifs. It is revealing in this context that Gissing should have begun to read

-- 12 --

devoutly through Dante’s *Divina Commedia* during the writing of *Isabel Clarendon*.<sup>13</sup> The influence of Gissing’s rapturous reading of Dante is evident both in Kingcote’s idealization of Isabel, and in the authority the novel arrogates to itself in supporting the hero’s poetic or metaphorical response to the world. Of Dante’s Beatrice, Gabriel Josipovici has written that

She is not a personification but a real person ... Dante’s whole effort is directed at making us accept her as such; it is because she is both real *and* a miracle that she is important to him, for it is this double fact that guarantees the meaningfulness of the universe and God’s divine plane.<sup>14</sup>

In *Isabel Clarendon* too, the heroine is both a “real” person and a miracle. Here, however, we find ourselves in a purely rhetorical world in which the hero’s poetic response to the world has no final validity or truth. Indeed, it is the novel’s continuing attempt to uphold the hero’s subjective and finally metaphorical view of Isabel Clarendon which serves to undermine its claim to replace falsifying imagination with that “true” meaning to which the reader, in a

position of tragic foreknowledge, has already been directed.

This disturbance is particularly marked in the novel's *dénouement*. On one level, Kingcote's renunciation of Isabel, like Ada's refusal of her legacy, is clearly meant to assert his moral superiority over the "choice of lower things." His sacrifice and self-denial, like the suicide of Goethe's Werther, become a reproach to the world and mark a heroic preservation of an ideal he has failed inevitably and tragically to realize. Yet this refusal serves paradoxically to conserve Kingcote's already demystified ideal of Isabel herself. The novel recognises the dependence of that ideal on a precise ordering of social conditions; but it does so not in order to dispense with the opposition of the ideal and the actual; rather, it would seem to hold them more

-- 13 --

firmly over against each other in order to endorse Kingcote's ideal of Isabel's "spiritual beauty" in the face of degrading circumstance.

Yet Kingcote fails in the end not because Isabel is unwilling to renounce her world, but because he himself refuses her sacrifice and reproach:

Imagine this woman some day cooling in her love, and speaking with her pale face unutterable things. She would have a right to reproach him, and a reproach divined would drive him to frenzy. (II. iii, 79)

His refusal of her contractual sacrifice is ultimately a recognition of the material dependence of his ideal, and the real social and sexual conditions of the times. The fate of his sister who has married beneath her is a cautionary reminder of the sacrifice he demands of Isabel. If Gissing does not resort to the solution adopted by George Eliot in *Felix Holt*, it is because he cannot elevate individual morality over a consciousness of material and social constraint. It is in this respect that the novel can be seen to expose the absence of an autonomous place or function for the emergent intellectual in the advancing industrial world of late nineteenth-century England. All that is left him is the marginality of a radical conservative or liberal humanist morality in which he is doomed ultimately to serve the dominant class that excludes him. What is finally interesting about *Isabel Clarendon*, and what this reading has tried to emphasize, is not what the novel might urge to believe, but what it is forced to recognise as it attempts to resolve the conflicts between its ideological dream and the encompassing realities of society to which the fiction itself would finally refer.

#### Notes:

(1) Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1957, p. 154.

-- 14 --

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 164.

(3) James Ashcroft Noble, *Academy*, 10 July 1886, xxx, p. 24; reprinted in *The Critical Heritage*, ed. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge, London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, pp. 96-97.

(4) See Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: a historico-philosophical essay in the forms of Greek epic literature*, tr. Anna Bostock, London: Merlin Press, 1971; first published in Berlin, 1920.

- (5) John Goode, *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*, London: Vision Press, 1978, p. 83.
- (6) Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, London: Eveleigh Nash Co., 1912, p. 67.
- (7) For a brief survey of critics who have taken this approach, see Pierre Coustillas, "Introduction" to *Isabel Clarendon*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1969, pp. xlix-l.
- (8) Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780—1950*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1958.
- (9) Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1973, p. 36.
- (10) See for instance, E. Lynn Linton, *The Girl of the Period, and Other Social Essays*, 2 vols., London: Bentley, 1883.
- (11) See especially, Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, tr. under the general editorship of J. Stanley, Vol. XXII, London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74, pp. 112-35.
- (12) For an account of feminist deconstruction, see Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, pp. 165-75.

-- 15 --

- (13) Letters to Ellen Gissing, 2 August 1885; *The Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family*, ed. Algernon and Ellen Gissing, London: Constable, 1927, p. 160.
- (14) Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction*, London: The Macmillan Press, 1979 (Second edition), pp. 123-24.

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### Gissing in the Classroom

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For several years now, the Victorian period has been of special interest to me, particularly as it pertains to the fiction of the era. Among the preeminent writers and their works identified with this period, George Gissing's are of major significance. Having taken much time to read and re-read, to study and analyse what his novels, short stories, diary, letters, and other writing have had to reveal, one learns that his works constitute a veritable bridge between a world fading away after a century of great accomplishments, and one newly appearing. One realizes also that Gissing's accomplishments were fundamental in helping to shape a literary environment he shared with his great former and immediate contemporaries. His writings represent an uncompromising confrontation between the past and present in what has been referred to as a transition between the premodern and the modern eras.

-- 16 --

One of my joys in teaching the Victorian novel has been the opportunity to use Gissing's



works as assigned texts for my students. Over the last five years or so, I have taught *The Odd Women* three times, *New Grub Street* once, and, just recently *The Whirlpool* for the first time. As more of the novels become readily available, I intend to assign them, as well.

The above selection of novels by Gissing, along with those of Thackeray, Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell, and Hardy, for example, has been not so much because any one of them is prized above the others, but because Gissing's works are suggestive of contemporary times, his and ours, in terms of their subjects, characterizations, ideas, and style, even as they reflect the Victorian tone, flavor and experiences for which the course is designed.

While the works of Thackeray, Dickens, Eliot and Hardy, more or less, are staples of the genre for this period and course, including Gissing among them has, for the most part, been singular, as opposed to my colleagues who, proficient in the literature as they are, have their favorites, along which Gissing ranks lowest, if at all. The reasons for this defect is not overly surprising. Gissing's reputation as a major novelist is of recent renown. The ardent scholarship pertinent to this author's life and works, spearheaded by the dedication of individuals such as Pierre Coustillas, of the University of Lille, France, and Jacob Korg, of the University of Washington, in Seattle, and many others throughout the world, has grown substantially over the last twenty-five odd years or so. No great rush of Gissing enthusiasts, however, has come in raptures at the renaissance, but those who have turned their skills and minds to the investigation of Gissing's contributions to nineteenth century British literature are assiduous partisans.

Several friends have known of my interest in Gissing, and, where possible, I have proselytized not infrequently with some success. A few of them have discovered a magnetism in

-- 17 --

Gissing's writings that has an appeal — for any number of reasons. But as one of the lesser minions whose satisfaction in Gissing's achievements have grown more fervent as time passes, I have had a strong desire to expose younger people to this writer's works. The classroom happened to be one of the best forums for those of us who lack immediate access, occasions or opportunities to reach audiences through other media, such as books, articles and sundry conventions or colloquia.

When his work has been introduced in the classroom by me, it is done as the last assignment for the term. I usually assign the novels to be read after a chronological pattern, and Gissing is the final author to be discussed as a rule.

The reactions of students vary toward his work, but with few exceptions his novels are well received, often accompanied with not a little relief — which will be seen in the discussion below. But on two occasions, however, that I can recall, the novels under discussion have been referred to as “boring” or “dull.” In each case the novel given this appellation was *The Odd Women*, and, perhaps, not surprisingly, the dissenters were male.

When asked why the book was so tagged by the recusants (and how easy it would be if either student was poor, but they were each excellent young scholars), their replies were equally mundane — although neither student knew the other, since each was from different years of residency. One commented that “nothing happens.” The book “lacked excitement”; the other remonstrated by saying that Rhoda Nunn was aptly named, and he failed to see what any man would want with a sexless, stern to drab woman such as she. Even Monica, he continued, was too silly for anyone to be concerned about. As for the male characters, Barfoot and Widdowson, each was hardly the “Gable or Redford” of his era. When I suggested that these dissenting remarks were somewhat superficial in terms of the issues, the perspective and the cogency of the themes addressed in the book, the student who thought the novel boring and dull smiled and

-- 18 --

said, “Who cares about that stuff!”; he wanted “action” and “conflict” — some real “emotional involvement.” Even in Eliot's *Adam Bede*, one felt involved, he said. And in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, or *Jude the Obscure*, the author penetrated the psychological “interspace” (he called it) of the reader's “emotions.” As for the student who disliked the names of Rhoda Nunn

and Everard Barfoot, and resented the fact that neither Barfoot nor Widdowson equated with the screen idols Gable or Redford, his remarks consisted only in a shrug of the shoulders.

By far, though, the major portion of my students has responded well to the Gissing novels — some, naturally enough, at different levels of interest.

Their remarks, as I recall (and have recorded a few in my journal) were that they felt relief from the ponderous interpolations and “perennial” moralizing of Thackeray and Eliot. While they became involved with the characters in the novels studied by these giants of the genre, and after a period of resistance to the style, they began to appreciate the strength and purpose behind their novels. Yet they felt that, in Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, with the exception of the lively Becky Sharp, the Napoleonic setting and the “costumed class structure,” and the posturing of the middle class whose aims seemed to be consigned to undercut one another, were too far removed to be taken seriously beyond a study in early Victorian manners. As for Eliot, the students believed her writing extremely strong, but too didactic and moralistic, and lacking the humor found in Thackeray’s excursiveness. They preferred to follow the narrative in her work, primarily, which found more favor among my female students rather than my male students, some of whom, interestingly enough, felt challenged by Eliot’s deterministic statements and digressive insightfulness into human actions. Dickens was the most familiar to them, and, one student called him the “Shakespeare of the novel,” whatever that meant. But while they enjoyed

-- 19 --

Dickens’s *Little Dorrit*, or *Dombey & Son*, or *Bleak House*, or some other Dickens novel, except for the length and, to them, his seeming gratuitous verbosity, they were moved by his pathos, his energy, his magnificent characterizations, his convoluted plots and, above all, his humor. Nowhere else (with the exception of Hardy, they felt) could one find much to “laugh at or with” in the Victorian novelists. Dickens was, at least to them, “fun.” Since many of my students are quite young, that is, in their early twenties, the kind of sentimentality that Dickens evokes still appeals to them, and they like his tearful endings — regardless of how unconvincing they are. This shows us (if nothing else it seems to me) how powerful a writer Dickens remains, even in this highly skeptical society.

When the class finally turned to Gissing, the responses initially were those of surprise. And there were looks of incredulity, for the style of the writing, the subjects and the characterizations, and the issues nearly always struck them as being “so ... now!” as several students told me. The problem of women’s rights, the difficulties of marriage and maintaining mutual and equal relationships, finding and maintaining an occupation, a place to live on adequate means, and securing the best kind of education possible for themselves and their children, the cries of war and imperialism, the need for money, getting enough to eat, the irresolution of the conflict between faith and reason; many another Gissing oriented problem, such as urban living versus suburban living, worker-employer relations, etc., held the students’ interest. They found themselves closely identifying with the writer’s concerns: “Who is he? Why hasn’t he been heard from? Was he really a Victorian writer? He’s much easier to read than the others. Was he a precursor to Hemingway because of his style?” Questions such as these were often raised during our discussions of Gissing’s works. Several students at each class wanted to learn more about him, to read more of his works. Statements such as the following were made to me: “He’s [Gissing] on the money!” “I like him.” “He was way ahead of his

-- 20 --

time.” “I heard that he was connected to [H. G.] Wells somewhere.” “I read, while researching my term paper topic that [George] Orwell thought highly of him [Gissing].” “He’s a writer’s writer, do you think?”

The class discussions of Gissing’s books were almost always involved and required less lecturing and educating on my part than with other authors. The fact that my students were overwhelmingly responsive to him the way they have been is gratifying. It was as though they

themselves had made the “discovery” of a “new” author.

Despite this, however, when I have approached my department about doing a special seminar on the works of Gissing for our English majors, my request has not been greeted with much enthusiasm. True, I’ve been encouraged to do a seminar that included Gissing, along with George Moore, and Wells, perhaps. But that is not really what I had in mind. Seminars have been given on single authors such as Dickens and Eliot, and I recently gave one on Hardy. I believe Gissing deserves the kind of treatment meted out to Dickens, Eliot or Hardy, if one really wants to expose students to the depths of the man’s works and thoughts. I will keep trying. But this reticence on the part of my department, I believe, is due in part to the lack of familiarity with his work — although a good number of my colleagues are acquainted with *New Grub Street* and one or two other novels by Gissing. And this generally cool reception for the work of Gissing may also be attributed to the fact that many critical assessments of this author’s works prior to the 1960s have not been widespread. In major literary histories, Gissing has been given, if not overt negative appraisals, guarded acknowledgement, with the curt dismissal of being too pessimistic or depressing, or morbidly self-indulgent, and lacking in humor.

Indeed, a colleague of mine once remarked to me that Gissing was no more than “second rate as a writer.”

Finally, I believe that the more critics, scholars and commentators continue reassessing

-- 21 --

Gissing’s contributions, and the more he is introduced into our classroom, students themselves may ultimately be the determinants of the value of Gissing’s worth. And as the quote that follows the title of the Gissing *Newsletters* reads, “More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me,” Gissing’s patrons will, in years to come, be such that his status as a major Victorian figure will never again be in doubt.

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#### Notes to *The Nether World*

P. F. Kropholler  
Paris

[The edition referred to is the 1890 Smith, Elder edition.]

- p. 6, l. 18  
“the noble savage.” A reference to a well-known concept in J. J. Rousseau’s works.
- p. 8, l. 42  
“in real tooth-and-claw conflict.” Cf. Tennyson: *In Memoriam*, LVI (“Nature, red in tooth and claw”).
- p. 26, l. 16  
“the world was not her friend nor the world’s law.” Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*, V. I. 72: “The world is not thy friend nor the world’s law.” Another reference to this passage occurs on p. 295, l. 22.

-- 22 --

- p. 43, l. 13  
“All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever.” See the *Book of Common Prayer*. Morning Prayer; Benedicite. The quotation is repeated at the

end of p. 347.

- p. 51, l. 18 ff.  
The anecdote about Dr. Johnson occurs in a footnote added to Boswell's *Life*, 1744.
- p. 52, l. 31  
"to fall among criminals." Cf. "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves," St. Luke, 10:30.
- p. 53, l. 9  
"One whom the spirit did very frequently move." A Quaker phrase referring to the Holy Spirit.
- p. 57, l. 5  
"In obedience to the laws of the Book of Genesis." Cf. Genesis, 1:28 ("Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth").
- p. 71, l. 36  
"her temper made it improbable ... that the course of wooing would in this case run very smoothly." From Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I.I.134 ("The course of true love never did run smooth").
- p. 83, l. 7  
"Nothing common adhered to his demeanour." Cf. "He nothing common did or mean | Upon that memorable scene" (Marvell: *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*).
- p. 104, chapter heading  
"Io Saturnalia!" An exclamation of joy uttered by the people on the occasion of the Saturnalia, the Roman religious festival. During the Saturnalia, slaves were given full licence, which may explain the remark on the next page, l. 40: "No distinction between 'classes' today."

-- 23 --

- p. 106, l. 20  
"like a stately ship of Tarsus, bound for the isles of Javan or Gadire." From Milton: *Samson Agonistes*, l. 714.
- p. 109, l. 26  
"the city of Man." This looks like an allusion to Augustine's *City of God* (*De Civitate Dei*).
- 120, l. 11  
"There is a happy land, far, far away." A hymn by Andrew Young (1807-1889).
- p. 180, last line  
"hope deferred." From Proverbs, 13:12: ("Hope deferred maketh the heart sick").
- p. 189, l. 5  
"from the rising to the going down of the sun." Cf. Psalms, 50:1 ("from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof").
- p. 196, l. 5

“he at length resumed the ordinary tenor of his way.” Cf. Th. Gray: *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, XIX (“They kept the noiseless tenor of their way”).

- p. 225, l. 37  
“after all these changes and chances of life.” From the *Book of Common Prayer*, Holy Communion, Collect after the Offertory, I (“all the changes and chances of this mortal life”).
- p. 230, l. 6  
“Sic volo, sic jubeo.” Cf. Juvenal, Sixth Satire, 223 (“Hoc volo, sic jubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas”). The form given by Gissing was used as a personal motto by the German emperor William II. Gissing commented on the phrase in his *Commonplace Book*, p. 38.
- p. 252, l. 18

-- 24 --

“you who at all events hold some count of their dire state.” In his *Commonplace Book*, p. 41, Gissing remarked that *you that* is used in the plural, whereas *you who* refers to a singular. Here he appears to be breaking his own “rule,” *you* being addressed to the *mesdames* of line 9.

- p. 277, l. 15  
“the trim gardens beyond.” Cf. “I am to be met with in trim gardens”. (Ch. Lamb: *The Superannuated Man*).
- p. 285, l. 29  
“which had no light of countenance to aid it.” Cf. “and show us the light of his countenance” (Psalms, 67:1, in the *Prayer Book* version).
- p. 286, l. 11  
“to point a moral.” From Johnson’s *Vanity of Human Wishes*, l. 219 (“To point a moral, or adorn a tale”).
- p. 293, l. 28  
“live by bread alone.” Cf. *Deuteronomy*, 8:3 (“man doth not live by bread only”).
- p. 302, l. 12  
“if for once we temper our righteous judgment with ever so little mercy?” There may be an allusion here to Portia’s speech in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, IV.I.184, ff.
- p. 311, l. 10  
“by the common light of day.” Cf. “and fade into the light of common day” (Wordsworth: *Ode. Intimations of Immortality*, V).
- p. 337, l. 15  
“Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” From I *Corinthians*, 10:12.
- p. 337, l. 20  
“What is the principal thing? ... Wisdom is the principal thing.” Proverbs, 4:7 (“Wisdom is the principal thing”).

-- 25 --

- p. 343, 1. 4  
“so Stephen also went forth to his labour.” Cf. Psalms, 104:23 (“Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening”).
- p. 343, 1. 6  
[labour] “the curse of curses ...” In his *Commonplace Book*, p. 37, Gissing quoted Hawthorne: “labour is the curse of the world.” He repeated the quotation in *Ryecroft*, Autumn XVII.
- p. 347, 1. 17  
“when your hour shall come.” Cf. St. John 2:4 (“mine hour is not yet come”). Also, *ibid.*, 7:30 (“his hour was not yet come”).
- p. 388, 1, 39  
“Well, what must be, must be.” Echoing the Italian “Che sarà, sarà.”

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### Review

Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*, New York and London: Methuen, 1985.

A Yale Ph.D. thesis in volume form, this book is fairly described by its supervisor, J. Hillis Miller, as “written at the frontier or cross-roads where literary study and sociological study are being brought together.” Although some readers would hesitate to rank it among comparative literature, it is concerned with novels by realist writers of three different countries, England, the United States and France, who, if they were not exact contemporaries, had some

-- 26 --

twenty-five years of literary life in common. The period concerned is that which has come to be regarded as transitional between the heyday of the Victorian age and the dawn of the interwar period. The six novels dealt with, however different they may be in most respects, have at least one common denominator which is Rachel Bowlby's subject: they offer early images of that consumer society which we all too easily tend to circumscribe to the mid- and late twentieth century. Never yet had Gissing, Dreiser and Zola been brought together in this way. Commentators on Gissing and Dreiser have systematically ignored each other, and critics of Zola have as a rule been far too busy with their author to look beyond the limits of France. Rachel Bowlby definitely innovates by placing the three novelists side by side and on the same level, a procedure justified by their joint exploration of the interaction of commerce and culture.

The method was fraught with dangers — the dangers of dull and/or arbitrary juxtaposition or possibly of unwarranted comparisons involving Procrustean adjustments. But no sense of forced *rapprochements* is at any time produced by the discussion. Each of the six novels preserves its autonomy and integrity while remaining an essential element in the general dual pattern. The first half of *Just Looking* — a phrase which applies to *Au Bonheur des Dames*, but hardly suits *Eve's Ransom* and *Sister Carrie* — begins with a stimulating discussion of such aspects of consumer culture as the commercialization of art, the analogy of department stores to cinema, the democratization of luxury and the spectatorship of consumer and author in the naturalist novels concerned. Next comes a detailed analysis of the mechanics of commerce and femininity which will repay careful study. It is in these two early chapters that Rachel Bowlby, as the blurb points out with an eye to potential buyers *dans le vent*, draws on structural, psycho-

analytic and marxist-feminist theory. "Psychoanalysis," she writes at the beginning of Chapter

-- 27 --

II, "was not the only enterprise around the turn of the century to be interested in the answer to Freud's famous question, 'What does a woman want?' Women's desires and the object of their investment were of the greatest interest and profit to the respected company Stuart Ewen dubs the 'captains of consciousness.' His phrase is intended to evoke the transformation of business concerns from production to consumption — from concentration on the manufacture of goods under the management of the nineteenth-century captains of industry to the manufacture of minds disposed to buy them." This is the subject of *Just Looking*, the second half of which, leaving women behind, concentrates on culture and art in the early consumer society, more especially culture and the book business in *New Grub Street*, then the artist as adman in Dreiser's little known story *The "Genius"* and finally painting as commodity in Zola's *L'Oeuvre*.

Gissing figures prominently in the book, and the two chapters devoted to his novels of Birmingham and of literary life are valuable contributions to the current reassessment of his work. The discussion of *Eve's Ransom* is full of new insights and tells us more about Gissing's intentions than Frank Swinnerton's comments, highly appreciative but too exclusively based on a positive response to his predecessor's new narrative technique after the collapse of the three-decker. This enigmatic novel, of which Adeline Tintner offered a brilliant interpretation in the *Newsletter* some years ago, is yet again discussed here, no less brilliantly, from another angle. Two events set the plot in motion: the recovery by Maurice Hilliard of a tidy sum of money owing to him, and the discovery of a photograph of one Eve Madeley in his landlady's album. "The money and the woman," Rachel Bowlby observes, "come together for Hilliard as means and end: means of release and object of pursuit; means of purchase and object to be bought." Maurice Hilliard and the archetypal Eve, a clever deceiver with an eye riveted on self-interest, have not previously been so thoroughly analysed as social creatures. To Hilliard,

-- 28 --

Eve "is by turns image, reality, object or player of parts, in relation to himself as detached analyst, moral judge, interested physician, admirer, spy/spectator or enthralled pursuer." Eve, for her part, is no theoretician, no reasoning critic of her own interests and of the world about her; she looks for safety and finds it at the end of a soberly ironical narrative. Money, magnet-like, attracts her and seals her fate. She has become a commodity. "One cannot purchase a woman's love," Hilliard remarks resignedly to Narramore. He should have said that he could not purchase Eve because he was too poor. If Narramore has not bought her, then she has sold herself. She has gained safety, but at what price for herself and for her crassly materialist husband? Perhaps the sequel to *Eve's Ransom* was written by anticipation, in the story of the French sisters.

The chapter on *New Grub Street*, though an equally shrewd assessment of a more ambitious novel, will perhaps strike some readers as less of a novelty than that on *Eve's Ransom*. If Rachel Bowlby is aware of the existence of all her predecessors, some of them, like David Eakin, fail to appear in her bibliography. However, after the transitional chapter VI in which she reviews the transformation of art — the conditions of artistic creation and the emergence of a new public — she deftly takes to pieces the agencies at work in *New Grub Street*. Of Milvain, the candid self-seeker, she construes the behaviour in commercial terms: "Milvain's lack of concern for questions of intrinsic value leads him, without contradiction, to treat people as well as literature as commodities, to be estimated according to the money or prestige they represent. Advertising himself is part of this, since 'modesty helps a man in no department of modern life. People take you at your own valuation' (III, 69). In relation to others, it leads to the switching of affection from one woman to another according to the change in their wealth. The novel

emphasizes his objectivity by making Marian and Amy interchangeable in another way: as cousins, they share the same name of Yule." Equally suggestive is the comparison between Milvain's and Reardon's attitudes — assimilation of the conditions of the world to one's own advantage versus arrogant and disdainful spectatorship — or the perceptive use of a quotation from a letter of 7 May 1882 to Algernon in which Gissing opts for artistic reproduction of reality against reality itself.

On the negative side there is little enough to be said. Two notes on p. 159 have failed to win the present reviewer's conviction. The "obvious parallels" between Maurice Hilliard on the one hand and Ryecroft, Godwin Peak and Hugh Kingscote on the other (will all readers recognize Bernard Kingcote?) are not obvious at all. Nor need the proliferation of "unexpected legacies" in Gissing's fiction be mentioned (approvingly?) as being related to "the typical novelist's ignorance about how finance actually works" (*The Born Exile*, pp. 34-35). Doesn't such an abrupt statement betray the no less typical modern critic's ignorance of some historical realities? As for the presence of a character named Hugh Mutimer in *Demos*, it cannot be confirmed.

The book is on the whole well printed, although, predictably for an English book printed in America, some French words have suffered in the process — in the text, where a faulty agreement occurs in the very first line, as well as in the endnotes. The illustrations, thirteen in number, are very good and aptly chosen. They add much to the book's interest, being part and parcel of the author's demonstration. There is a fine irony in the fact that, in the 1892 yellowback edition of *New Grub Street*, the advertisements for the five Gissing titles in Smith, Elder & Co's Popular Library figure side by side with a full-page advertisement for Mellin's Food. The plump Miss Barber, age fifteen months, whose portrait testifies to the undoubted excellence of the said food, may have been in Gissing's mind when he wrote "A Calamity at

Tooting." There is further irony to be found in that illustration for anyone who realises that G. Mellin's Works were located in Peckham, where Gissing's uncle, the man whom he had in mind when he created the cockney Andrew Peak, had his short-lived "Noted Little Provision Shop." Here is some nice material for an article on Gissing "between shop and desk"!

Pierre Coustillas.

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#### *New Grub Street in German*

[The story of the translation of *New Grub Street* into German and of its serialization in the Budapest newspaper *Pester Lloyd* has become common property since the publication of Gissing's letters to Eduard Bertz in 1961, then of the novelist's diary in 1978. The title adopted for the serial publication by Adele Berger, *Ein Mann des Tages*, was hardly satisfactory — it was indeed that of the first chapter and certainly amounted to a betrayal of Gissing's artistic purpose by giving Jasper Milvain undue prominence. Adele Berger, a good translator, was not unaware of this, and she promised Gissing that she would try to find a more suitable title for the publication in volume form. But for some reason or other there was no publication in book form. Was Adele Berger too easily discouraged by one or two rejections? Was her interest in English literature abruptly terminated by some dramatic event? No one has so far answered these questions. The story remained buried in the files of *Pester Lloyd* for years until two German



intellectuals came to think independently that *New Grub Street*, which has been alluded to a number of times in the German press of late years, was fully worthy of being published in volume form in their country. Wulffhard Heinrichs, an admirer of Gissing and a good propagandist of his works in Germany, decided about six months ago to try his chance with a new Bibliothek which had been launched in January 1985, "Die andere Bibliothek," published by Franz Greno, the Nordlinger publisher, only to discover that the editor of the Bibliothek, the poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger (a book on him by A. V. Subiotto has just been published by Leicester University Press) had this very project in mind and thought of publishing Adele Berger's translation in his series in the near future.

As usual with "Die andere Bibliothek," the publication of the volume was preceded by that of a magazine of 32 pages entirely devoted to the book and its author — the contents were described in the January 1986 number of the *Newsletter*. The two following pieces have been translated from the magazine by Professor Patrick Bridgwater, of Durham University, author of *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony* (1972) and *Gissing and Germany* (1981).

The book itself, a bargain, at DM25, is splendidly produced. It contains no introduction, only a note after the table of contents on the book's first publication in England and in the Budapest daily which first published the translation in 1891-92. — Ed.)

#### Introduction by Hans Magnus Enzensberger

He's been there getting on our nerves for decades now, the author writing a novel about the difficulties he faces in writing a novel. Is it supposed to be our fault somehow that he is uninspired, sitting staring at the ceiling, suffering from the fact of being so uninspired?

Every year further specimens of the genre appear, getting more and more paltry all the time. They testify mainly to the fact that their authors' experiences — their sole subject — are themselves getting more and more paltry. The author's psyche is proving to be singularly vacuus. Grubbing around in it kills no evenings.

Yet for all that the "novel of the novel" has a brilliant past: consider the malicious good humour which characterizes André Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, consider the insights into a majestically controlled work process afforded by Thomas Mann's *Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus*, to say nothing of Balzac's *Illusions perdues*, a book which has as its theme the birth of the modern culture industry.

Balzac's heroes do not importune us with barren narcissicism or sterile lamentation. In creating them the author reproduces the crux of his own experience of society, in other words, the conditions under which he produces his work.

In his novel *New Grub Street* George Gissing goes to work on the selfsame crux more directly, more savagely, more mercilessly than Balzac. The book is about the commercialization of literature and the consequences of this. Gissing's life-long struggle for survival guarantees the authenticity of his portrayal. With a cold chagrin and an astonishing lack of self-pity he reveals the choices confronting a writer of his time.

We are not a little surprised to discover that the ways of the literature industry have changed little in the century since the appearance of *New Grub Street* in 1891. Maybe the contracts look better these days, maybe Victorian starvation rates of remuneration are no longer the order of the day, at least in these parts; but the everyday barbarity, which in Gissing's day established itself at the heart of the literary production process, is as rampant as ever it was; to this day thousands of those who work in the production of the written word can recognize themselves in his description of it.

*New Grub Street* is about the close-fistedness of publishers, the skullduggery of critics, the venality of the booktrade, the petty intrigues of the world of *belles lettres*, the deadly rivalries of the literary hirelings who watch one another like so many scorpions in a bottle.

In this sphere, that of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*, trash and tops, Burda and Klagenfurt, the cunning capitalism of 1891 is still going strong. Legal and social conditions which since then have become the rule for the employees of all other businesses, do not apply to this self-contained little world where the devil takes the hindmost.

Gissing's novel bears the marks of the milieu which it describes: the neurotic frenzy, the economically determined need to succeed, the pressure to adapt, the triviality and sheer horror of the literature industry. This strange classic, who is today enjoying a belated revival in the Anglo-Saxon world, was in his lifetime a marginal figure, a desperate outsider. In his book, which was itself written for a pittance, he has mercilessly exposed the interface of what is nowadays called the "written word."

But the novel also contains its own alternative, a project which Gissing himself was unable to carry out. One of his wretched heroes, Harold Biffen, who ends up a suicide, says "I've decided to write a book called 'Mr. Bailey, Grocer' ... Mr. Bailey is a grocer in a little street by here ... He's fond of talking about the struggle he had in his first year of business. He had no money of his own, but he married a woman who had saved forty-five pounds out of a cat's meat business. You should see that woman! A big, coarse, squinting creature; at the time of the marriage she was a widow and forty-two years old. Now I'm going to tell the true story of Mr. Bailey's marriage and of his progress as a grocer. It'll be a great book — a great book!"

"What I really aim at is an absolute realism in the sphere of the ignobly decent. The field,

as I understand it, is a new one; I don't know any writer who has treated ordinary vulgar life with fidelity and seriousness ... The result will be something unutterably tedious ... Precisely. That is the stamp of the ignobly decent life. If it were anything *but* tedious it would be untrue. I speak, of course, of its effect upon the ordinary reader."

In its boldness this programme blows open the possibilities of the Victorian novel and goes way beyond Zola's naturalism. It was only carried out thirty years later. The hero of the "great book" was to be called not Mr. Bailey greengrocer [*sic*], but Leopold Bloom, advertisement space salesman, and the pittance which his creator received barely saved him from starvation.

Prose poem by Johannes Edfeldt  
"In memoriam George Gissing"

For others the victor's wreath, for you the thoughts of a few who mourn your death. You saw London as a diseased organ. In your diagnosis it was a gigantic, pulsating mass of squalor and vice, epidemics and neuroses, of stunted, broken ambitions. You saw the hordes in the slums, grey as lemmings. You knew the brutal law, "your money or your life!" You yourself had to slave away among the ground-down literary proletariat, after a hard day's work creeping into a cheap café and quickly vanishing back into your lonely room. There you wrote down your detailed visions of a world into which science, beneath a veneer of civilization, has introduced a barbarity more savage than that of any barbarian. Then — in the evening of a burdensome life — the relief of *Henry Ryecroft*. And then the cruel, quick hand of death wrote the final full-stop.

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The "Explosion" Continues:  
Forthcoming Editions of Gissing's Works

Pierre Coustillas

New manifestations of interest in Gissing's works have become conspicuous in recent months. The publication of seven new editions or impressions of books by or about him was reported in our January number, and an additional batch of four titles is described in the present issue. Further projects have been announced. Two more titles are being prepared by the Hogarth Press: *Denzil Quarrier*, with an introduction by Gillian Tindall and *In the Year of Jubilee*, with an introduction by John Halperin, have been announced for next December. Gissing will then be the "author of the month" at the Hogarth Press. No decision has apparently been made concerning the titles for 1987, but it might be a good idea to turn to those novels which are not available in paperback from any publisher, *Isabel Clarendon*, *The Paying Guest*, *The Crown of Life*, and *Our Friend the Charlatan*, although admittedly the average reader may be less anxious to buy such stories than one more edition of *Demos*, *New Grub Street* or *The Odd Women*.

Oxford University Press is soon to enter the fray. It had been rumoured when the new paperback series of World's Classics was launched some years ago that *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* might be a possible choice, though not in the near future. Now that time has passed we hear that this title is being edited by Mark Storey, a senior lecturer in the University of Birmingham known for his work on Byron and John Clare. The publication of the book, probably early next year, will coincide with the appearance of a paperback edition of John Halperin's *Gissing: A Life in Books*. It is to be hoped that the accidental mistake concerning the portraits of Margaret and Ellen Gissing will be corrected on that occasion. *The Nether World*, currently available from the Harvester Press and from Dent, is also to be reissued in the World's

-- 36 --

Classics, edited by Stephen Gill, of Lincoln College, Oxford.

The Harvester Press has announced a critical edition of *Veranilda* with an introduction, textual notes as well as a study of the manuscript and of Gissing's notes in preparation for his novel, by Pierre Coustillas.

Significant news from Japan have been sent by Shigeru Koike. First the Japanese translation of *Le Roman anglais au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978), which contains a chapter on *Born in Exile* and many references to Gissing, is to appear in the spring under the imprint of Nan-un-do, who have several Gissing titles in their list. Then, in the autumn, Shûbun International, a Tokyo publishing house, will bring out five volumes at about the same time:

- I. *New Grub Street*, translated by Osamu Doi. This translation is a revised version of Professor Doi's translation published in 1969 by Kitazawa Shoten.
- II. *Born in Exile*, translated by Kazuo Mizokawa, whose name is not a new one in Gissing studies either.
- III. *The Odd Women*, translated by Mrs. Yoshiko Ôta, a professor at Tôyo-Eiwa Women's University, Tokyo.
- IV. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, together with *The Immortal Dickens*, translated by

Shigeru Koike.

V. *By the Ionian Sea*, in a new translation by Shigeru Koike, together with *Sleeping Fires*, translated by Osamu Doi.

Meanwhile small editions of Gissing short stories as well as of selections from the *Ryecroft Papers* are kept in print by a number of Japanese publishers. The latest batch received from

-- 37 --

Shigeru Koike consisted of titles published by Nan-un-do: *The House of Cobwebs*, edited with notes by Matahiko Ichikawa, first published in 1953 and last reprinted in 1982; *George Gissing and Washington Irving*, a selection edited with notes by Ikujiro Tominaga and Hideo Nakajima, first published in April 1982 and already in its fourth impression in February 1983 (the Gissing stories are "A Poor Gentlemen" and "Humplebee"); *Adventures into the Truth*, a selection from several British novelists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, edited with notes by Hiromi Ito *et al*, first published in April 1981 and reprinted for the fifth time in March 1985; lastly *By the Ionian Sea*, the Shôhakusha edition, first published in April 1970.

In Italy, Francesco Badolato has found a publisher for a translation of the Italian sections of Gissing's diary. He is planning to reproduce Gissing's original sketches of Italian and Greek sites.

Other projects have been heard of recently, but they have to be confirmed. The unexpected publication of a new edition of *By the Ionian Sea* in the "Century Travellers" testifies that some publishers prefer to keep silent about their own plans until they can offer their wares to booksellers by return of post. Considering that the editions of Gissing's books currently in print or scheduled for publication in the very near future are more and more numerous, an up-to-date list will be published in the *Newsletter* later this year.

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#### Notes and News

Dr. José Antonio Hoyas Solís and Pierre Coustillas gave lectures at the University of

-- 38 --

Extremadura in Cáceres on 10 March 1986. They dealt respectively with "The function of dialect in the novels of George Gissing" and with "Gissing as an apostle of culture." The two lectures had been announced in *Extremadura*, the regional daily newspaper published in Cáceres, in its number for 27 February 1986, p. 8, under the title "Seminario permanente de didáctica del inglés." Lectures were also given on Kipling's short stories and on his novel, *The Light that Failed*, which appeared, in its longer version, only a few days before *New Grub Street* and in some parts contains views of artistic bohemia not unlike Gissing's.

P. F. Kropholler reports that he has discovered two more Gissing quotations in the *Oxford English Dictionary* under "skyless" and "to stead" (both in *A Life's Morning*), while Pierre Coustillas came across one from *The Unclassed* (to strike off). Eleven Gissing quotations in all have been traced so far in the *O. E. D.*, seven from *A Life's Morning* (under to companion, to dusk, to impaste, to set, skyless, soilure and to stead), one from *The Unclassed* (to strike off), one from *Thyrza* (to promise), one from *The Town Traveller* ("seven" in the phrase "to be more than seven") and one from *Our Friend the Charlatan* (mundungus). P. F. Kropholler also

reports that he has found a passage on Gissing in a Dutch novel by Ina Boudier-Bakker, *De Sloop op de Deur* (1930). One of the characters observes: "But in England remember Gissing. In *Demos* he describes the influence of Socialism on the working classes. And that moving story *The Odd Women*, the sad history of three sisters who after their father's death are left behind in genteel poverty and slowly decline into dull misery." This novel, *A Knock at the Door*, was once something of a best-seller in Holland. The conversation reported is supposed to take place about the year 1900.

*Turn-of-the-Century Women* is a journal which might well prove of more or less

-- 39 --

permanent interest to Gissing scholars and readers (see "Recent Publications"). It is published twice a year by the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, and edited by a former contributor to the *Gissing Newsletter*, Margaret D. Stetz. Each number begins with a "Turning Point," which is devoted to a short work of literary interest by a turn-of-the-century woman. In the number for Winter 1984, the woman in question is Ella Hepworth Dixon, who once asked Gissing to contribute a short story to her journal — in vain, she was not generous enough.

The *Times Literary Supplement* for 4 April (p. 347) contained an advertisement for *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain*, by T. R. Wright (Cambridge University Press, £27.50). "Amongst the notable literary figures, it gained its widest circulation through the works of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and George Gissing." Part of this book appeared in a slightly different form in the *Newsletter*. In the same number of the *T. L. S.* (pp. 349-50) Frances Cairncross reviews a book by Ellen Mappen, *Helping Women at Work: The Women's Industrial Council, 1889-1914* (Hutchinson, £4.50), in which Clementina Black figures prominently. Clementina Black, who reviewed *The Odd Women* in the *Illustrated London News* in 1893, has been reprinted by the Virago Press and there is a book about her by a German academic, Liselotte Glage, in which the author says she was encouraged to write the volume by the discovery of Miss Black's review of *The Odd Women* in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*.

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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. Sheets of the first Harvester edition bound in dark blue cloth.
- George Gissing, *Thyrza*, Introduction by Stefan Stoescu and translation by Bianca Zamfirescu, Bucharest: Editura Univers, 1985. Pp. 607. Pictorial covers. Lei 32.
- George Gissing, *Zeilengeld (New Grub Street)*, Adele Berger's translation revised by Wulfhard Heinrichs and Helga Herborth, Nördlingen: Franz Greno, 1986. Pp. 583. Grey cloth, red panel with gilt titling on spine. DM25.
- George Gissing, *By the Ionian Sea*, with a biographical foreword by Frank Swinnerton, The Century Travellers, London, Melbourne, Auckland, Johannesburg: Century Hutchinson Ltd., 1986. Pp. 156 + 2 blank leaves. The pictorial cover shows the painting "A Sunset on the Laguna of Venice" by Edward William Cooke.

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Articles, reviews, etc.

Renée Joy Karp, "Language, Linguistics," *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Vol. 43, no. 4, October 1982, p. 1133A. Abstract of dissertation entitled "Fearful Wonder: Perceptions of

-- 41 --

Paris and London in Some Nineteenth-Century French and English Novels." Gissing is one of the four English novelists studied.

Diane Mary Smith, "Literature, Comparative," *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Vol. 44, no. 7, January 1984, pp. 2141A-2142A. Abstract of dissertation entitled: "The Work World in the Naturalist Novel: A Comparative Study of the Naturalist Novels of Emile Zola, Max Kretzer and George Gissing.

Wendy Lesser, "Even-Handed Oddness: George Gissing's *The Odd Women*," *Hudson Review*, Vol. 37, no. 2, Summer 1984, pp. 209-20.

Lawless Bean, "Gissing's 'Comrades in Arms': New Women, Old Attitudes," *Turn-of-the-Century Women* (a journal published by the University of Virginia, Charlottesville), Vol. I, no. 2, Winter 1984, pp. 40-42. Another article in the same number, "The Novels of Margaret Harkness," by Eileen Sypher, contains a number of allusions to Gissing.

Philip Stevens, "George Gissing in Guernsey," *The Report and Transactions of La Société Guernesiaise*, 1984, Vol. 21, Part 4, pp. 586-91. A narrative account of Gissing's stay in Guernsey based on his diary and correspondence.

José Antonio Hoyas Solís, "George Gissing's Narrative and Late Nineteenth-Century Literary Trends," *Anuario de Estudios Filológicos*, VII, Universidad de Extremadura, Cáceres, 1984, pp. 227-31.

Gilbert Bonifas, *George Orwell: L'Engagement*, Collection Etudes Anglaises, no. 87, Paris, Didier Erudition, 1984. Orwell's attachment to Gissing is referred to on several occasions.

Anon. "Reviews II Books Briefly Noted," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 40, no. 1, June

-- 42 --

1985, pp. 124-25. Notice of *Demos*, *The Nether World*, *Henry Ryecroft* and *The Unclassed* (Harvester/Methuen USA). An advertisement for *Workers in the Dawn*, *A Life's Morning*, *The Whirlpool* and *Thyrza* by the same publishers appears in the same number.

Anon., "Gissing won't be missing," *Wakefield Express*, 20 December 1985, p. 5.

Francesco Badolato, "Evoluzione spirituale di George Gissing," *Il Corriere di Roma*, 25 December 1985, pp. 4 and 10. Review of *Workers in the Dawn* and *A Life's Morning*. Continued and concluded on January 15, p. 4 and on 6 February, under the title "Idealismo in Gissing," p. 9.

Ernesta Spencer Mills, "George Gissing: Antologia Critica," *Brutium*, October- December 1985, p. 20.

Frances Austin, "Reviews," *English Studies*, Vol. 66, no. 6, December 1985, pp. 564-67. Review, with mentions of Gissing, of K. C. Phillips, *Language and Class in Victorian England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell and André Deutsch, 1984).

J. M. W. Bemelmans, "'A Permanent Interest of a Minor Kind': Charlotte Brontë and George Gissing's *The Unclassed*," *Brontë Society Transactions*, Part 95 of the Society's Publications, no. 5 of Vol. 18, 1985, pp. 283-91.

Michael Wheeler, *English Fiction of the Victorian Period 1830-1890*, New York and London: Longmans, 1985. "Circles of Hell: Gissing," pp. 169-74.

Sheila M. Smith, "Reviews," *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 15, 1985, p. 328. Review of Michaux's *George Gissing: Critical Essays*.

Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street*, Cambridge University Press, 1985. The last chapter deals with Gissing and *New Grub Street*.

-- 43 --

Henry James, *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, New York: The Library of America, 1985. Contains James's well-known essay on Gissing, pp. 1401-06.

Mervyn Horder, "Pity the Poor Victorians," *Bookseller*, 4 January 1986, pp. 37-38. Review of Nigel Cross's book with a passage on Gissing.

Francis King, "A Maid but Perhaps No Wine," *Spectator*, 11 January 1986, p. 30. Review of *Landscapes and Literati*.

Anon., *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 January 1986, p. 99. A descriptive paragraph on Michael Collie's *George Gissing: A Bibliographical Study* (St. Paul's Bibliographies).

Silvano Valentini, "Il professor Badolato e la riscoperta di George Gissing," *L'Esagono*, Anno 21, no. 2, 1 February 1986, p. 23. With portrait of Francesco Badolato.

Jürgen Manthey, "Verlorene Illusionen (britisch)," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 8 February 1986, p. 4 of the week-end supplement. Review of the German translation of *New Grub Street*.

Alan Bell, "Rescue for the Remaindered," *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 February 1986, p. 171. Review of Nigel Cross's book, with a passage on *New Grub Street*.

Willi Setzer, "Zeilengeld," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 19 February 1986, p. 16.

Neil Philip, "Paperback Choice: Reprint or Be Damned," *British Book News*, March 1986, p. 136. Review of the four Hogarth Press titles.

Pierre Coustillas, "*The Light that Failed* or Artistic Bohemia as Self-Revelation," *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 29, no. 2, 1986, pp. 127-39. Contains a passage on Gissing.

-- 44 --

John Halperin, Introduction to Anthony Trollope's *The Belton Estate* (World's Classics, 1986).  
A short comparison with *The Odd Women* appears on p. ix.