

“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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The Triumph of Mediocrity:
George Gissing’s *New Grub Street*

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Individual freedom and the struggle for existence leading to the survival of the fittest are two important ideas in social Darwinism.¹ In combination, they theoretically lead to progress but in reality are largely incompatible. George Gissing, in whose novels John Goode says a social Darwinist “vocabulary is not uncommon,”² dramatizes the incompatibility of these two ideas in *New Grub Street*. Although in a letter to his brother Algernon Gissing said of Herbert Spencer that, “He is perhaps our greatest living philosopher,”³ the lives of Gissing’s characters

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ironically portray the failure, rather than the achievement, of Spencer’s ideas. In *New Grub Street*, Gissing shows that the struggle for existence does not lead to progress, especially in the lives of creative artists, but rather to a leveling process in which the independent artist is defeated and the mediocre triumphs.⁴ As John Peck states, “What [*New Grub Street*] begins to seem is a work primarily concerned with the question of the relationship between man and his whole environment, a work about man and the modern city.”⁵ And in that environment, the one who adapts best lives to define the relationship.

Edwin Reardon and Jasper Milvain represent the independent, creative artist and the facile adapter, respectively.⁶ Before examining the conflict between the ideas Reardon and Milvain represent, it might be instructive to look at Alfred Yule who illustrates a middle position

between the two men and who illuminates Reardon's failure as well as Milvain's success. Yule, a hardworking literary journalist barely sustaining himself in the struggle for existence, a precariousness symbolized by his failing eyesight, covets the editorship of "The Study."⁷ What signals Yule's lack of adaptability are the reasons for which he wants the position. Unlike Milvain, who looks to what sells, Yule wants the power to settle old scores the editorship will give (pp. 127-28). He looks inwardly and desires to fulfill his own needs; there is no sense of a plan to create a journal which will respond to the market (pp. 126-27). Adaptation to market requirements would be anathema to Yule. As the narrator says of Yule's varied literary productions, "He took his efforts *au grand sérieux*; thought he was producing works of art; pursued his ambition in a spirit of fierce conscientiousness. In spite of all, he remained only a journeyman" (p. 127). At home, Yule is increasingly isolated in his study from his family and friends after he fails to secure the editorship of "The Study," and his prospects for a real literary success dim. John Peck observes the "contrast between... light and dark"⁸ with regard to

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Reardon, but it is possible also to contrast the dark moodiness of Yule's character with the light, realistic but optimistic nature of Milvain's and align Yule with the greater darkness that overtakes Reardon in death.

Marian Yule, Yule's daughter and indispensable researcher, also occupies the middle ground between the independent, creative artist and the skillful adapter. However, she is closer in spirit to Reardon than Milvain, and her comparative failure in the end as she becomes a librarian in a provincial city (p. 542), deserted by Milvain in favor of Amy, formerly Reardon's wife, underscores Gissing's sense of danger to the artist. Marian does research and writing for her father and toward the end of the novel submits work in her own name (pp. 541, 542), but she prefers a different life:

She kept asking herself what was the use and purpose of such a life as she was condemned to lead... She herself would throw away her pen with joy but for the need of earning money. (pp. 137-38)

However, she does her work honestly, and if no genius, she has no personal animosity like her father (pp. 127-28) nor desire to manipulate the public taste as Milvain does (pp. 38, 43, 150). When Milvain expresses such sentiments, Marian feels annoyance and cannot or will not take him seriously (pp. 149-50, 359). Her sense of integrity endangers her in Gissing's sharp delineation of a world in which only the adapter prospers. Possibly Milvain's feeling that Marian is "dangerous" (p. 75) when he first meets her is a reflection not only that she will deter him from achieving his goals but that she also morally surpasses him. The incident in which Jasper and Marian wait for the train to pass under a bridge on which they are standing reinforces Gissing's main divisions between the artist and the adapter. To Milvain, the power of the train "makes me feel eager to go back and plunge into the fight again" (p. 63). Marian responds,

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"Upon me it has just the opposite effect"(p. 63). If Marian tends more to Reardon's than Milvain's response to the struggle which life necessitates, it is not hard to imagine the greater effect this struggle has on the artistic consciousness.

Leo Henkin, writing of men like Milvain and Reardon, clearly portrays Gissing's view of the difficulties faced by the independent artist in the struggle for existence:

New Grub Street paints the struggle both among books and among men in the literary world of Gissing's day. Natural selection plays the role of villain; for the adaptation of writers to their environment and to prevailing conditions is the basis of the action ... Those authors who can change their

writings to suit the fickle public taste for the new will survive and live ... Others, those poor souls with ideals who have set themselves rigid rules of composition, can exist only so long as the public favors their particular brand of literature.⁹

Milvain skillfully blends intelligence and will, meeting Henkin's criteria for a successful career. Reardon, however, lacks the necessary force to survive in the literary world. Goode says that "the distance between Dickens and Gissing is marked by Darwin. The struggle for success and recognition, the pleas of private benevolence, the belief in reform, give way to the struggle for survival, the sense of a world in which oppression is systematic and inescapable."¹⁰ In the end, Reardon stops writing and returns to a position at a hospital (p. 259); he does not die from outright starvation but rather from a congestion in the lungs (p. 483).

At the beginning of *New Grub Street*, Reardon, a failing novelist, looks back to a happier time with Amy. The novel also begins at a crucial time in the lives of nearly every one of the major characters and ends with the death of Reardon and the marriage of Amy to Jasper

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Milvain. Reardon's struggles are continuous, but the necessity of grinding out another novel to support his family has defeated him. He tells his wife:

"My will seems to be fatally weakened. I can't see my way to the end of anything; if I get hold of an idea which seems good, all the sap has gone out of it before I have got it into working shape." (p. 79)

A few pages later the narrator comments on Reardon:

He was the kind of man who cannot struggle against adverse conditions, but whom prosperity warms to the exercise of his powers. Anything like the cares of responsibility would sooner or later harass him into unproductiveness. (p. 93)

Reardon's struggles, because of his own personality, increasingly narrow his chances to succeed further as a writer. He cannot adapt to the prevailing conditions of the literary market. Although initially successful (pp. 92-93), not even Amy and his child can motivate him to write once the pressure to produce novels becomes a dominant emotional focus. As Milvain observes, only "favourable circumstances" and the liberty to write a "fairly good book" every two years would free Reardon to be creative (p. 36).

Reardon's early literary successes before marrying Amy appear to belie the idea that only with a secure income would he be able to write. Through two legacies (pp. 88, 92), a device which Gissing uses elsewhere in the novel, Reardon first moves to London and on the occasion of the second legacy leaves a fairly simple job at a London hospital to write full time. When he takes the job at the hospital, the £200 from the first legacy is nearly exhausted, and Reardon is in a "state of semi-starvation" (p. 92). For the work at the hospital, Reardon receives a pound a week (p. 91). On this money he "found that the impulse to literary production awoke in him more strongly than ever" (p. 92); however, the income is very modest and his job no sinecure.

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Although Milvain makes his statement after Reardon's marriage, the question still arises as to why he is able to write without a secure income? First, the writing of Reardon's first two novels is entirely unrelated to his survival. Second, he then has no one else depending on him. The £400 legacy he receives on the death of his grandfather encourages him to leave his hospital job. For his third and fourth novels, Reardon receives £50 and £100 (p. 93), respectively. Money has

definitely freed his creative powers. It is possible that Reardon, with no sense of struggle, could have continued to support himself alone from his writing. However, this is a transitional stage which, given his need for love and affection, could not last. Ten weeks after meeting Amy Yule, Reardon marries her (p. 95), and not long after this his true struggles begin. He cannot, owing to his social position, and Amy's attitude toward the proprieties, take another clerical job. He must succeed as a novelist, and this necessity dries up his creative powers and leaves the abject figure encountered earlier. Now, one realizes the significance of Milvain's statement that only "favourable circumstances" (p. 36) would free his creative powers in any long range way. Neither the earlier legacies nor his job could have given him the necessary security since sooner or later Reardon's growth and development as a man would have forced him into the step he actually takes, i.e. marriage, and without a private income the struggle for survival would be too much for him.

Bernard Bergonzi questions whether or not Reardon could survive as an artist even with a secure income. Though the thrust of Gissing's novel supports an interpretation of environmental pressures leading to failure, Bergonzi's view that Reardon is constitutionally incapable of succeeding needs to be addressed:

In such a world, where literature has become a commodity and its production a mechanical business, one may either accept the prevalent standards and try

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to succeed by them, which is the role freely adopted by Jasper Milvain, or one can vainly struggle against them in the interests of a nobler ideal of literature, as does Edwin Reardon. But Edwin's struggle is undermined, not merely by his weak and faltering temperament, but by a radical skepticism about values of any kind, which, as an up-to-date positivist of the eighties, he is unable to repress ...¹¹

Certainly, Reardon at times appears to want to fail and thus to confirm Bergonzi's emphasis on the psychological as the primary locus of Reardon's defeat, but Gissing throughout the novel carefully constructs external reasons, e.g., lack of money and changing taste, for Reardon's predicament. What Bergonzi adds to an understanding of the novel and what deepens an appreciation of Gissing's craft is not so much Reardon's predisposition to failure as an inability to overcome difficulties.¹² Gissing starts with a temperamentally weak character and places him in a world where the necessity to struggle for success is paramount. Reardon, relieved of the prop which Milvain states will save him, is free to succumb; no heroic struggles emerge as he takes the path easiest for him. Thus, the harsh environment is structurally guaranteed to win as Reardon is transformed from a weak success to a certain failure. As John Halperin observes:

The clash between art and materialism — between the creative man wanting to do something worthwhile and the circumstances of his life which force him to be mediocre or die — is at the centre of *New Grub Street*. Nowhere else in Gissing's work is the malignity of matter so emphasized or the life of the artist characterized so despairingly.¹³

Reardon, writing in this climate of despair, cannot undo himself and thus cannot live.

Both Reardon and Harold Biffen, with the possible exception of Milvain Reardon's sole

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literary friend, display a self-destructive pride and independence that prevent them from seeking anyone's help at the most needed moment. When Milvain attempts to promote Reardon's next to last novel, the latter refuses his aid on artistic grounds even though it would have been

financially remunerative to accept (p. 192).¹⁴ And Biffen, who in the past has borrowed from his brother, finally refuses to do so again (p. 527), and his consequent, extreme poverty, coupled later with his frustrated passion for Amy, by then Reardon's widow, drives him to suicide (p. 529). It is unlikely that if he had £400 a year he would kill himself. Earlier, Reardon addresses Biffen after the latter's novel appears: "I have a superstitious faith in "Mr. Bailey". If he leads you to triumph, don't altogether forget me." (p. 472). Biffen's reply appears to underscore the failure of both men's lives: "Don't talk nonsense" (p. 472). Just as Amy's presence and pressure cannot help Reardon, neither does the friendship between Reardon and Biffen enable them to prosper in an alien world. They are examples of Michael Collie's fundamental observation: "That Gissing saw social disintegration in contemporary, evolutionary terms is quite clear."¹⁵ Reardon and Biffen cannot fight a power greater than themselves which destroys more than just themselves.¹⁶ Certainly, neither man, given their temperaments, can be one of those few benefactors of mankind Gissing envisions in his *Commonplace Book*: "The progress of the masses is by no means due to general effort among them, but to the hard struggle against universal sluggishness of a very few energetic men, — mostly in the enlightened class."¹⁷ Although these few "enlightened" ones might reverse the disintegration, they hardly ever appear in Gissing's fiction however much they are needed. As Gissing states in his *Notes on Social Democracy*, "they [the masses] must be, in every sense of the word, educated to progress."¹⁸ But, in a letter to Eduard Bertz a few months after finishing *New Grub Street*,

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Gissing stated that he did not expect to live to see any "spiritual growth" which may result from material progress.¹⁹

In contrast to Reardon, Jasper Milvain adapts ideally to the literary market. His advice to his sisters, Dora and Maud, to begin an authorial career reveals his sharp awareness of future trends:

"I maintain that we people of brains are justified in supplying the mob with the food it likes. We are not geniuses, and if we sit down in a spirit of long-eared gravity we shall produce only commonplace stuff. Let us use our wits to earn money, and make the best we can of our lives. If only I had the skill, I would produce novels outrashing the trashiest that ever sold fifty thousand copies ... For my own part, I shan't be able to address the bulkiest multitude ... I shall write for the upper middle-class of intellect, the people who like to feel that what they are reading has some special cleverness, but who can't distinguish between stones and paste." (pp. 43-44)

Milvain, conscious of his own limitations and the world in which he must exist and rejecting any claim to the role of an independent, creative artist, has no illusions as to what is needed in the literary marketplace. Toward the end of the book, Jasper discusses with Dora the future of Harold Biffen's "realistic" novel and comments on the work of Reardon's friend that "The struggle for existence among books is nowadays as severe as among men" (p. 493). Milvain, in clear social Darwinist language, skillfully connects the literary world with the larger world; he is to succeed in both. J. P. Michaux, in examining the significance of names in *New Grub Street*, comments on the first syllable of Milvain's name that "a mill can also be a pugilistic encounter, and there is no doubt that here again is underlined the Darwinian theory of adaptability of the survival of the fittest: Milvain loses no opportunity and he sacrifices

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Marian's love to reach his goal."²⁰ Robert L. Selig maintains that Milvain suffers, like Reardon and Biffen, from "a similar alienation, debilitating isolation from full human contact."²¹ But, Milvain's "alienation" leaves him with Amy and the monetary and sexual comforts, among

others, that she brings, thus an alienation only from what the more genuine artist would seek but not what society would admire and reward. Adrian Poole, commenting on *New Grub Street* and in words that clearly apply to Milvain, goes even further than Selig's idea of alienation: "There is a strong evolutionary thesis underlying the narrative, according to which physical victory and moral degeneration are interconnected."²² At the end of the novel, "Jasper [lies] back in dreamy bliss" (p. 551) listening to Amy play and sing, creating an image almost of decadence when one remembers the lives of those lost or discarded, e.g., Reardon, Reardon and Amy's child, Biffen, and Marian.

Additional characters further elaborate Gissing's despairing portrait of the creative artist. Whelpdale and his wife, the practical Dora Milvain, succeed in the literary world. While Reardon declines artistically, Whelpdale initially flounders, trying one direction after another from novelist (p. 177) to literary adviser (p. 195), before succeeding in such a way that not only reinforces the image of Milvain's success and methods but comes dangerously close to caricaturing them. However, the danger is avoided in the most convincing manner. Whelpdale changes the name of a magazine from "Chat" to "Chit-Chat" and is immediately successful (pp. 514-15). The half-literate reading public has its supreme vehicle with articles designed exclusively for its tastes and abilities. If there is a center of mediocrity in the literary world, Whelpdale triumphantly occupies it. In contrast, Milvain's views verge on the highbrow but only in contrast, if one remembers Milvain's statements on the writer's calling. Dora's success with children's stories (pp. 494-95) is also less subservient to the lowest taste than Whelpdale's,

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but it is plainly commercial in origin (p. 302). Whelpdale's cheerful vulgarity is his one redeeming feature; he acknowledges his aims without hypocrisy (p. 496).

Gissing's position in "The Hope of Pessimism" is that resignation and withdrawal from the world's strife are the only answers; the competition for existence, no matter what it may bring, is not worth the consequent travail.²³ However, characters such as Milvain happily work to achieve what the world considers success with scarcely a doubt as to the terms exacted for it. Possibly the independent artist can maintain his position only by a stance such as Ryecroft's, who, looking back on his literary life, states:

Hateful as is the struggle for life in every form, this rough-and-tumble of the literary arena seems to me sordid and degrading beyond all others. Oh, your prices per thousand words! ... And oh, the black despair that awaits those down trodden in the fray.²⁴

Ryecroft, a blend of Reardon and Milvain, "withered by his struggle within the pattern of modern civilization,"²⁵ survives only by leaving the arena with a legacy.²⁶ Reardon, left in the literary battle, cannot adapt and is dragged down from his state of precarious emotional and material independence. Freedom, if the struggle for survival is too great and the person too weak, is freedom only to fail.

Notes:

1. For a presentation of social Darwinist ideas, see Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics* abridged and revised, and *The Man 'Versus' the State*, both in Vol. XI of *The Works of Herbert Spencer. A System of Synthetic Philosophy* (1892); rpt. Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1966).

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2. John Goode, *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), p. 63.

3. George Gissing, *Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family*, coll. and arr. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (1927; rpt. New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1970), p. 40.
4. Robert L. Selig, "The Valley of the Shadow of Books': Alienation in Gissing's *New Grub Street*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 25 (1970), 188-98, explores the alienation of the artist in terms of the mode of production of writers and the emphasis on money. See also note 13 below on John Halperin's use of the idea of the mediocre with reference to *New Grub Street*. Halperin, however, does not tie this in with a social Darwinist interpretation.
5. John Peck, "New Grub Street: An Approach Through Form," in *George Gissing: Critical Essays*, ed. Jean-Pierre Michaux (London and Totowa, N.J.: Vision and Barnes & Noble, 1981), p. 153.
6. Oswald H. Davis, *George Gissing: A Study in Literary Leanings* (London: Johnson, 1966; [no city]: The Folcroft Press, 1970) describes their situation as "the tug of war between ideals and commerce represented respectively by Reardon and Milvain" (p. 87).
7. George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed. with intro. Bernard Bergonzi (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 346, 127. All subsequent references will be by page number in parentheses in the text.
8. Peck, p. 148.
9. Leo Henkin, *Darwinism in the English Novel: 1860-1910. The Impact of Evolution on Victorian Fiction* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 230.
10. Goode, p. 26.

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11. Bernard Bergonzi, *The Turn of a Century* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973), p. 53. See also Michael Collie, "Gissing's Revision of *New Grub Street*," *Yearbook of English Studies*, 4 (1974), p. 214, for a view that Reardon's problems are mainly internal. C. J. Francis, "Gissing and Schopenhauer," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 15 (1960), pp. 53-63, also discusses this theme in relation to Gissing's life and work.
12. See Jacob Korg, "George Gissing's Outcast Intellectuals," *American Scholar*, 19 (1950), pp. 194-202, for Korg's initial view that Reardon's emotional and psychological state is largely responsible for his dilemma. Korg, "The Spiritual Theme of George Gissing's *Born in Exile*," in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad: Essays Collected in Memory of James T. Hillhouse*, ed. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr. (Minneapolis; Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1958), later shifts emphasis for Reardon's failure to the environment: "Industrial civilization rejects the art he [Reardon] offers it, and since he cannot manufacture a product adapted to the demands of the literary market, it calmly eliminates him" (p. 248).
13. John Halperin, *Gissing: A Life in Books* (Oxford: Univ. Press, 1982), p. 148.
14. Goode, pp. 116-17, would deny an artistic integrity to Reardon (although granting it to Biffen) but Goode does not adequately consider Reardon's early novels nor his emotionally and physically weakened state.
15. Michael Collie, *The Alien Art: A Critical Study of George Gissing's Novels* (Folkestone, England: Dawson 1979; Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1979), p. 159.

16. See André Guillaume, "The Jamesian Pattern in George Gissing's *New Grub Street*", *The*

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Gissing Newsletter, 20, no. 1 (January 1984), pp. 28-33. Guillaume, although he minimizes their struggles, fairly accurately sums up the situation of Reardon, Alfred Yule, Marian Yule, and Biffen: "There is no literary darwinism about them, as they in no wise exemplify the survival of the fittest, but passively live out the life of the oppressed and weak" (p. 33).

17. George Gissing, *Commonplace Book: A Manuscript in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library*, ed. with intro. Jacob Korg (New York: New York Public Library, 1926), p. 53.
18. George Gissing, *Notes on Social Democracy*, intro. Jacob Korg (London: Enitharmon Press, 1968), p. 14.
19. George Gissing, *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz: 1887-1903*, ed. Arthur C. Young (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1961), p. 119.
20. J. P. Michaux, "Names in *New Grub Street*," in *George Gissing: Critical Essays*, ed. Jean-Pierre Michaux, pp. 205-06.
21. Selig, p. 127.
22. Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context* (London: Macmillan, 1975; Totowa, N. J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), p. 146.
23. George Gissing, "The Hope of Pessimism," in *George Gissing: Essays & Fiction*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 96-97. Bergonzi, p. 53.
24. George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, foreword V. S. Pritchett (New York: Signet, 1961), p. 52.
25. Jackson I. Cope, "Definition as Structure in Gissing's *Ryecroft Papers*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 3 (1957), p. 133.

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26. Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 99. See Goode, p. 195.

"The Invincible Curate" and Penny Readings
at Wakefield Mechanics' Institution

Clifford Brook
Wakefield

George Gissing's short story "The Invincible Curate"¹ begins:

That was the time of penny readings, and soon after his arrival at Donniston the Rev. Mr. Benshaw appeared on the platform of the Mechanics' Institute.

His figure alone would have commanded attention — tall, muscular, thrilling with vigour; his voice, impressive to begin with, ended by startling his audience and moving the more frivolous to mirth. He recited “Horatius” and never had such a recitation been heard in Donniston ...

He was only the curate of a minor parish, but his energies soon overflowed the whole town ... Ladies took a great interest in him, and marvelled that such ... an embodiment of clerical force had never yet been presented with a living! ...

Unfortunately he was married. They lived in a tiny house, had three children (soon to be four) ...

Quickly following that build-up the reader is told that Mr. Benshaw could not manage his finances and as a result of debts had to resign his position and leave the town, as had happened before.

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Mechanics’ Institutions and similar organisations appear in several other of Gissing’s works including *A Life’s Morning*, *Denzil Quarrier* and “My First Rehearsal,” and no doubt he drew on his knowledge of Wakefield Mechanics’ Institution, of which his father was a prominent official, for some of his scenes. The following has been compiled in a form to identify the Reverend Mr. Benshaw, but also to illustrate how Gissing used poetic licence to combine different occasions and, further, to describe some of his father’s activities.

General Committee Minutes, Wakefield Mechanics’ Institution 6 May 1862.²

Mr. Binks reported that he attended the annual conference of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics’ Institutions held at Batley on 23 April ... and that the questions of Recreations and Penny Readings were, amongst other subjects, discussed. ... As to Penny Readings it was stated that they had been successfully carried on in several Institutions, and Mr. Binks gave details of their management, and thought they might be tried with advantage in our Institution ...

After some conversational remarks Mr. Walker moved and Mr. Williamson seconded “That the subject of Penny Readings be referred to Messrs. Rev. Barmby, Holdsworth, Binks, Gissing [George Gissing’s father, T. W. Gissing] and Masterman and that they report to this Committee.” “Carried”.

General Committee Minutes, 3 June 1862.

The secretary read the report of the Penny Readings Sub Committee of which the following is a copy: — Mr. Gissing read portions of a book on Penny Readings at Ipswich by Mr. Sulley, when it was resolved to recommend to the General Committee that Penny Readings be established in connection with the Wakefield Mechanics’ Institution at the commencement of the next session ...

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A list of some forty gentlemen, including T. W. Gissing, who were “requested to take part

in the readings” was given after the suggested rules and conditions.

Report to the Annual General Meeting of Wakefield Mechanics’ Institution held on 27 August 1862.

Penny Readings.

Being desirous of making the Institution still more useful and popular, we have decided to establish Readings to commence with the ensuing session, in which Prose and Verse (embracing humorous and pathetic writing, history and fiction) shall alternate, and we beg to request the cooperation of all classes of members.

The Regulations for the Readings are: —

1. That the Readings be given in the Music Saloon [the principal room in the Institution’s building] on Saturday evenings, from 7.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m.
2. That the Price of Admission be One Penny, both to Members and Non-Members, to be taken at the door.
3. That the Readings shall be varied in character, complete in themselves, and so arranged as to afford by contrast, mutual relief.
4. That Papers or Extracts from works on Popular Science be allowed to be read but not earlier than 8.30 p.m. That discussion be allowed on such papers. If there be no discussion, then other readings can be given.
5. That Political and Religious Subjects be excluded.
6. That no Reading shall exceed twenty minutes in length.
7. That the aim shall be to teach the People more through Imagination and the Feelings than be direct didactic instruction.

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8. That the Readings shall be under the management of a Sub-Committee.

General Committee Minutes, 19 April 1863.

Report on the Penny Readings.

These began on 11 October and ended 27 March. To the end of the year they were given on Saturday nights and after that on Friday nights, the change being made with the hope of increasing the attendance. There was not however any increase, the average being in the first period 195 a night and in the second 180. The highest attendance was on the second night — 295; the lowest on the last night but one — 112; though there were 233 present on the final night. The total attendance was 4655. [Which was equal to the total of pennies in the total receipts, £19.8s.9d.]

The Proportion of the Working Class for the time that an account was

kept, namely up to Christmas, was two thirds of the whole — after that time it was probably not so large.

The number of pieces by individual authors, starting with the largest, included Tennyson — 26, Hood — 9, J. H. Eccles — 8, Dickens — 8, Ingoldsby — 6, etc. The numbers of items recited by different readers ranged from 2 by E. A. Leatham on one evening through 27 by T. W. Gissing on 13 evenings to 33 by W. S. Banks on 16 evenings.

A new Penny Readings Committee was elected at the General Committee meeting on 1 September 1863, and later the Annual Report of the Institution for the session 1863/4 contained detailed reference to that Winter's Penny Readings, stating that "The attendance showed a great falling off from the previous year, the average for the whole time being only 99." Of interest in this report, not only were the names of readers given, as in the earlier year, but also the items that each had read.

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Mr. Gissing.

"Sunthin' in the Pastoral Line"	Biglow Papers
"The Ride of Paul Revere"	Longfellow
"Snobson's Experience"	Anon.
"Pantaloon"	Anon.
"Locksley Hall"	Tennyson
"Divided"	Jean Ingelow
"The High Tide"	Jean Ingelow
"The Runaway Slaves at Pilgrim Point"	E. B. Browning
"Tea and Coffee"	J. [sic] Disraeli
"The Grandmother's Apology"	Tennyson
"Last Words of Juggling Jerry"	G. Meredith
"City Churchyards"	Dickens
"Ballads"	Dickens

It was to Mr. Gissing's credit that the two poems by Jean Ingelow had been published as recently as 1863. Further, his judgment is supported by the entry for Jean Ingelow, 1820-1897, in the latest edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 1985, edited by Margaret Drabble: "her best known poems are 'Divided' and 'The High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire 1571' both in *Poems 1863*." In this context it should be noted that T. W. Gissing had published three volumes of his poetry before his marriage.

Another reader was the Rev. J. S. Gammell whose list of six readings included "Horatius" by Macaulay.

The Reverend James Stewart Gammell, M. A., Jesus College, Cambridge and Glasgow University³ is an unlikely model for the Rev. Benshaw. After three curacies from 1852 to 1860 he then came to Wakefield to be the first Vicar of Outwood, a new parish bordering the town to the north, and remained there for twenty years until 1880, when at the age of 54 he went to

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reside in Clifton, Bristol, "owing to a serious illness." His grateful parishioners presented him and his wife with their portrait in oils and a gold watch "as a token of the esteem and affection in which he was held."⁴ From October to December 1870 there was a series of acrimonious letters in the *Wakefield Journal and Examiner* between the Rev. Gammell and "Layman" arising from a report of a speech that he had made on the uneven distribution of church endowments. His final reply to "Layman's" allegations was printed on 16 December 1870:

My income from the endowment is £80 a year and from fees etc. £25 a year. So in total about £2 a week. The house [a large Victorian one by the church and now an hotel and restaurant] may be estimated at £30-40 a year. I was given £350 by one of my relatives to prevent me being absolutely starved.

Coincidentally this correspondence had overlapped some involving Mr. Gissing concerning his support for a municipal water supply, a subject that he had raised in his electoral address on the occasion of his re-election to the town council in November 1870. His reply to criticism by "Consistency" had been published on 28 October.⁵ Further, there was a closer link between the two men as suggested in the same newspaper on 2 December 1870, a month before Mr. Gissing's death: "Wakefield Mechanics' Institution. The Rev. J. S. Gammell, vicar of Outwood, treated members to an evening with Jean Ingelow, one of the poetic luminaries who adorn the age. Mr. T. W. Gissing was in the chair."

J. S. Gammell differed from Mr. Benshaw in many ways: he was not married when he came to Wakefield, but married Anne Bramley of Silcoates in the neighbouring parish of Alverthorpe in 1866; it seems likely that he had only two children; and his house was not tiny. Yet during his long stay in the area he became well known, and known for his power of recitation, and by

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associating with the Mechanics' Institution would meet the dissenting families. More orthodoxly he was also Secretary of the rival Church Institution.

But what would make it ironical if Gissing had him in mind when writing his short story is that his life style changed in 1883 when "on the death of his uncle, Major Andrew Gammell, without issue, Mr. Gammell succeeded to the valuable estates of Drumtochty, Dillivaird and Countesswells [in Scotland] and in March of that year took up his residence at the beautifully-situated and charmingly-picturesque [107- roomed] Castle of Drumtochty."⁷ On his death in 1899, as well as leaving the estates, which had an annual rent-roll of £5,000, to his son later to become Sir Sidney Gammell, he left £19,000 in personal bequests to his daughter, a brother and a nephew.⁸ His affection for Outwood is marked by a plaque in the Church: "To the Glory of God and in humble and thankful remembrance of twenty years done for God and man in this church and parish this chapel was built AD 1887 by James Stewart Gammell first Vicar of Outwood 1860-80" and an obituary says "colliers from the Yorkshire parish were frequently to be seen recuperating from illness in the pure and bracing air of Drumtochty."⁹

After leaving Wakefield his only offices in the Church were Chaplain of St. Palladius, 1883-88, he building a church to St. Palladius in his grounds in 1885; and Chaplain to the Bishop of Brechin, 1888, in whose diocese Drumtochty lies.¹⁰

It is doubtful whether there were any more penny readings at Wakefield Mechanics' Institution after the session when the Rev. Gammell read "Horatius." From the General Committee Minutes of 9 September 1864, T. W. Gissing was one of those re-elected to

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"constitute the Penny Readings Committee", and on 20 September extra names were added

including “A. Ash who in particular be requested to ascertain whether any musicians can be had to assist the Readers.” The final reference to the readings is in a press cutting of the Annual General Meeting 30 August 1865 which was inserted into the Minute Book: “Mr. Gissing stated his belief that if music could only have been added to the interest of the penny readings, the latter would not have flagged and gone down as they had.”

At the time the Rev. Gammell read “Horatius” George Gissing was only six years of age!

Another series of penny readings was given at the Free Church, near Kirkgate Station, Wakefield in 1865.¹¹ Amongst the readers were T. W. Gissing and the minister, the Reverend Goodwin Barmby, who had built the church and who had been associated with the readings at the Mechanics’ Institution.

Wakefield Journal and Examiner, 4 November 1870.

Wakefield Mechanics Institution. On Monday evening last the usual weekly meeting was held in the Music Saloon, Wood Street, when the room was again well-filled to listen to an agreeable deviation from the usual weekly lecture, in the shape of a literary entertainment by the Reverend W. Stephenson, Mr. Fowler, Rev. J. S. Eastmead and Mr. Gissing.

Mr. Stephenson was the attraction of the evening and gave a beautiful and spirited rendering of Macaulay’s historical poem “Horatius” and was equally at home in “The Jackdaw of Rheims” which he recited in a manner that literally brought down the house. Mr. Gissing read one of Jean Ingelow’s poems called “Winstanley” ... A vote of thanks was carried unanimously and the Reverend W. Stephenson responded.

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Wakefield Journal and Examiner, 23 December 1870.

Wrenthorpe Penny Readings. The second of a series of readings and musical entertainments was held in the church room. The readers were the Rev. W. Stephenson, Rev. J. Harrison and Mr. N. Amys.

T. W. Gissing died on 28 December 1870 and very soon George, aged 13, and his brothers were sent as boarders to Lindow Grove School, Alderley Edge, Cheshire.

The Reverend William Stephenson, M.A., Magdalen College, Oxford¹² was “licensed to the curacy of St. Paul’s [Gissing wrote that the Reverend Benshaw was at St. Peter’s, a switch similar to the one in *A Life’s Morning* when he changed the actual St. John’s District of Wakefield to that of the fellow evangelist St. Luke], Alverthorpe near Wakefield 20 October 1869”¹³ though he officiated as a curate at a baptism there on 11 July 1869. The last official reference to him is also in the parish baptism register on 27 August 1871.¹⁴

In the census return for 1871 his address is given as 2 Warren Terrace, Wrenthorpe in the parish of Alverthorpe:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>		<u>Place of Birth</u>
William Stephenson	40	Priest of the Church of England	Portland, Dorset.
Emily Ann Stephenson	40	Wife	Halifax, Yorkshire.

Herbert Arthur Stephenson	8	Kingston-upon-Hull, Yorkshire.
Ernest W. R. S. Stephenson	6	”
Walter A. Stephenson	5	”
Elizabeth Brear		Servant

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If it seems strange that twenty-five years later Gissing should not only remember an event that took place in a particularly tragic month and when he was barely thirteen years of age, but should also incorporate details that would have come to light whilst he was away in Cheshire, possibly the key is the Reverend Joseph Harrison, one of the two other readers at the Wrenthorpe Penny Readings. Harrison, as well as having been licensed as a fellow curate at St. Paul's, Alverthorpe earlier that year, was better known to Gissing as his schoolmaster at the Collegiate School, Back Lane, Wakefield. Two references to Gissing's education under Harrison show his affection for the one-teacher school, in a letter from Rome to his sister, Margaret, in 1888 he wrote: "The ruins are very fragmentary but nearly all have been identified and one walks among places that have been familiar since Harrison's Back Lane School."¹⁵ And in 1895, less than five months before he wrote "The Invincible Curate,"¹⁶ the minister of the Unitarian Chapel in Wakefield came across George standing in front of the school building, that was also the Sunday Schoolroom of the Chapel, when George said "I fear that you find me trespassing, but the sight of my old school transforms me into a child ... the earliest memories fire the greatest powers of concentration."¹⁷ So maybe he kept in contact with Harrison in his vacations from Lindow Grove School.

Certainly what has been found out about William Stephenson has much in common with the Reverend Benshaw even if Gissing moulded separate events into one. Unusually Stephenson had held six curacies before coming to Wakefield.¹⁸ His house was one of a terrace of five houses, each with two living rooms and two bedrooms,¹⁹ and he had neighbours who were a trade instructor, a gardener, a dressmaker and an agricultural worker (female).²⁰ The house, now demolished, could be called "tiny" in view of its being occupied by a parson, albeit a curate, living there with his family and a servant. By his visit to the Mechanics' Institution he could be

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said to be "on friendly terms with many Dissenting families, a thing unheard of at Donniston" (yet so was the Rev. Gammell) — followers of the established church tended to be members of the rival Church Institute. His stay of two years in Wakefield was short and he came to the district married and with three children. It is not known whether it was financial pressure that caused his departure, and at his death he was assessed for probate as leaving "under £1,500" which meant between £1,000 and £1,500" — the significance of that sum can be measured by the fifty surrounding entries in the Probate Calendar where it was the ninth largest in size, and the average of the remaining forty-one was "under £400."²¹

It has not been possible to find out whether he, as did the Rev. Benshaw, left one of his children behind in Wakefield to be brought up by "a comfortable widow" nor if at different times he received two silver tea services as testimonials.

William Stephenson would seem to have come to a sad end. After he left Wakefield there is no obvious record of his employment for four years until he was appointed successively to two more curacies, at St. Mark's, Pentonville, 1875, and St. Stephen's, Hammersmith, 1877, both in London.²² Lastly, his death was recorded as "3 January 1880, aged 48, Clerk in Holy

Orders, cause of death — Cerebral softening 1 year 6 months, Paralysis 6 months, Cerebral Haemorrhage 21 hours, residence — Sussex House, Fulham²³ [a private mental asylum just across the border with Hammersmith].²⁴

It would be interesting to find a copy of his one book, *Twenty-five Village Sermons, Preached at Eversley*, Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1862, 3s.6d.²⁵

The final words are given in the *Wakefield Journal and Examiner*, 27 October 1871:
Wakefield Church Institution.

The lecture and entertainment session of the above institution virtually began last night with one of those music and reading evenings which were so

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popular last year. The power of attraction has by no means diminished as was shown by the large audience which assembled last night. The Rev. Canon Camidge [Vicar of Wakefield], the president, occupied the chair. The entertainment began with the overture "Zamba" arranged as a duet for harmonium and pianoforte, and spiritedly played by Mr. J. Emmerson and Mr. J. Dunhill. The same two gentlemen afterwards gave on the same instruments some of the principal airs from "Faust" with such telling effects that the audience compelled them to sit down and repeat a portion. They will however fail to do themselves full justice until the committee provides a piano more fitted to be put in juxtaposition with the beautiful harmonium.

The readers were those old friends the Rev. J. S. Gammell and the Rev. W. Stephenson whose abilities in that walk are too well known to need more particular attention. At the close of the evening a vote of thanks was accorded to acclamation to those who contributed to the evening's enjoyment.

1. *Human Odds and Ends: Stories and Sketches*, Lawrence & Bullen, 1898 (reprinted Garland Press, 1977), pp. 203-09.
2. The Minutes and Annual Reports of Wakefield Mechanics' Institution are held at Wakefield Library Headquarters.
3. *Alumni Cantabrigienses*.
4. *Aberdeen Journal*, 3 November 1899.
5. *Wakefield Journal and Examiner*. For T. W. Gissing's correspondence, see 7, 14, 21, 28 October, and 4 November 1870; for J. S. Gammell's, 28 October, 4, ii, 18, 25 November, and 16 December 1870.
6. *Evening Express* (Aberdeen), 22 May 1973.
7. *Aberdeen Journal*, 3 November 1899.
8. Will of J. S. Gammell deposited at Stonehaven Sheriff Court, Scotland. 5 March, 1900.

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9. *Aberdeen Journal*, 3 November 1899.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Wakefield Express*, 4, 11, 18 and 25 November 1865.
12. *Clergy Directory 1877*.
13. Diocese of Ripon Registry.
14. Baptism Records, St. Paul's Church, Alverthorpe held at West Yorkshire Archives Joint

Service.

15. *Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family*, p. 259.
16. *London & the Life of Literature: The Diary of George Gissing*, ed. P. Coustillas. The visit to Back Lane School took place on 2 April 1895 (p. 367), and the story was written on 30 August (p. 385).
17. Memoir of the Reverend Andrew Chalmers, Minister of Wakefield (Unitarian) Chapel. John Goodchild Collection, Wakefield Library Headquarters.
18. *Clergy Directory 1877*.
19. Information from an eighty-year-old resident of Wrenthorpe.
20. Census Returns 1871.
21. *Calendar and Grants of Probate and Administration 1880*, Vol. Sm-Sz, T.
22. *Clergy Directory 1878*.
23. Death Certificate issued by Fulham Registration Office, 6 January 1880.
24. Hammersmith and Fulham Central Library.
25. *Clergy Directory 1877*.

I am indebted, in particular, to John Goodchild, Principal Local Studies Officer and Archivist, Wakefield Library HQ, and to the Local Studies Section of Aberdeen City Library.

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Gissing's Novels in Paperback

Pierre Coustillas

This history of Gissing's novels as physical objects is becoming more complicated every year and there is no bibliography or reference book that gives a reliable account of his books in print at a given moment. *The English Catalogue* used to be fairly accurate, but it gave new editions only and for some reason overlooked a good many over the years. It also gave some titles before they were available and this procedure proved disastrous when a publisher or an author changed his mind. For instance Methuen announced a new edition of *The Crown of Life* in 1943, but did not publish it; nor had they published the same title in "Methuen's Shilling Novels" as announced on p. 39 of the firm's catalogue for March 1905, a copy of which will be found in some copies of the Rochester edition of *Oliver Twist* (1900). *Books in Print*, an American compilation, is the most unreliable of bibliographies on the market. It lists over half a dozen Gissing titles that are supposed to be available from such firms as Telegraph Books or Robert West, but the books are not in print. No copy has been deposited in the Library of Congress, and letters to the firms mentioned are not known ever to have elicited a reply. The mythical editions announced or said to have been in print for years would seem to have been invented for the puzzlement of bibliographers, overconfident booksellers and potential purchasers who still have to beware of the printed word.

Considering the difficulty in obtaining accurate information from some publishers and the large number of new editions or impressions of Gissing's novels in recent years, especially the paperback editions currently for sale as well as five editions announced by the Harvester Press, the Hogarth Press and Oxford University Press which should appear in the next few months, we think it useful to give a comprehensive list. It will be noted that four novels are only available in

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hardback from English and American publishers — *Isabel Clarendon*, *The Paying Guest*, *Our Friend the Charlatan* and *Veranilda*. However, inexpensive paperback editions of *The Paying Guest* are obtainable from Italy (Canova) and Japan (Kinseido). No effort has been made to give prices which, in the publishers' language, are said to be "liable to alteration without notice." It is

only fair to add that at least one hardback edition (*New Grub Street* in the Modern Library) sells at a price which is not higher than those of the more expensive paperbacks.

Workers in the Dawn, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Harvester Press and Methuen USA).

The Unclassed, ed. Jacob Korg (Harvester Press and Methuen USA).

Demos, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Harvester Press).

Thyrza, ed. Jacob Korg (Harvester Press and Methuen USA).

A Life's Morning, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Harvester Press and Methuen USA).

The Nether World, ed. John Goode (Harvester Press); ed. Walter Allen (Dent). O.U.P. is to publish this title in the World's Classics, with an introduction and notes by Stephen Gill.

The Emancipated, ed. John Halperin (Hogarth Press).

New Grub Street, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (Penguin).

Denzil Quarrier, ed. John Halperin (Harvester). This edition is announced for next spring.

The Hogarth Press was to publish this title in December 1986, but publication has been postponed.

Born in Exile, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Harvester Press); ed. Gillian Tindall (Hogarth Press).

The Odd Women, ed. Marcia R. Fox (Norton); ed. Margaret Walters (Virago); ed. Elaine Showalter (New American Library).

In the Year of Jubilee (Dover); ed. John Halperin (Hogarth Press).

Eve's Ransom (Dover).

Sleeping Fires (University of Nebraska Press).

The Whirlpool, ed. Patrick Parrinder (Harvester Press and Methuen USA); ed. Gillian Tindall (Hogarth Press).

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The Town Traveller, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Harvester Press).

The Crown of Life, ed. Michel Ballard (Harvester). This edition is announced for next spring.

The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft, with an introduction by John Stewart Collis and bibliographical notes by Pierre Coustillas (Harvester). This title is also to be published in the World's Classics (O.U.P.) with an introduction and notes by Mark Storey.

Will Warburton, ed. John Halperin (Hogarth Press).

Two additional remarks may be in order. First, Gissing's only travel narrative, *By the Ionian Sea*, is available in paperback from Century Hutchinson. Second, all Gissing's novels are currently obtainable from Harvester, with three exceptions, *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women* and *Eve's Ransom*.

Obituary

Ernesta Spencer Mills 1909-1986.

We regret to announce the death of Mrs. Ernesta Spencer Mills, which occurred on 13th October at her home near Ascot. She had been for a number of years one of those correspondents on whose kindness the compiler of miscellaneous yet sometimes vital news has to rely if readers of the *Newsletter* are to be kept posted on a maximum of events and publications concerning the life and work of Gissing. From an occasional correspondent she quickly became a friend who, on receipt of each number of the *Newsletter*, passed generous comment on its contents, and often had out-of-the-way information to send either about Gissing himself or about other writers who had visited and written about Calabria.

A Calabrian and a distant relative of Garibaldi, whose name is inseparable from Italian

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unification, Mrs. Mills was devoted heart and soul to her native land and her many interests included all those English travellers in Calabria, such as Henry Swinburne, Edward Lear, Gissing, and Norman Douglas, who have left memorable accounts of their trips to Magna Graecia. On more than one occasion she wrote for Italian journals on the subject and her enthusiasm was never in doubt even though she was a good judge of other people's work. Amongst other works she, with her husband, translated Edward Lear's *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria* into Italian, and a 200-page Guide to Calabria from Italian into English.

Her life was studded with romantic phases and generous actions. Happening to be in Athens in 1940, she was caught there when Italy declared war on Greece, and that is where she met her future husband, Albert Spencer Mills, who was then a member of the token force that Great Britain sent to Greece as a gesture of goodwill and support. From Athens she went to Cairo as a refugee with the British Embassy staff when Germany invaded Greece in April 1941. Her future husband, then a Lt. Colonel in the Intelligence Corps, travelled extensively in the Middle East throughout the war, with headquarters in Cairo, and so their friendship developed into stronger feelings and when the war ended and Mr. Mills returned to his civilian occupation in Cairo, they got married in 1946. They retired early and in 1968 went to live in Calabria, mainly to look after Mrs. Mills' widowed mother. They lived there for seven very active and enjoyable years. Mr. Mills took on a voluntary job as Hon. British Vice Consul in Calabria, in which, of course, Mrs. Mills' assistance was invaluable.

While in Calabria, together with her husband, she founded an Anglo-Italian Club in Reggio Calabria and also established an English Section in the Municipal Library, substantially endowed by them, both of which have been for years a link between two cultures that have met less spontaneously south of Naples than in northern or central Italy, where numberless English

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writers and artists have sought inspiration and not infrequently, a home. Mrs. Mills' continued interest in the activities of this Club was but one manifestation of her dedication to culture, of her vitality and generosity. She was an indefatigable propagandist who was genuinely devoted to Gissing's cause, among other similar causes, and she understood better than some academic or journalistic commentators the importance of Magna Graecia in his mental landscape. We shall remember her genial attachment to values which in life's darkest moments stand out as worthy of man at his best. Our deepest sympathy goes to Mr. Mills who has lost a perfect wife after 40 years of love and companionship.

Book Reviews

David Grylls, *The Paradox of George Gissing*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1986.

Ever since Gissing published his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, over a hundred years ago, sympathetic reviewers and readers have repeatedly asked themselves why they find Gissing's personality and works so attractive, why he is the kind of author who is not likely to fall into oblivion. An enquiry into the motivations of individual readers would produce astonishingly varied results. Some readers respond to him intensely because they have had experiences similar to his, having lived in the same districts of London or having suffered comparable emotional and/or domestic ordeals. Or they may have come to share some of his disenchanted views of society, to admire his cultural commitment with its two-sided aspect, ancient and modern literatures. Or again they may feel attracted by his courageous

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anti-imperialism and staunch pacifism. But whatever the case may be, Gissing's romantic impulses, his fruitful self-contradictions, his concern for truth as he saw it, account for much in a persistent attractiveness which has been acknowledged by commentators as different as Desmond MacCarthy and Orwell, Virginia Woolf and Henry James. David Grylls is the latest critic to enquire into the matter and he does so with such knowledge and insight that he leaves most of his predecessors far behind. Prefaces to books, though they should never be skipped, usually make dull reading because of their didactic and apologetic tone, but in the present case the critical study begins at the first line of the preface, and it does so with a vigour and precision that spur the reader to go along at the critic's vigorous pace: "George Gissing was a highly cultivated man who lived for many years in squalor and poverty, an aesthete who was also a social critic, a classicist obsessed with contemporary life. His attitude towards the proletarian poor was a peculiar compound of contempt and compassion, just as his appraisal of the upper classes wavered between envy and impatient disdain." And Grylls goes on listing similar contrasts until he comes to the central paradox which might aptly serve as an epigraph to his book: "Gissing was a pessimist — but a pessimist who believed in energy and will power." This is a point which is developed at length and with a wealth of splendidly chosen examples in chapter I. The four other chapters are devoted to "Workers and Reform," "Art and Commercialism," "Poverty, Intellect and Exile," "Women, Feminism and Marriage," and stress is laid throughout on Gissing's most specific feature in the critic's eye, namely his paradoxical imagination, which is represented as his peculiar strength. "The book has three intentions. First, it offers a portrait of Gissing's imagination. Secondly, it offers individual analyses of several of Gissing's major novels. Thirdly, it examines Gissing's fictional development."

These promises are amply fulfilled. For one thing Gissing the man and the artist is here

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understood with an uncommon degree of subtlety, and the volume is pleasantly free of those passages which in some other studies betray the critic's irritation at his or her subject as well as a desire, born of real or supposed knowingness, to reorganise the pattern of Gissing's life and to suggest to him posthumously what he should have done at crucial junctures if he had been as sensible a person as his biographer or critic. Nor does David Grylls occasionally quarrel with Gissing's characters as though they were real-life individuals with whose idiosyncrasies one might have to put up. The portrait of the man and artist that emerges from the present book is a well-balanced and thoroughly documented one. Much of the unpublished material in American libraries has been turned to excellent account, and the result is a fully reliable and engaging image of Gissing's mental world. The artist gets his deserts; his attitudes, tastes and ambivalences are recorded shrewdly and dispassionately. The corpus of works on which the book is based excludes nothing one could expect to find in a discussion, however tight, of less than 200 pages. All the novels receive some careful, if at times oblique, critical attention, and nine of them, by general assent the most significant and/or the major ones, are discussed at some length. Still the five working class novels from *Workers* to *The Nether World* are given ampler space than those of the middle and late nineties. *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool*, not to mention *The Crown of Life*, certainly deserved detailed consideration as being later major achievements. Seeing that they do not get it, one may wonder whether the limited space David Grylls was granted by his publishers accounts for the comparatively short commons received by all the longer works after *The Odd Women*. Deliberately and not unfairly, *New Grub Street*, *Born in Exile* and *The Odd Women* are regarded as the peaks of Gissing's central period 1890-1895, but when he has finished discussing the last of these three stories, we are on the threshold of the conclusion. Nonetheless Dr. Grylls's third intention is not overlooked as one

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gets, either by anticipation or in the conclusion, some idea of the last developments in the

writer's career. Such novels as *The Whirlpool*, *Our Friend the Charlatan*, and *Will Warburton* are after all examined in the last ten pages, and the survey of Gissing's thirty volumes of fiction includes a large number of appropriate allusions to his many short stories, which, incidentally, still await a detailed critical study. Even the slenderest tales occasionally benefit from a passing mention. A case in point is supplied by "Joseph," which is dismissed in the writer's diary as "miserable trash."

The solid documentation and strong empathy with the subject are matched by the unflaggingly stimulating nature of the discussion and by the brilliant writing. To select passages for praise is difficult because the urge to approve is pretty constant as one reads on. The book succeeds in doing many other things than those announced in the preface. It is for instance something of an enquiry into Gissing's working methods. Dr. Grylls has done what very few scholars have done hitherto — he has read the scrapbook in the Pforzheimer Library and a number of volumes mentioned in the diary. The vivid short parallel he draws between Arnold White's *Problems of a Great City* and *The Nether World* would be worth developing by anyone who chances upon a copy other than that in the British Library. Gissing notes that he got "some hints" from White, but it is David Grylls's opinion that the hints "were in fact substantial and extensive." Not only can many material details on, say, pawnshops, overcrowding and unemployment, let alone the distresses of winter and bank holiday excesses, be traced back to Arnold White, but White's conclusion, David Grylls observes, "with its stress on the moral strength of thoughtful individuals, is remarkably similar to that of Gissing." Perhaps had more space been available, he might have followed up the discussion with an incursion into Osborne Jay's *The Social Problem* (1893) which, published four years after *The Nether World*, in turn

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borrowed significantly from an earlier work. Indeed we have here an interesting example of a novelist finding much adequate material in a social enquiry (Arnold White's) and the reverse case of a commentator on urban life (Osborne Jay) seeking in a work of fiction confirmation of his own findings. Nor does, for that matter, the chain of influences stop here. It is a well-known fact that Arthur Morrison, whose studies of slum life, *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894) and *A Child of the Jago* (1896) echo Gissing's *The Nether World*, was a friend of Osborne Jay, and that Somerset Maugham, on the publication of his first novel, *Liza of Lambeth* (1897), was accused of having plagiarised his immediate predecessor, Arthur Morrison.

The Paradox of Gissing can also claim to be a reconsideration of the novelist's favourite themes, a more extensive one than is suggested by the titles of the chapters. Thus the developments on advertising should be placed alongside the article on the same subject by Robert Selig and the recent book by Rachel Bowlby; similarly, the discussion of feminism from p. 141 to p. 150 can be profitably compared with such studies of Gissing's female characters as those offered by Lloyd Fernando or Patricia Stubbs in the last decade. "Gissing," writes David Grylls, "was a woman-worshipping misogynist with an interest in female emancipation." Grylls would not have erred greatly had he substituted "passion" for "interest." There were moments, as in the letter to Bertz of 2 June 1893 when Gissing's thoughts coincided with those of contemporary feminist leaders: "Among our English emancipated women there is a majority of admirable persons; they have lost no single good quality of their sex, and they have gained enormously on the intellectual (and even on the moral) side by the process of enlightenment, that is to say, of brain development." To which he added, for the benefit of those who, over the years, have allowed themselves to equate Widdowson with Gissing: "I am driven frantic by the crass imbecility of the typical woman. That type must disappear, or at all events become

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altogether subordinate."

Most remarkable in this distinguished book are the extensive discussions of *New Grub Street*, *Born in Exile*, and *The Odd Women*. Here as in the first chapter David Grylls's talent for

striking phrasing is often apparent. Who could disagree with him when he observes that the first of these three stories is “a novel written out of despair and bewilderment, but also out of defiance and integrity”? Or that in it as in all his finest novels, Gissing “examines how a social problem bites into individual lives”? One can but approve of the rebuttal of the inept opinions of Messrs. Lang and Swinnerton that *New Grub Street* is as arbitrary in its structure and philosophy as *David Copperfield*, when in fact as David Grylls demonstrates, it is “cunningly composed of contrasting and counterpointing themes, with numerous symmetries of incident and motive.” “If poverty corrodes,” he notes apropos of the same novel, “commercialism pollutes.” To any reader who was, nearly twenty years ago, disappointed by Peter Keating’s tepid assessment of *New Grub Street* in his “Studies in Literature” monograph, David Grylls’s capable commentary upon the novel can be strongly recommended. In this respect, too, it nicely complements an article published by Robert Selig in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* and a chapter in Rachel Bowlby’s *Just Looking*. The three approaches have many affinities. “When books are converted to commodities,” Dr. Grylls ironically points out, “people are reduced to investments,” and “Gissing facilitates the association by describing literature in moral terms.” It is clearly established that “*New Grub Street*, an imaginative melting-pot for a number of Gissing’s most passionate concerns, is not only an informative sociological document but a skilfully structured psychological study whose social analysis is precisely embodied in its treatment of personal relations”.

No less deeply are we made to penetrate into the complexities of *Born in Exile*, Gissing’s most ambitious novel. “Poverty plus intellect equals exile” is an excellent algebraic expression

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of a truth forcefully illustrated in this story, and present in most of the works, down to *Will Warburton*, whose eponymous protagonist sublimates exile into resignation. Like the older Gissing, it would seem, Warburton eventually learnt a lesson from Ryecroft that the young Godwin Peak was too fiery to make his motto: “The mind which renounces, once and for ever, a futile hope, has its compensation in ever-growing calm” (Spring XX). Peak has indeed little in common with Warburton, though both characters are up to a point seen in an evolutionary context. In *Born in Exile* (a book which has elicited a wide range of complementary interpretations from the pens of Morley Roberts, Emile Henriot, Jacob Korg and Charles Swann among others), David Grylls perceptively argues, the crucial concept of evolution is more than a mere topic of discussion, it is “a metaphor that colours [the book’s] conception. Several characters evaluate evolution; even more exemplify it. Influenced, perhaps, by his preparatory reading, Gissing repeatedly reverts to the notions of variability and heredity, competition and adaptation. The question of ‘instinct’ emerges as vital, as also does that of ‘finding a mate’; characters develop, or fail to adapt, and perhaps most significant, different classes come to seem like separate species.” Much the same distance as has been noticed between Godwin Peak and Will Warburton was already apparent between Peak and Lashmar, and David Grylls’s suggestion that *Our Friend the Charlatan* is partly a reworking of *Born in Exile* shows that his book might well serve as a starting-point for new fruitful explorations: “Both books are the stories of young men without means who attempt to advance themselves by deceit; professing beliefs not really their own, they are finally destroyed by the cruel revelation of a compromising article. The effects of the two novels are, nevertheless, utterly and revealingly distinct. *Born in Exile* is a work of complex empathy — ironic but angry, intelligently intense — while *Our Friend the Charlatan* is an ebullient satire, a skilled exercise in resolute detachment. Gissing’s

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vision has shifted from inner to outer, from critical sympathy to un pitying scorn.”

The fifteen pages devoted to *The Odd Women* take into account much of the recent criticism on this widely discussed novel which has been in the last fifteen years one of Gissing’s best selling titles (the Norton edition, one of the three paperbacks in print, is now in its ninth

impression), for example the commentaries of Alice B. Markow, Jenni Calder, Gail Cunningham, Patricia Stubbs and Nina Auerbach. Kathleen Blake is referred to approvingly as having pointed out that Rhoda's insistence on renunciation should be related "to a persistent and honourable tradition in the history of feminism." David Grylls, who is very good on Widdowson and Monica, aptly calling the former character "a *feeble* tyrant," offers a detailed and, it would seem, an entirely new study of the two plots in the book: "Well before the end of the book it becomes unmistakable that Everard and Rhoda are not simply antitheses of Widdowson and Monica: their story is not just a heartening contrast, but a sobering parallel. In each case a cautious love affair snarls up into a power struggle. With the married couple this is mainly material, an overt argument about choice and freedom in their social and private lives. With the lovers it is mainly psychological, a covert contention for emotional control. In both plots jealousy bites into the characters." In the final estimation of the optimistic and pessimistic aspects of this novel the critic's level-headed approach is once more finely apparent: "Only half of Gissing could agree with Rhoda. With his stubborn belief in the virtue of striving, he could never approve of 'paralysis of effort.'"

Altogether, *The Paradox of Gissing* is a volume which is sure to make its mark in Gissing studies. It will do much to enhance Gissing's reputation now that all his novels and virtually all his writings are in print, most of them in paperback selling at reasonable prices. David Grylls's

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book is one of the most carefully researched works on its subject that have appeared in recent years. It is also supremely reliable and contains much valuable bibliographical information in the 23 pages of notes. The index will prove all the more useful as it covers these notes and does not fail to include Gissing's characters. It is to be hoped that this hardcover edition will be enough of a financial success in the estimation of the publishers for the possibility of a paperback reissue to be contemplated when all the reviews due to appear in academic journals have given the volume the enthusiastic praise it deserves. — Pierre Coustillas

José Antonio Hoyas Solís, *Estandar y dialecto en la narrativa de George Gissing*, Cáceres: Ediciones Universidad de Extremadura, 1985.

A book in Spanish on Gissing is a novelty. Interest in the author in Spanish-speaking countries has hitherto been almost non-existent if one is to judge by printed comments on his work. With the exception of a few entries in ageing encyclopaedias, he has been consistently ignored in Spain and Latin America. Not a single Spanish translation of his books is on record. The publication of this small book is therefore doubly welcome, and it is a book which breaks new ground.

As readers of Mr. Hoyas Solís's recent article in the *Newsletter* will have noticed, his approach to Gissing is a linguistic one, and this closely printed booklet offers a detailed study of Gissing and matters of language, a subject which has never been discussed at any length. It contains a preface, a long introduction which is concerned with the novelist's capacities as a linguist and his interest in linguistic expression, four substantial chapters and a short conclusion. The bibliography includes a list of Gissing's works and a five-page list of books and articles

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mostly about his artistic achievement in general. Its only apparent deficiency is that it contains a fairly important number of misprints, most of them affecting proper names, but no one familiar with Gissing will be much inconvenienced by these accidental mistakes which, it would seem, the printers made when correcting other misprints on the proofs.

If the Introduction is the least original part of the book it is nonetheless in its own way one of the most useful since it consists in a well-informed discussion of Gissing's linguistic culture. It starts from the influence of his father as recorded in letters and the oft-quoted "Reminiscences," and covers Gissing's early reading, his knowledge of Latin and Greek as well as of modern languages, including Spanish of course, and examines the abundant evidence of his keen responsiveness to questions of language, whether in life or in his novels. No similar recapitulation had ever been attempted, although Samuel Vogt Gapp explored some avenues of this vast subject in his *George Gissing, Classicist*, and one's respect for the novelist's culture is, if anything, increased by the many facts and quotations collected here. Mr. Hoyas Solís is very much at ease in this extensive exploration of a domain which extends from Gissing's notes on French phonetics to a number of entries on words and language in his *Commonplace Book*, from remarks made by Jasper Milvain and Alfred Yule to appreciative comments on the *Anabasis* in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. A good many aspects of the subject that would deserve extensive treatment are briefly referred to, for instance Gissing's use of the vocabulary of medicine and psychology (p. 31) and his care for the appropriate word as attested by the corrections on the manuscripts of his novels. It was surely relevant to comment at some length on the writer's interest in the history of the English language and in etymology.

Chapter I is devoted to "Realism and naturalism in the descriptive discourse of George Gissing" and the novelty here is that, while Mr. Hoyas Solís incorporates the conclusion

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reached by previous commentators on such notions as Positivism, Darwinism and determinism, he makes his successive points by examining Gissing's vocabulary in a selection of passages from *Workers*, *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, *Thyrza*, *The Nether World* and *Born in Exile*. Where his very few predecessors were content with general considerations, he pays close attention to the connotations of Gissing's words. The body of the book (chapters II to IV) consists in a study of characters through language — respectively standard English, dialect and intermediate cases. Not only are Gissing's many remarks on his characters' speech perceptively analysed, but also the way they are made to express themselves. These three chapters amount to a reconsideration of the novelist's class-consciousness through linguistic observation. The working class novels of the 1880's offer a wealth of material, but stories like *Born in Exile* and *The Town Traveller* are also turned to good account. One wonders whether the enquiry was consciously circumscribed to those novels in which matters of class and language are present in a significant form or whether, for some reason or other, books like *In the Year of Jubilee* or *The Paying Guest* were overlooked. The latter story, with its entertaining confrontation between the genteel Mumfords and the lower-class Louise Derrick, besides Mrs. Higgings and Thomas Cobb, surely offers material that would have complemented the findings derived from *The Town Traveller*. Still it would have supplied only a variation on a theme which is abundantly illustrated in *Demos* — the harmony between language, turn of mind, social status and political conviction in the cases of Hubert Eldon and Richard Mutimer.

Mr. Hoyas Solís has written a well-documented and stimulating study of Gissing's novels. It reads well and can surely be gone through without any difficulty by anyone who has some not too rusty knowledge of Spanish. However, as he also occasionally writes criticism in English (witness his recent edition of three Kipling stories just issued by the same publishers, Ediciones

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Universidad de Extremadura, Cáceres), he would doubtless find many more readers if he were prepared to give us a slightly revised and enlarged version of his book in English. Should he do

so, a couple of factual errors might be profitably corrected. Gissing did not write *The Town Traveller* after he separated for good from Edith Underwood; indeed the book was written during their short-lived reconciliation in the summer of 1897. Nor did he contribute anything to Dickens studies before he wrote his book for the Victorian Era Series. Lastly, unless some new documents have surfaced recently, there is no evidence of any personal acquaintance between Gissing and William Morris. But these are only minor obstacles in the reader's way. We should be grateful to Mr. Hoyas Solís for this original contribution to Gissing studies. Gissing himself, who so often despaired of being understood by his critics, would doubtless have enjoyed reading this thoughtful and perceptive study which does him full justice. — Pierre Coustillas.

Notes and News

Among the new publications in volume form that have been announced by publishers are paperback editions of *Denzil Quarrier* and *The Crown of Life* (Harvester Press). No paperback edition of these novels has been published in recent decades. The Italian portions of Gissing's diary will appear in a translation by Francesco Badolato and with an introduction under the imprint of Herder Editrice, the Roman publishers. It is to be hoped that Gissing's drawings, which could not be used in the Harvester edition of the diary, will appear for the first time in the Italian book.

The October issue of the by now solidly established *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*

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published by the University of Montpellier in Southern France contains three articles on Gissing (see "Recent Publications"). Orders for this number, which is sold at 70 francs, can be sent to the editor of the *Cahiers*, Université Paul Valéry (B.P. 5043), 34032 Montpellier Cedex, France.

The Times Literary Supplement for 31 October contained an abbreviated version of the main speech by the Chairman of the Booker Prize judges. It consisted in a retrospective review of English novels published in 1886: "There were two novels by the young Mr. Gissing — infinitely depressing, but truly serious." This is apparently quite appropriate; both *Demos* and *Isabel Clarendon* were indeed published in the same year 1886. But the Chairman overlooked a crucial fact — *Demos*, either as a three-decker in March or as a six-shilling edition in November, was published anonymously, and it was not known to the public that Gissing was the author of the story until *Thyrza* appeared in April 1887. The *Times* for 24 October 1986 gave an account of the speech.

J. Don Vann missed a good opportunity of including Gissing in his volume *Victorian Novels in Serial* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1985, \$50.00). This book gives all the bibliographical data concerning the serial publication of 192 novels by sixteen Victorian writers, starting with William Harrison Ainsworth and ending with Mrs. Humphry Ward. Among these Gissing is conspicuous by his absence and the compiler, with that self-confidence which proceeds from ignorance, tells us that, like the Brontës, Disraeli, Samuel Butler and George Moore, Gissing never published in serial. Mr. Vann cannot have spent much time in checking. If he had consulted even such a superseded book as Mabel Collins Donnelly's *George Gissing: Grave Comedian*, he would have found that *A Life's Morning* was serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1888, not from January to June, however, but from January to December and that *Eve's Ransom* first appeared in the *Illustrated London News* in early 1895.

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Had he consulted the present journal he would have realized that *Will Warburton* was serialized simultaneously in at least two English newspapers. However, Mr. Vann's book will be useful to anyone interested in the sixteen novelists whose works are covered by his enquiry. His seventeen-page introduction is well worth reading for all the information it contains on the history of serialization, its effects on authorship, some special publication problems and the endings of serial parts.

Dennis Shrubbsall draws our attention to a couple of inaccuracies in reviews of *Landscapes and Literati*, which contains all that is known of the correspondence between W. H. Hudson and the Gissing brothers. It was in 1901, not 1902, that Hudson was granted a pension on the Civil List. The exact date is 9 August 1901. As for the date of Hudson's arrival in England, it is 3 May 1876.

Warm thanks are due to all the friends and correspondents who have sent bibliographical information published in the last few numbers of the *Newsletter*, more especially Francesco Badolato, Alan Cohn, Chris Kohler, Sylvère Monod, Dennis Shrubbsall and the late Mrs. Ernesta Spencer Mills.

Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee*, with a new introduction by John Halperin, London: The Hogarth Press, 1987. Pp. xiv + 443. Pictorial paperback. £4.50.

George Gissing, *Veranilda*, edited with an introduction by Pierre Coustillas, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987. Pp. cxvii + x + 448. Black cloth with gilt titling on blue panel. £35.

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The critical material includes a bibliographical note, an introduction, notes to the text, a study of the author's preparatory notes, a discussion of the manuscript including various cancelled passages as well as pages from an earlier version of this historical novel, and a bibliography.

Patricia Alden, *Social Mobility in the English Bildungsroman; Gissing, Hardy, Bennett and Lawrence*, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986. Pp. x + 155. Greenish grey cloth with black titling. \$39.95.

Albert Denjean (ed.), *Studies in Realism: Bennett, Gissing, Moore, Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, no. 24, October 1986. This volume contains three articles on Gissing: "Some Personal Observations on Realism and Idealism in *New Grub Street*," by Pierre Coustillas, pp. 63-78; "Realism v. Romantic Convention in Gissing," by David Grylls, pp. 79-93; and "Realism as Discovery in the Novels of George Gissing," by Jacob Korg, pp. 95-107.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Jenni Calder, "Cash and the Sex Nexus," *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, Vol. XXVII, 1982, pp. 40-53. Contains a passage on Gissing, pp. 45-46.

John R. Byers Jr., "Half a Henry James Letter," *American Literary Realism*, Vol. XVI, no. 1, Spring 1983, pp. 129-31. Byers transcribes, with many inaccuracies, part of a letter from

Henry James to Gissing in early 1903. What remains of this letter was once in the hands of Gabrielle Fleury. It was sold at Sotheby's in 1971.

Frank Kermode, "The Decline of the Man of Letters," *Partisan Review*, Vol. LII, no. 3, 1985, pp. 195-209. Contains a passage on *New Grub Street* and *Sleeping Fires*, pp. 197-99.

John Gross, "A Sea of Troubles," *Observer*, 17 August 1986, p. 22. This review of the second

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volume of Conrad's *Collected Letters* (1898-1902) contains a passage on Gissing.

Francesco Badolato, "Gissing a Roma: Impressioni sull'arte," *Brutium*, July- September 1986, pp. 12-13. This article is followed by a review of the first few titles in the Hogarth collected edition of Gissing's works.

Anon., *British Bulletin of Publications* (issued by the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Council), no. 75, October 1986, p. 11. Notice of *Landscapes and Literati*.

Brian Lake, "Book Reviews," *Book Collector*, Vol. XXXV, no. 3. Autumn 1986, pp. 385-86. Review of Michael Collie's *George Gissing: A Bibliographical Study*.

Francesco Badolato, "Inediti di Hudson e di Gissing," *Il Corriere di Roma*, 30 November 1986, p. 4. Review of *Landscapes and Literati*.

Laurel Brake *et al* (ed.), *The Year's Work in English Studies*, Vol. 64 (1983), London: John Murray for the English Association, 1986. Refers in various places to work on Gissing in 1983.

Jean Raimond, *La Littérature anglaise*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986. Gissing is discussed briefly on p. 87.

T. R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Gissing's Positivist period and ideas are examined at some length on pp. 218-29.

Serge Cottureau, *George Meredith: Les derniers romans (1880-1895)*, Paris: Editions du C.N.R.S., 1986. Gissing is referred to briefly on pp. 139 and 234.