

THE GISSING NEWSLETTER

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

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“A Voice that Spoke Straight and Shapely Words”:
Gissing in the works and papers
of Virginia Woolf.

Pierre Coustillas.

Virginia Woolf’s interest in Gissing’s works has been known for at least sixty years, since she published an influential essay on him in the *Nation and Athenæum* for 26 February 1927.¹ Gissing scholars have occasionally quoted from it and her name has become a quasi compulsory landmark in Gissing criticism. Publishers who have to define his specific contribution to English literature and mention a couple of names to support their views think of Virginia Woolf as readily as of Orwell. But no effort to survey all the aspects of her interest in him has ever been made, and indeed it could not have been attempted with any measure of

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success until some vital information was released by Woolf scholars. The publication of *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* by her nephew Quentin Bell² in 1972 supplied a few hints of a biographical nature, then B. J. Kirkpatrick, in the third (updated) version of his *Bibliography of Virginia Woolf* (1980)³ revealed the existence of some critical material on Gissing, which, considering that it was buried, unsigned, in the files of old periodicals, had no chance of catching the critic’s eye, and late last year Andrew McNeillie began to publish Virginia Woolf’s collected essays under the imprint of the Hogarth Press, making thereby further revelations. This material, together with her Diary and Letters, clearly shows that the Gissing-Woolf connection must be explored in three fields — bibliographical, biographical and critical.

There is no evidence that Virginia Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, was actively interested in Gissing's work. His relationship with Thomas Hardy is well documented, but no clue is given anywhere to any review from his pen of a Gissing story. His reviews of current literature under the title "Hours in a Library" in the *National Review* cover nothing relevant. Still he can hardly have ignored Gissing's work which by 1904, the year of his death, loomed large in the English literary landscape. It is likely enough that his daughter Virginia, who became of age in the year of Gissing's own death, found some of his books in the paternal home. As Andrew McNeillie reports, it was in November 1904 that she embarked on her journalistic career. At the suggestion of Violet Dickinson, she began "to send examples of her work to Margaret Lyttelton, a friend of Violet who edited the women's pages of the *Guardian*." This was an Anglo-Catholic weekly which commented at length on current literature, and twenty of Gissing's twenty-five titles up to 1903 had been reviewed in it with scant intelligence until *By the Ionian Sea* had unsealed the eyes of the purblind critic who had, with dogged regularity, assessed his books from a moral

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rather than artistic standpoint. Perhaps Virginia Stephen read the sympathetic obituary of Gissing by Margaret Bateson (Mrs. W. E. Heitland) in the *Guardian* for 6 January 1904, a few weeks before her father's death. Anyway, it turned out that, most unexpectedly to us, it was not one of Gissing's three posthumous books, *Veranilda*, *Will Warburton* and *The House of Cobwebs*, that she reviewed for the *Guardian* — they were reviewed, by someone else — but a novel by Algernon Gissing, *Arrows of Fortune* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1904), a very weak story, which she demolished most economically by relating the plot in a sarcastic manner. "The reviewer of Mr. Algernon Gissing's last book," she began, "need not spend much time in criticism of his characters. Their names speak for them. Sir Philip Scorton and Marian Kellbrook are, on the face of it, hero and heroine; Crispin Cragg is obviously the villain. In the first chapter an old book is found in which Marian's dead father has registered his curse and demand for vengeance upon Crispin Cragg, who has apparently done him great wrong in his lifetime ..." The tale is briskly summed up and its mechanical development stressed. Two "arrows of fortune" dispose of two obnoxious characters, respectively Hartley and Crispin Cragg, son and father, and Marian can ultimately become engaged to the knightly Sir Philip and drop the evil book which she has throughout concealed about her person into a bonfire where, the reviewer observes satirically, "we can only hope that it was burnt to ashes."⁴

More interesting and probably as much of a novelty to readers of Gissing is the essay on *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* which appeared, also in the *Guardian*, on 13 February 1907. Virginia Stephen's (undated) reading notes for it are in the Monks House Papers held by the Sussex University Library. In this new article she proved more ambitious than in her short derogatory assessment of Algernon's inferior novel. By early 1907 *Henry Ryecroft* had been four years in print and it was a best-selling title on Constable's list. Six six-shilling editions had

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been disposed of, and the half-crown pocket edition was in its third impression. Perhaps the essay was all the more readily accepted as the book, unaccountably, had not been reviewed in the journal on being first issued. At the time, she rightly observed in her elegant piece, "attentive ears recognised the accent of a true book that would endure when the clamour of a season of books was passed away. Here was a voice that spoke straight and shapely words at its natural pitch, and carried their meaning by the impulse of some rare sincerity to the recesses of the mind."⁵ Unlike many readers of the volume who were anxious to discover the writer's

personality as distinguished from the author of the realistic novels (a distinction, incidentally, which raises more problems than it solves), or who treasured it for “the beauty of its writing, the sweetness of its humour, or the maturity of its knowledge,” she chose to praise it for “the impression that it leaves of a live, human creature, who has not scrupled to let us know his foibles, and his failings, and his imperfect human shape.” The essay is largely a fascinated analysis of Ryecroft’s personality, of which she clearly understands the pathos, even though his reticence deprives the book of the chance of being read as a confession. Ryecroft, she notes in a manner which would have delighted men like Thomas Mosher and Christopher Morley, is “inclined to put more trust in books than in people.” And she stresses Ryecroft’s tendency to see nature and the world instinctively through some veil of written words, witness the echoes of *Tristram Shandy* or *Henry IV*. As with “all exquisitely literate minds,” she concludes, “his brain plays a kind of battledore and shuttlecock with life and literature.” Virginia Stephen’s occasional contributions to the *Guardian*, a journal one would never have thought of in connection with her, virtually came to an end with this article on *Henry Ryecroft*. Her last piece, published over two years later, was to be an obituary of her Quaker aunt, Caroline Emilia Stephen. By then she had become a regular contributor to the *Times Literary Supplement*, then

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edited by Bruce Richmond. This is where her second essay on Gissing appeared on 11 January 1912. It is a long review article, starting on the front page, of the eight Sidgwick and Jackson titles reprinted the year before, which had enjoyed a first lease of life as one-volume novels under the imprint of Lawrence & Bullen in the 1890s,⁶ but as twelve volumes are casually referred to in the opening paragraph one may suppose that she had also secured copies of the other titles she mentions or quotes from — *Born in Exile*, obtainable, she says, “upon bookstalls for sevenpence,” obviously in the Nelson edition, and *Demos*, *The Nether World* and *New Grub Street* (all still available from Smith, Elder), with which she shows signs of great familiarity. Already in 1907 she had given her readers to understand that her knowledge of Gissing’s work was not limited to *Henry Ryecroft*, and that she had read much recent comment upon it. She now offered fresh evidence of empathy with all the major titles in print, and, paradoxically, she had more to say about the books she was not nominally reviewing than about those Sidgwick & Jackson were bravely trying to promote — a procedure which she repeated, more consciously doubtless, as we shall see, in 1933. She gave all these reprints a warm welcome; they remained for many years the nearest equivalent to a collected edition of Gissing’s works. “There is a curious blending of respect and contempt in the publishers’ minds towards me,” she quoted Gissing as saying to Edward Clodd, “and I should like to see which sentiment will prevail.”⁷ She, for one, decided that it was respect which prevailed in the attitude of the public, and she ventured to suggest the destiny of the new edition: “it will find its way to houses where very few novels are kept. Ordinary, cultivated people will buy them of course: but also governesses who scarcely ever read; mechanics; working men who despise novels; dons who place him high among writers of English prose; professional men; the daughters of farmers in the North. We can imagine that he is the favourite novelist of a great many middle-aged, sceptical, rather

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depressed men and women who when they read want thought and understanding of life as it is, not wit or romance.” She saw him as a born writer with one great theme, “the life of a man of fine character and intelligence who is absolutely penniless and is therefore the sport of all that is most sordid and brutal in modern life.” His honesty she acknowledges, his hatred of poverty which always degrades, and of the poor, whom it would be sentimentalism to idealize from a distance, as did Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens in their own way. Gissing is wise

enough in her view to brush aside the notion of the fundamental equality of men as an unattainable ideal, and she quotes the famous passage in *Demos* where Adela gazes at her husband's face opposite her. Harold Biffen's artistic honesty she considers to be inherited from his creator; like all Gissing's other worthy characters, what makes him so typical is the pathetic conjunction of his poverty and his capacity to think. All these aspects of Gissing's work she praises, also his "terse workmanlike prose" and the powerful cumulative effect of even the low-keyed, almost insignificant chapters in his novels. In the description of Manor Park Cemetery she finds a style "glowing at the heart with a kind of flameless fire." Only two criticisms she ventures to make — that, following the English method of story-telling, he should have thought it necessary to fill the gaps between the pinnacles of emotion in his narrative, and that he should have sometimes dealt with men and women living at ease, for directly "he lost his grip ... [and] changed his sober prosaic prose for a loftier style."

In retrospect this second essay, as warmly and lucidly appreciative as the first, appears the best of the four she was to write. Like a number of articles from other pens on Gissing, it was reprinted in the *Living Age*,⁸ a fact overlooked by all modern bibliographers of Virginia Woolf. Whether she herself was aware of this reprint on 16 March 1912 is doubtful: if the editor of the

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American journal paid for reproduction rights, his cheque is not likely to have been paid into the writer's banking account. It is with this piece that Andrew McNeillie concludes volume I of *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, which, incidentally, contains some reviews of books by authors Gissing had been in touch with, notably F. G. Kitton's *The Dickens Country* (1905), W. H. Hadow's *Oxford History of Music* (1905), C. Lewis Hind's *The Post Impressionists* (1911), Anne Thackeray Ritchie's *Blackstick Papers* (1908), and Rosalind Travers's *The Two Arcadias* (1906).

The third essay, "An Impression of Gissing," which will be reprinted in Volume III of Andrew McNeillie's collection of the *Essays*, has been left out of account by most Gissing scholars. It was commissioned as a review of May Yates's pioneering little book, *George Gissing: An Appreciation* and of the second edition of *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, and it appeared in the *New Statesman* for 30 June 1923.⁹ It is signed "V.," and is something of a disappointment. The critic who, a decade before, had revealed wonderful insight into Gissing's personality and writings has obviously been influenced by the picture of the man given by Morley Roberts in his *roman à clef*, which she may have first read in 1912. Her impressionistic evocation of Gissing's poverty-ridden existence, of his matrimonial errors, smacks of impatience. Of May Yates's congenial study she quotes only two sentences concerning his ambiguous attitude to the poor — "a curious mixture of pity and contempt" — and compares him unfavourably with Dickens. If she concedes that it will be well worthwhile to read *New Grub Street* and *The Nether World* again, she warns her readers that it will be a melancholy experience. The progress of her own views on the art of fiction has been detrimental to her appreciation of Gissing's realism, the realism of an artist overmuch concerned with himself. One feels that Virginia Woolf is in the mood which prompted her to write her pamphlet against realism, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (1924), and that she has developed a grouse against the Victorian narrative technique, which by then had indeed fallen into disfavour with the *avant-*

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garde intelligentsia at large. Yet, though her enthusiasm for Gissing had decreased considerably, she does not really dislike him. She respects the scholar in him and recommends his "solid books, always of scrupulous workmanship;" she admits that "as the dreary story tells itself, it wraps itself about in a glory of sober prose," and she rightly predicts that "the works of Gissing

between 1880 and 1906 will live longer than many of their more celebrated contemporaries.” His incorruptible honesty she was to acknowledge to the last.

How she had come to move away from him and his books between 1912 and 1923 is explained nowhere in her diary and correspondence, which are now available in complete editions. Still one feels that her admiration may have begun to wane very shortly after she wrote her *Times Literary Supplement* article of 11 January 1912. In a letter of 21 March 1912 she told her friend Sydney Waterlow (1878-1944), a British diplomat who was a Rye neighbour of Henry James: “I read your article, guessing it must be you, and thought it excellent, because, imbecile as I am in such matters, I could understand and enjoy. I wish I’d known your facts about Gissing. Desmond [MacCarthy] told me something, which was then contradicted and I felt I was writing about a ghost.” Clearly Waterlow had begun to publish in the press the notes taken during his conversations with Henry James in 1907 and 1908. The passage on Gissing which Virginia Stephen had in mind — it is a better index to James’s snobbery than to Gissing’s personality — has been quoted time and again; yet it should perhaps be quoted once more: “How surprising that with so much humming and hawing, such deliberation in the choice of the right adjective the portraits of persons that he builds up in talk should be so solid and vivid! Thus he described the only occasion on which he had seen Gissing. The impression made by Gissing was a peculiarly painful one. Nature had been unkind to him. The front face was not bad; he had a fine forehead and clustering hair. But when he turned his head you saw one side of

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the face disfigured by a great expanse of purple scar, and mouth and chin were uncomely and feeble. Altogether an extraordinarily ungainly, common, ill-shaped figure; almost knock-kneed, bearing the unmistakable stamp of Wakefield, his birthplace. And how queer that such a being should speak French so well — with a precise affectation that made it almost too well!”¹¹ It must be borne in mind that until the simultaneous publication of Morley Robert’s fictionalized biography and of Frank Swinnerton’s jealously *critical* study, very little was known about Gissing’s life although plenty of rumours were abroad. Reading Henry James’s brief personal recollections, those of a superior person looking down from a pinnacle of wisdom, intellectual and moral, upon an acquaintance whose books he praised reluctantly, would seem to have somewhat disturbed her. Further, the allusion to Desmond MacCarthy, whose wife, Molly, was a cousin of her step-sister Laura, may have unsuspected significance. MacCarthy was one of those prominent ubiquitous critics whose personal contacts included writers who had known Gissing or people who had heard of him from fairly reliable sources. He had reviewed *Veranilda* in December 1904.¹² What had he said that had been contradicted? one wonders.

After the passing reference to Gissing in the letter to Sydney Waterlow, we only find a brief allusion in a diary entry for 13 December 1917 (“Poverty degrades, as Gissing said”) and a colourless reference to her *New Statesman* piece in a letter to her husband of 25 and 26 April 1923: “Began Gissing ... finished reading my Gissing book ... Wednesday ... I have written at Gissing.” Her diary for the period does not mention the article, which is the poorest and the least sympathetic of the four.

A new opportunity to reconsider Gissing was offered to her by the publication in late January 1927 of *The Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family*, edited by Algernon and Ellen Gissing, to which Alfred Gissing had appended a preface. In some ways the new essay she wrote was a review of the volume of correspondence, as is made obvious by her

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weaving into the fabric of her piece many details borrowed from the book, but it is also a reassessment which tries to synthesize her complementary and changing views on the subject.

As in the 1923 essay, Gissing is called an imperfect novelist — “one of those imperfect novelists through whose books one sees the life of the author faintly covered by the lives of fictitious people.” Maybe influenced by those critics who since Gissing’s death had been blinded by *Henry Ryecroft* and saw him as a scholar *manqué*, a born writer but not a born novelist, she played down the importance of his novels because she realized while reading the collection of letters that she had hitherto altogether overlooked one important aspect of Gissing’s culture — his lifelong interest in antiquity and classical literature. Without having the knowledge required for commending the belletristic side of the works at the expense of the novels, she now tends to reduce his capacities as a novelist. With a writer like Gissing, she quite unjustifiably comments, “we establish a personal rather than an artistic relationship.” Also quite unreasonably she regrets finding so little wit and no brilliance in the volume of family letters just published, as though letters to one’s family had of necessity to be witty and brilliant! She quotes his childhood remarks on a booklet called *That’s It* and couples this with an implicit accusation of reverencing facts too much in his works (shades of her obsession with the fiction of Arnold Bennett!), forgetting that in 1912 she had found one of his essential merits in his ability to make his characters *think*. Obviously the circumstances of Gissing’s life as she had discovered them first in *Henry Maitland*, then in the volume of family correspondence, partly alienated her sympathy. She had written on the works more feelingly and pertinently when she knew next to nothing about Gissing the man and his circumstances. Nor is she on a safer track when she makes him “the champion of life as it is,” a writer who “proclaims that ugliness is

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truth, truth ugliness, and that is all we know and all we need to know.” Yet she cannot forget her old point of view, goes back to *Demos*, *The Nether World* and *New Grub Street*, and quotes again from the description of Manor Park Cemetery. Gissing has now become a man who “was always thinking... always changing,” and “never ceased to educate himself.” But she cannot get out of the rut into which she has gradually driven herself, and no remark in this her last essay betrays a more basic misinterpretation of Gissing’s culture and artistic aims than her reconstruction of Gissing’s evolution. “Ugliness,” she imagines him thinking when he turned to historical fiction, “is not the whole truth; there is an element of beauty in the world.” Had Virginia Woolf read *Workers in the Dawn*, she would have realized that Gissing’s concern with beauty was in his first book as palpably present as in his last.

After reading this fourth essay of hers on Gissing, one is led to the inevitable conclusion that a new notion of Gissing and his work had displaced the old one. Most likely she had not reread a single Gissing novel in the last fifteen years and she had allowed her old appreciation to be blurred by the factual account of his life given by his self-advertising biographer and by the distorted picture of the writer offered by his drastically edited correspondence. This last volume she had read throughout, from the 1870 diary to the appendix reporting the Reverend Cooper’s kindly, though misleading, image of Gissing on his death-bed, but she had lost her grasp on the substance of the works and on the artist’s unwavering determination “to bring the present and the past near to each other.” She had also, in her rather hazy approach to factual reality as expressed in Gissing’s letters, somewhat twisted facts, and she was ultimately to be reminded of it by the novelist’s younger son.

II

This last essay is by far the best known of the four Virginia Woolf wrote on Gissing.

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Alfred Gissing read it and, understandably, found it inadequate. He said so to its author. "I have a vague recollection," she confessed to her publisher Jonathan Cape six years later, "that he wrote to me when [it] first appeared and said that I had exaggerated his father's lack of education — or something of the kind. But I did not gather that he objected to the article as a whole, and he certainly did not ask me to alter it or suppress it."¹³ It was doubtless in the version printed in the *Nation and Athenæum* on 26 February 1927 that Alfred Gissing read the essay, rather than in the *New Republic* a week later.¹⁴ There it was allowed to rest for over a year and might have lain undisturbed until Virginia Woolf collected the material for the second series of *The Common Reader*, had not Alfred Gissing offered Jonathan Cape the typescript of *Selections Autobiographical and Imaginative* from the works of his father. The volume of family letters and *A Victim of Circumstances* had been published by Constable & Co., the firm that had made the most substantial profits from the sales of Gissing's works from 1903 onwards, but it was advisable to try a new firm at a time when such publishers as Fisher Unwin, Nash & Grayson, Sidgwick & Jackson, Blackie, Methuen and Benn had the novelist on their current lists. It is made clear by the correspondence available between the three parties that Cape informed Alfred Gissing of his intention of using Virginia Woolf's tepid essay as an introduction to the projected volume of *Selections* which appeared in February 1929, but, as we shall see, he should not have stopped at that. The existence of proof copies of the book with blank pages at the beginning of the volume and no mention of or contribution by Virginia Woolf may indicate that Cape thought of adding the introduction at proof stage only.

Whatever the case may have been, Virginia Woolf mentions the revision of her article in two diary entries dated 8 and 10 November 1928, and the *Selections* from Gissing's works duly

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appeared three months later. After that the essay was collected in *The Common Reader* (Second Series) in 1932, and Jonathan Cape was thanked in a note on p. 7 of this book for permission to reprint an unnamed paper which, it is obvious, can only have been the Gissing essay. In that form it has been reprinted many times and, still with the old pagination, was reprinted in 1986 in a paperback edition edited, like the new edition of the *Essays*, by Andrew McNeillie. It was also collected in 1966 in volume I of the four-volume *Collected Essays*¹⁵ issued by the Hogarth Press.

This fourth Gissing essay was destined to be used yet again as an introduction to a Gissing title, a few months after the publication of the second *Common Reader*. It happened that Jonathan Cape had for some time been publishing an inexpensive series of reprints entitled the Travellers' Library, and he offered Alfred Gissing to reprint *By the Ionian Sea* as no. 186. The offer was welcome since the book, originally published by Chapman & Hall in 1901 and reprinted by the same firm in 1905 (twice), 1917 and 1921, was now out of print. But once more Cape wished to use Virginia Woolf's introduction and the consequence was to be one of those minor literary quarrels like that between Methuen and Gissing about the Dickens prefaces at the turn of the century, or those which attended the publication of *Veranilda* in 1904 and *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* in 1912.

This new quarrel is richly documented and a number of letters concerning it are still unpublished. On 13 October 1932, Cape wrote to Virginia Woolf telling her of his intention to print her essay on Gissing as an introduction to Gissing's travel narrative.¹⁶ *Selections Autobiographical and Imaginative*, he said, was now out of print and he wished to keep the essay in print in another book of Gissing interest. For this he promised a fee of five guineas and suggested she might like to revise her piece and, perhaps, adapt it to the specific use intended. She promptly accepted the offer of five guineas, but she would not alter the revised version she

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had just published in the *Common Reader*, adding that she had not read *By the Ionian Sea*, but that she imagined the introduction “sufficiently general to serve as it stands.”¹⁷ This was a somewhat cavalier procedure — some appreciative comment on a book which has become a classic of travel literature was, it would seem, in order, besides being a matter of posthumous courtesy to a writer who, with the notable exception of Lawrence & Bullen, had never been treated very courteously by publishers in his lifetime. Two days later Cape promised proofs which were actually sent on 21 November with the cheque for five guineas. The proofs, which included *By the Ionian Sea*, were returned with thanks as early as 25 November.

Things proceeded smoothly until 24 February 1933, when Alfred Gissing wrote an angry letter to Cape which throws some light on his opinion of the essay which had introduced his selections from his father’s works. He was writing from “Barbon, Westmorland, via Carnforth” and began by complaining that the author’s copies of the book had been sent to his former address at Aysgarth; and quite properly, he protested against the publisher’s free and easy manners. This letter reveals that he had complained in 1929 because Virginia Woolf’s introduction had not been submitted to him before publication and because it was, he said, full of errors of fact. Why such an introductory piece, which in 1929 had been censured by admirers of his father, had been revived despite his explicit disapproval of it, was more than he could understand. Faulty and carelessly written he called it, and utterly unsuited to this particular book of his father’s which was not even mentioned by Mrs. Woolf. He obviously hoped that the copies he had received were advance copies, since he expressed his desire to have a slip inserted at the beginning of the book, stating that he dissociated himself entirely from the use of such an introduction. The book, he thought, needed no introduction, and surely not one like that printed by Cape — a mere inaccurate excrescence. Yet if some sort of introductory matter was deemed

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desirable by the publisher, it should at least have been of a scholarly nature, and suited to the subject of the book. He further threatened to give publicity to his disapproval of the introduction in letters to the press, and he was as good as his word.

Meanwhile, however, the triangular private correspondence went on for a few weeks. On 2 March Jonathan Cape wrote to Virginia Woolf. He reported Alfred Gissing’s objections, minus his indignation, so that the echo of the latter’s angry protest was made hardly perceptible. Anyway, he remarked, as the book was to be published next Monday and the orders had been despatched, there was not much that could be done. Besides, it now appeared that Alfred Gissing’s objections to the introduction attached to *Selections* four years before had reached the firm while Cape was in America, and the whole affair had gone out of everyone’s mind in his office. If Mr. Gissing disowned the introduction in a letter to the press, he very much hoped that Mrs. Woolf would see her way to reply to him.

On the same day Cape replied to Alfred Gissing. He repeated that he was in America at the time *Selections* had come out, remarking that a preface by Virginia Woolf had definite advertising value. She had been invited — with no result — to revise her original introduction, that it should have a closer link with *By the Ionian Sea*, but it was an interesting and provocative introduction for all that, he thought. The subsequent correspondence — a letter from Jonathan Cape to Alfred Gissing of 10 March 1933 in which Virginia Woolf’s letter to Cape of 3 March was transcribed in full, and Alfred Gissing’s reply of 14 March — was not much of a climb-down. “From what you say,” Virginia Woolf pleaded, “I gather that his objections must be much stronger than I realised. And until I see what they are I can’t of course say whether I can answer them or not. Certainly I meant no disrespect to his father — and I don’t think that any impartial person who read my article would think so.”¹⁸ Alfred Gissing replied that he had

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no ill-feeling towards Mrs. Woolf, but that a careless and badly written introduction was not to be tolerated. He further revealed that at the time he had first objected to her piece — was it in 1927 or 1929? — denouncing its inaccuracies, in particular the reference to the education given to the Gissing children, he had received a reply from Mr. Leonard Woolf, who promised to correct the errors should the article be reprinted. In retrospect Alfred Gissing's position, while it reflects the susceptibility of a family which had suffered much from public comment passed on them in books like those of Morley Roberts and Frank Swinnerton as well as in the press, appears a much stronger one than that of either Jonathan Cape or the Woolfs, whose carelessness in this affair is solidly established.

The last stages of the quarrel can be reconstituted from Virginia Woolf's diary and from the files of two weekly journals. "A little nip from Gissing in the TLS, which I must answer," she wrote quietly in her diary on 13 April. Alfred Gissing had just written to the editors of the *Times Literary Supplement* (13 April, p. 261) and of the *New Statesman and Nation* (15 April, p. 475):

Sir, — You would do me a favour if you would allow me, through the medium of your columns, to disclaim all responsibility for an introduction which has been attached to a reprint of George Gissing's *By the Ionian Sea*, recently issued by Messrs. Jonathan Cape. This introduction was inserted without my knowledge or consent, and I am, therefore, in no way answerable for the errors which it contains.

Yours faithfully,

A. C. Gissing.

Virginia Woolf only replied to the former journal,¹⁹ saying that the introduction for which Mr. Gissing disclaimed all responsibility was hers and signed with her name. She would therefore be much obliged if Mr. Gissing would inform her what errors it contained, in order

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that she might correct them, should the opportunity occur. His answer was published on 27 April (p. 295). He painstakingly demonstrated that the objectionable introduction was riddled with small inaccuracies typical of those reviewers who rely on impressions which they do not take the trouble to check when they set pen to paper. Perhaps the most serious of them concerned Gissing reading Thucydides in Sicily. Conversely, the rebuttal of Virginia Woolf's remark that the Gissings "had to scrape together what education they could get" was more dictated by the family's self-respect than by truth pure and simple. One cannot unreservedly accept Alfred Gissing's well-meant statement that "there was at no time a shortage of money for the education of the children," and that "even the sisters were able to remain at school (the Wakefield High School) until the age of eighteen." Virginia Woolf had the last word, deriding her opponent's care for accuracy, but ultimately apologizing for her remarks about the Gissings' education (4 May, p. 312). She also had the last word in the sense that she made no effort to correct her factual errors when new impressions of *The Common Reader* (Second Series) were issued to satisfy public demand. The consequence is that the fourth essay on Gissing, however interesting it may be in some respects, remains as unreliable as ever with regard to facts and events. It is to be hoped that when it is reprinted in volume 5 of the *Essays*, the editorial apparatus will include Alfred Gissing's letter listing his corrections.

III

A survey of the Gissing-Woolf connection would leave something important out of

account if it were limited to the younger novelist's criticism of the older and its biographical background. Now that a wealth of material has been published on both sides — letters, diaries, notebooks — further links can be traced between the two writers. The main one is at once

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biographical and artistic — Kitty Lushington, once Gissing's pupil, was a childhood friend of Virginia Stephen and, by the latter's admission, was the original for Mrs. Dalloway in the novel of that name (1925). Another link is purely artistic — in *To The Lighthouse* (1927) Charles Tansley has inherited some of the features of Godwin Peak.

The Lushington daughters first appear in Gissing's correspondence in a letter to his brother Algernon of 13 January 1881: "I have today given the first lesson to the children of Vernon Lushington, Q. C., and late Secretary to the Admiralty. There are four girls; I give them an hour twice a week."²⁰ This was at the time he was writing his first article for *Vyestnik Evropy* and both the new tuition and the new journalistic commitment had been offered to him through his patron Frederic Harrison. Vernon Lushington was then forty-eight and, after eight years as Secretary to the Admiralty, from 1869 to 1877, he was now Judge of the County Courts for Surrey and Berkshire. A wealthy man, he paid his daughters' tutor the modest fee of five shillings per hour of teaching. After a fortnight, Gissing told his sister Ellen, then thirteen, that he taught the four girls English, history and geography, and that they were rather clever. "The eldest [Kitty] is only fourteen, but they might each be taken for at least three years older than they are... One of them is always reading Homer, and she tells me that she would give anything to learn to read it in the original Greek."²¹ He occasionally referred to the girls in his correspondence — two late mentions occur in December 1883 and January 1884 at which time he was still giving them lessons. Gissing does not mention the girls' names in his correspondence of the period, but the two who were to become Virginia Stephen's friends, that is Katherine and Susan, were necessarily known to him.

Inevitably, Kitty must have mentioned having once had Gissing as a tutor during her conversations with Virginia Stephen, and she was doubtless aware, in after years, that her

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husband, Leopold Maxse, (1864-1932), whom she married in 1890, published several of Gissing's short stories in his monthly, the *National Review* — "The Day of Silence" (December 1893), "A Capitalist" (April 1894) and "A Lodger in Maze Pond" (February 1895). Two passing references in Gissing's diary would seem to indicate that Gissing did not quite forget his former pupil Kitty and that the Lushingtons were not unaware of his activities (28 December 1888 and 1 April 1889). How they knew that he was in Italy in the winter of 1888-89 — the Frederic Harrisons heard of this through them — is indeed a mystery since Gissing's movements were not reported in the press in those days. He was to meet Kitty once more, by accident, on travelling back by train from Haslemere to Epsom after a visit to the Harrisons at Blackdown Cottage. This was on 25 August 1896. "At Haslemere Station," he noted in his diary, "there entered, and sat opposite to me, a lady whom I thought I knew. After travelling some miles, she said to me, 'I think you must be Mr. Gissing.' And behold it was Mrs. Maxse, formerly Kitty Lushington, my pupil. We talked, and she left the train at Guildford. I had not seen her for twelve years."

While to Gissing Kitty Lushington was associated with the years of semi-starvation in dingy lodgings during those long years between *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed*, she was, in Virginia Woolf's mind, originally associated with family life at St. Ives, Cornwall, which Quentin Bell, in his biography of his aunt, vividly describes as follows: "Family life at St. Ives was rather shabby and casual; Talland House was untidy and overrun with people. For in

addition to the family there were guests: cousins, uncles, nephews and nieces in great quantities, Meredith who used to sit under a tree reading his poetry to Julia [Virginia's aunt, Julia Stephen] and Mrs. Jackson, Lowell, Henry James, and a number of obscurer characters who had failed or had yet to make a name for themselves [...] And there were younger people; those whom Virginia described as the tyrants and demi-gods of their childish world."²² One of these was

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Kitty Lushington, "an old friend and the daughter of an old friend — it was under the jackmanii in the garden of Talland House that she agreed to marry another of the younger guests, Leo Maxse."²³ Among Virginia's earliest visions of Kitty was that of a young lady some fifteen years her senior in a summer atmosphere of picnics and tea parties. But somehow Virginia never got on easily with Kitty, and the former's correspondence (vols. I and II, 1888-1922) teems with petulant references to her. "She was smart," Quentin Bell writes, "with a tight, neat, pretty smartness; her blue eyes looked at the world through half-closed lashes; she had a mocking voice; she stood very upright."²⁴ And Virginia quickly came to think that Kitty was a snob. Her husband, Leopold, was an arch-conservative, a valetudinarian, who for all his bad health, succeeded in outliving her by ten years, and Virginia does not seem to have liked him much either. Her tepid feelings were extended to Kitty's sister, Susan, about whom, as early as 1903, one reads this remark in a letter to Violet Dickinson: "I go to the Greek play with Susan and Mr. Lushington. It is an experiment: I have never spent 5 minutes alone with Susan in my life."²⁵

The contacts between the Stephens and the Lushingtons — neighbourhood acquaintances in South Kensington to start with — are documented in Virginia's correspondence from 1897 onwards, and a detailed record of them *must* read like a study in deterioration. This is not a situation which could have been guessed from the fictional portraits of Kitty, first in *The Voyage Out* (1915), then in *Mrs. Dalloway*, but besides the alchemy of artistic creation, the fact must be taken into account that Kitty Maxse died in October 1922. A few years before the composition of *Mrs. Dalloway* she fell over the bannisters of a flight of steps, and Virginia suspected she had committed suicide — and this may have helped to produce greater detachment and a more tolerant view of Kitty.

A selection of quotations from Virginia's letters will help us to visualize the personality of

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Gissing's former pupil through the eyes of one of his major critics. At the age of twenty one already finds her making a dig at the Maxses: "I can't think how one writes to an intimate friend. Once I called Kitty darling in a telegram! and we have never been on good terms since. She wrote a long letter this morning, but she's freezing hard. Leo will be the death of her."²⁶ Obviously what Virginia disliked in Kitty was essentially her cold manner to her, which was not incompatible with a "bossing" attitude when circumstances gave the older woman an opportunity to offer advice and act like a (not very tactful) surrogate mother. To Violet Dickinson, a favourite and a very different woman from Kitty whom she addressed as "My Violet," Virginia wrote on 30 June 1903: "Kitty is eternal — cool and fashionable — while from tip to toe [she] has little aristocratic stories without much point — which *is* the point. But, as you say, she is a good woman — and etc etc etc."²⁷ An inveterate conformist, Kitty liked to feel good, and Virginia resented her virtuous airs and social gestures. A few months before Leslie Stephen's death, a letter to the same correspondent, referring to her own sister Vanessa Stephen, later Bell (1879-1961), offers new evidence of her ambiguous attitude to Kitty: "Kitty has suddenly realized that father is ill, and writes very affectionate letters to Nessa. She is a good woman and all that, and would do anything for Nessa I know, and as it is does a good deal

— but the end of a long sentence is that she and Sparrow [i.e., herself] aren't what you call sympathetic — and her attitude on these matters makes me unreasonably irritated [...] This letter is, what Kitty would call, a sign of the literary temperament d--d egotistic. But I don't care a hang."²⁸ An odd fish who made her feel angry, this sums up her impressions of Kitty at the time Leslie Stephen was dying. Falsely sympathetic little notes cost Kitty very little effort, but Virginia saw through it all. Besides, in her letters of the same period a new source of

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antagonism is revealed to Violet Dickinson: "Kitty has been here 1½ hours talking politics; I should feel more confidence in her schemes for setting the Empire on its legs again if they were exactly the *opposite* of 'what Leo thinks' (as she always begins her sentence). [...] I was asked to spend an evening in Montpelier Square [at Kitty's house], but I said 'No I have other engagements' which I hadn't, but I thought it set a higher price on my head, and you know every Sparrow is numbered."²⁹ There had been a time when Kitty was likeable, but, in the eyes of Virginia, marriage to the conventional and politically pretentious Leopold had made her a painful person in any drawing-room. Oh, if she could only wear off the Maxse varnish!

Things went on in that strain for months and years: "Kitty [...] is to me as salt to a very sensitive snail [...] Oh damn Leo I say. She lives in an unreal Paradise."³⁰ Still eventually Kitty got on the Stephens's nerves so intolerably that she was given the cold shoulder and she perhaps came to sense that she had been pronounced an objectionable bore in her friends' house. An undated letter of July 1911 to Vanessa Bell indicates that a new stage had been reached, which Gissing, with his sound hatred of social hypocrisy and vapid talk, would have appreciated to a nicety had fate made him a witness: "I have been to tea with Nelly [Lady Robert Cecil] this afternoon [...] She told me that we had behaved very badly to Kitty. I said that Kitty was obsolete, and had to be dropped. She said that both Kitty and Leo were 20 years behind the times; and gave me to understand that Kitty is a foolish thimble-pated woman, living in a swarm of smart people she doesn't care about, but quite happy."³¹ Three years before that, Kitty had been raw material for fiction. A letter of Virginia to her sister Vanessa of 10 August 1908 contains a confession: "Lettice [an earlier name for Clarissa Dalloway in *The Voyage Out*] is almost Kitty verbatim; what would happen if she guessed? Never was there such an improvident

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author — Flaubert would turn in his grave."³² By the time the Great War broke out, Kitty had vanished altogether from Virginia's life, but she reappeared unexpectedly in December 1917 when her way crossed Virginia's in Knightsbridge. Virginia was going from shop to shop trying desperately to buy some coal. Unresentfully, Kitty said: "'O I'll give you some coal; I've got two cellars full,' and that saw us through, but I've not seen her since that day, so distinguished looking and not a year older, though she must be going on for fifty."³³ Time passed and in 1920, Virginia, who had by then made her mark in literature even though her major work was still to come, heard from her friend Margaret Llewelyn-Davies that Kitty had "read *Night and Day* and thought it very bad, the characters bloodless, the writing dull, the love insipid."³⁴ Leonard Woolf wrote the next day to the same correspondent that Virginia "takes *Night and Day* with philosophic calm. I imagine Kitty Maxse's unfavourable opinion is a great compliment. It means that the book has at any rate moved on to something beyond Kipling, Sir Henry Newbolt, and possibly Stanley Weyman."³⁵ Virginia herself reported Kitty's opinion of her book to her old friend Violet Dickinson without much delay, merely commenting: "But then you know — *my* opinion of Kitty Maxse — I never succeeded with Kitty. I never put on her clothes right. She gave me an entire outfit, all black, when Thoby died."³⁵

The conclusion of the unfortunate relationship was drawn by Virginia Woolf on hearing

of the death of Kitty Maxse and its circumstances. "Ought one to write to Susan Lushington?" she asked Roger Fry. "No, one would say the wrong thing. Still it seems a pity that Kitty did kill herself: but of course she was an awful snob. No, one couldn't go on with people like that. One had to make a break somewhere."³⁷ She did not attend the funeral service — "couldn't face [it] — my black being incomplete."³⁸ Thus, Kitty, Gissing's pupil, vanished from the material world of Virginia Woolf. Considering the sober hostility with which Virginia had come to

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regard her former friend, it is a happy thing that the artistic conception of Clarissa Dalloway was not spoiled by the bitter recollections of Kitty Maxse. The artist's superior wisdom triumphed over the lingering impatience with the dead woman. Gissing would doubtless have enjoyed the process of purification.

Compared to this, the other transmutation mentioned above — the reshaping of some aspects of Gissing's unfortunate hero, Godwin Peak, into that curious character Charles Tansley in *To the Lighthouse* — is nothing more than a footnote to a pretty full page, yet a footnote which throws some light on the sources of the latter novel. When Virginia Woolf read *Born in Exile* cannot be determined with any degree of certainty, but she definitely did so in 1911 at the latest, and her comment on the story in her *Times Literary Supplement* piece testifies that she thought it a creditable achievement. She mentioned the novel again, along with *New Grub Street*, in her 1923 and 1927 essays on Gissing, and it is reasonable to suppose, as observed previously, that she read it in the extremely popular sevenpenny edition issued by Nelson in January 1910.

It is evident even to the casual observer that Peak and Tansley are representative of a social type which had found its way into English fiction one generation before Virginia Woolf, a type which occurs at its most characteristic in those novels of Gissing, Hardy, Bennett and Lawrence discussed by Patricia Alden in her recent book, *Social Mobility in the English Bildungsroman*. As well as a cousin of John Smith (in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*), Jude Fawley, Edwin Clayhanger and Godwin Peak, Tansley is a product of Forster's Education Act, but there are unmistakable signs in *To the Lighthouse* that Virginia Woolf wished to portray a young man like Godwin Peak rather than just like any other of the characters just mentioned. Tansley's great handicap, of which he is painfully conscious, is his poverty. "Slow rises worth by poverty depressed," wrote Samuel Johnson, a statement which Tansley carries on him like a protest in the face of the

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universe. He is not a likeable young man. We see him, right from the first, as a highly self-conscious and class-conscious admirer and disciple of Mr. Ramsay, who is known to be largely patterned upon the author's father, Leslie Stephen. Mr. Ramsay is the only person Tansley can respect at all; and he admires him very much in the way Godwin Peak admires the more radical professors of Whitelaw College, and for that matter, the way Gissing himself looked up to his more prestigious professors at Owens College, A. W. Ward and A. S. Wilkins. Only intellectual life matters to such characters, and this attitude is naturally coupled with a passionate dislike of the commonplace, the basely quotidian, the insignificant. Charles Tansley's mental tension during the evening meal described in "The Window," his graceless physical behaviour have neatly identifiable equivalents in Peak's attitudes. Neither is a favourite in his environment. The Ramsay children view him as a social inferior and (quite wrongly since he has been asked) as an intruder who has chased them all the way up to the Hebrides; he is viewed by them with the same socially critical eyes as those of young Sidwell Warricombe in the opening scene of *Born in Exile*. Tansley's candour is inseparable from his social grudge; self-defensively, he has a knack for making unpleasant remarks — no, he takes pleasure in telling little James, it will not be fine tomorrow and there will be no landing at the lighthouse.

He has Peak's awkwardness and aggressivity, derived from the consciousness of his social inferiority — it is interesting to note that he is the son of a chemist, like Gissing himself, that he has a large number of brothers and sisters, and that, though no scholarship is mentioned by the narrator, he has supported himself from the age of thirteen. Intellect, education, matter to him with all the urgency felt by a mind hankering after self-improvement and easily moved to scorn. He hates exaggeration; truth as he sees it is the standard by which he measures the value of

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things. It is no wonder cricket, even in the holiday atmosphere of "The Window," holds no interest for him. Such students as he or Peak, or Gissing in actual life, have no choice but to be earnest, and their earnestness is commensurate with their social unease and angry determination to succeed. Viewed as an awful prig or an insufferable bore by the Ramsay children, he is nonetheless understood by Mrs. Ramsay, whose charm fascinates him. And this is another major resemblance with Peak — he is highly susceptible to female beauty, but not a feminist for all that. "Women can't paint, women can't write," he exclaims depreciatingly. In a predictable manner he is no admirer of Scott's novels and had rather attend a performance of an Ibsen play than go to the circus. Like Peak, he can, not unfairly, be described as an unstable combination of poverty and pride.

However, as we hear in the third part of *To the Lighthouse*, which is set after the war, Tansley, despite his poverty, eventually succeeds; he gets the fellowship he was so pathetically yearning for and makes his way in life. Neither Godwin Peak nor Jude Fawley had seen their hopes fulfilled. In between some world-changing decades had elapsed. Intellectual aspirations, in *To the Lighthouse*, are no longer shown up as a mockery. At all events such is the implied view of Virginia Woolf, a novelist of the interwar period, born into the Victorian upper middle class, and a woman at that, who could see social reality with the eyes of her humbler male predecessors of the 1880s and 1890s, and who had some personal experience of the social problems they discussed in their stories. But for all that Charles Tansley makes full sense as a descendant of one of Gissing's most memorable characters.

In the light of the intricate network of associations between Gissing's life and art and her own experiences and achievements, there is some fittingness in the fact that his novels are now being reprinted by the Hogarth Press, a publishing house she founded in collaboration with

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Leonard Woolf in 1917. At the end of his career Gissing was not quite sure whether publishers would respect his work well enough to keep it in print. An answer has been given in the last thirty years by many of them. Virginia Woolf, an artist involved in the publication of solid literature, even though her enthusiasm about Gissing's novels somewhat declined between 1907 and 1927, never ceased to respect them. And respect, under her pen, was no cheap word.

1. "George Gissing," pp. 722-23.
2. In two volumes (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972).
3. The third edition of the old Soho Bibliography, published by Oxford University Press.
4. *Guardian*, 17 May 1905, p. 856. Reprinted in the *Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume I 1904-1912*, edited by Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986), pp. 41-42. The authorship of the review is established by a reference to *Arrows of Fortune* in the Diary (Christmas 1904-31 May 1905) held by the Berg Collection.

5. *Guardian*, 13 February 1907, pp. 282-83. Reprinted in the *Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume I 1904-1912*, pp. 131-34.
6. "The Novels of George Gissing," *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 January 1912, pp. 9-10. Reprinted in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972 and 1985).
7. Letter of 7 November 1899. Virginia wrote that the letter was "printed the other day." The whereabouts of this publication shortly before 11 January 1912 still have to be traced.
8. "The Novels of George Gissing," Vol. 272, pp. 675-80.
9. Pp. 371-72.
10. Her diary has been published in five volumes and her collected letters in six.
11. This passage on Gissing also appeared as "Memories of Henry James" by S. P. Waterlow, in the *New Statesman*, 6 February 1926, p. 514. See also Simon Nowell-Smith, *The Legend of*

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the Master (London: Constable, 1947), pp. 81-82; Frank Swinnerton, *The Bookman's London* (London: Allan Wingate, 1951), p. 135; Leon Edel, "Henry James and Sir Sydney Waterlow," *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 August 1968, pp. 844-45; and Norman Page (ed.), *Henry James: Interviews and Recollections* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 51.

12. "Veranilda," *Independent Review* (London), December 1904, pp. 479-80. His three other pieces on Gissing are: "George Gissing," *Empire Review*, February 1927, pp. 147-52; "The World of Books, — A Specialist on Poverty," *Sunday Times*, 17 February 1929, page unknown; and "The World of Books, — An English Chekov," *Sunday Times*, 20 February 1938, p. 6. This last piece has been reprinted by Francesco Badolato in his *George Gissing: Antologia Critica* (Rome: Herder, 1984), pp. 260-64.
13. Letter of 3 March 1933, published in Volume V (1932-1935) of Virginia Woolf's collected letters, *The Sickle Side of the Moon*, p. 165. For technical reasons "it" has been substituted in square brackets, for "the introduction."
14. "The Letters of George Gissing," pp. 49-50.
15. P. 297-301. It is worth adding that Gissing appears in three pieces reprinted in these *Collected Essays*, "Defoe," "The Narrow Bridge of Art" (Vol. 1) and "Phases of Fiction" (Vol. II). In the serial version of these essays listed by Elizabeth Steele in *Virginia Woolf's Literary Sources and Allusions* (New York: Garland, 1983), Gissing is mentioned in the third only, "Phases of Fiction" (New York *Bookman*, May 1929, p. 273).
16. Unless otherwise stated the unpublished letters referred to are in the Reading University Library. For permission to consult them I am grateful to Dr. J. A. Edwards and to Mr. Michael Bott.
17. *The Sickle Side of the Moon*, Vol. V 1932-1935 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), p. 112.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

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19. "Correspondence," 20 April 1933, p. 276.

20. Letter published in part in *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family* (London: Constable, 1927), p. 88.

21. Letter of 30 January 1881, *Letters to his Family*, pp. 89-90.

22. *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1972), Vol. I, p. 32.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

25. *The Flight of the Mind: The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1888-1912*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: The Hogarth Press, 1975), p. 107. Undated letter written in the autumn of 1903.

26. *Ibid.*, p.54. Undated letter written in September 1902.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 94. Letter tentatively dated 19 September 1903.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 103. Undated letter of October or November 1903.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 208-09. Letter to Violet Dickinson of 1 October 1905.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 468-69.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 349.

33. *The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1912-1922*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), p. 201. Letter to Vanessa Bell of 8 December 1917.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 411-12. Letter to Vanessa Bell of 2 January 1920.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 412.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 413. Letter of 4 January 1920. Thoby Stephen, her brother, who died in 1906 at the age of twenty-six.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 573. Letter of 22 October 1922.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 574. Letter of 29 October 1922 to Violet Dickinson.

(I am grateful to Ros Stinton for supplying me with some of the bibliographical information used in this article.)

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Don't Let Poor Alg Starve

Dennis Shruballs

Gissing scholars are familiar with George's generosity to his younger brother, the impecunious novelist Algernon, lending him money when he could ill afford to part with it. In his diary¹ George records ten occasions between December 1891 and January 1899 when he loaned Algernon sums varying from thirty shillings to fifty pounds, and another when he stood surety for a bank loan of one hundred pounds. Moreover George was grateful to his friend, the writer and naturalist W. H. Hudson (1841-1922), for the interest he took in his brother's work, and, in 1893, his advice that Algernon should use his extensive factual knowledge of English Midlands' rural life to write essays for journals and periodicals,² implying that he should abandon novels. Many years were to elapse before Algernon appreciated the wisdom of this advice, but by this time it was too late to profit from it.

George's death in December 1903 was also the demise of Algernon's principal financial back stop, and in January 1904, supported by Hudson, H. G. Wells and Edmund Gosse, he sought aid from the Royal Literary Fund which gave him one hundred pounds. A similar appeal in February 1908, supported on this occasion by Hudson and W. A. S. Hewins, yielded a further one hundred pounds; and it is with the kind permission of the copyright owner, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the agreement of the Royal Literary Fund, the owner of

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the holographs, that Hudson's supportive letters are reproduced hereunder:

St, Luke's Road, W.
4 January 1904.

Dear Sir,

I am asked, as an old and intimate acquaintance of Mr. Algernon Gissing, to write to you in reference to an application for a grant from the Royal Literary Fund which is being made for him.

I have not known a more deserving case than his. He is a hard-working man, abstemious to the verge of asceticism in his life, and devoted to letters. So far he has been able without outside help to support himself and a wife and four small children by his pen. Beyond what he makes he has absolutely no means.

As a reader of fiction I should say that his novels are considerably above the average as literature. Some of them — *The Scholar of Bygate*,³ and *A Secret of the North Sea*,⁴ may be instanced — are excellent works. Unfortunately they have had no great sale, owing, I believe, to the fact that he has to some extent been overshadowed by the greater reputation of his brother, George Gissing.⁵ His profits being small he has not so far been able to put by anything against such an emergency as the present one where he has been put to a great expense by the long illness of his wife, who is still laid up, and a removal

from Willersey in Gloucestershire to his present home in Cumberland.

I have known him intimately about fourteen years.

To prevent mistakes it is as well to say that of the three W. H. Hudsons who write

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books I am the author of *The Naturalist in La Plata*,⁶ *Hampshire Days*,⁷ *Nature in Downland*,⁸ etc. I may say, too, that I write feelingly on the subject of this letter, since I have been in a similar sad position as that of my friend, and had I not been helped by a grant from the Royal Society's fund at the right moment I should probably not have lived to write other books and see better days.⁹

I am, dear Sir,

Yours truly,

W. H. Hudson.

40 St. Luke's Road, W.

4 February 1908.

Dear Sir,

I wish to say a word on behalf of Mr. Algernon Gissing whose case I am informed will be brought before the General Committee at tomorrow's meeting. I know that since he received some assistance from the Royal Literary Fund a few years ago he has worked hard and in a very hopeful spirit to improve his position, and I am perfectly sure that but for the fresh serious breakdown in his wife's health he would not have been driven to seek for outside help again.

I doubt if it is necessary for me to say more than a very few words in this letter about his literary work. For the last eighteen or twenty years he has been producing fiction of a good wholesome kind, very well written but never very popular, and very poorly paid as I know. His best work was in 1893 and the three or four years following; from that time onward his life has been one incessant struggle with misfortune. If his work declined in quality it was not strange and the wonder is that with his children to

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keep and his wife, an excellent mother and careful housekeeper, an almost hopeless invalid, he was still able to produce his volume each year.

His great hope is, if he can get over his present trouble, to give his time mainly to topographical work in the future, which he can do charmingly as he has shewn in the two small books on Broadway and Ludlow.¹⁰

I hope with all my heart that his case will be favourably considered by the Committee.

Yours very truly,

W. H. Hudson.

These were not the only occasions on which Algernon was driven to seek financial aid from the Fund, but his subsequent applications were not supported by Hudson.

If, as is generally agreed, Algernon's novels were of a poor standard, one must conclude either that Hudson was a poor judge of literature or that, in Algernon's case, he erred on the side of charity. The first premise is untenable: not only was Hudson an outstanding literary stylist

himself; he was among the first to discern the poetry in Edward Thomas's prose and suggest that he was working in the wrong medium; also to encourage John Masefield to abandon writing novels in favour of long narrative verse. A perusal of Hudson's letters to the eminent critic, Edward Garnett,¹¹ will certainly dispel any scepticism still lingering in the reader's mind. However, Hudson's charity is apparent in such statements as "considerably above the average as literature" and "very well written"; but he is cautious when praising individual titles. *The Scholar of Bygate*, for example, was well reviewed in a number of journals including the *Academy* of 13 February 1897 (p. 205), and criticized not unkindly by brother George¹² who compromised not with his conscience in matters literary.

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It is, perhaps, just as fanciful to imagine George Gissing saying of his brother "don't let poor Alg starve" as the "don't let poor Nellie starve" of Charles II on *his* deathbed. But perhaps Hudson thought that's what his "old and very intimate friend" *might* have said — or something like it!

1. *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, edited by Pierre Coustillas (Harvester, 1978).
2. *Landscapes and Literati: Unpublished Letters of W. H. Hudson and George Gissing*, edited by Dennis Shruballs and Pierre Coustillas (Michael Russell, 1985), pp. 5-6. Seventeen years later Hudson was to remind him of it; *ibid.*, p. 80, 11, 1-4.
3. A single volume 447 p. work published by Hutchinson in 1897. On 8 February 1897 Hudson wrote, at length, to Algernon about it, and his letter has been included as No. 21 in *Landscapes and Literati*.
4. A single 341 p. work published by Chatto & Windus in 1900.
5. There is good reason for supposing that Algernon's sales were boosted by George's reputation for as Arthur C. Young points out on p. xxxii of his edited *Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz 1887-1903* (Constable, 1961) some of Algernon's publishers were in the habit of bringing out his books hard on the heels of those of his more distinguished brother. Hudson seems not to have been aware of this.
6. Published by Chapman & Hall in 1892.
7. Published by Longmans in 1903.
8. Published by Longmans in 1900.
9. Hudson refers to a grant of £40 which he received from the Royal Society during the eighteen eighties to enable him to co-operate with Dr. P. L. Sclater in the writing of *Argentine Ornithology*, a textbook of all Argentine birds then known to science. Published by

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R. H. Porter, Vol. I in 1888 and Vol. II in 1889, it is today a rare and valuable book. Since 1901 Hudson had also been receiving a Civil List pension of £150 per annum.

10. *Broadway* (91 pp.) and *Ludlow and Stokesay* (89 pp.) both published by Dent in their Temple Topographies series in 1904 and 1905 respectively.
11. *Letters from W. H. Hudson to Edward Garnett*, edited by Edward Garnett (Dent, 1925).
12. See *George Gissing on Fiction*, edited, with introduction and notes, by Jacob and Cynthia Korg (Enitharmon Press, 1978), pp. 88-90.

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Gissing in Sweden

P. F. Kropholler
 Paris

Until recently only *Ryecroft* had appeared in a Swedish translation.¹ It is very gratifying that two of Gissing's major novels — *The Odd Women* and *New Grub Street* have now been added, both in paperback and printed on excellent paper. These editions were referred to in the *Newsletter* for October 1986. They both carry a postscript by Ulf Brandell, of which the following is a brief summary.

As regards *The Odd Women* (*Udda Kvinnor*) Brandell begins by pointing out that Gissing

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has found his place in literature as a typically late 19th-century "gloomy realist." Both his "gloom" and his "realism" are indeed of unusual intensity. For several decades he was almost forgotten in his own country. The revival of interest started with an appreciative article by George Orwell. New editions have come out as well as several biographies, the most important of which is *The Born Exile* by Gillian Tindall. Gissing's life was almost entirely one of martyrdom. There follows a biographical account largely based on Gillian Tindall.

The basic idea underlying Gissing's work is that modern art must express the misery characteristic of our time. Authorship too is connected with misery. Next to *New Grub Street* his most important book is *The Odd Women*. We can say that unlike his more philanthropically inclined contemporaries, Gissing realized that the liberation of women is related to that of the working classes.

In a postscript to *New Grub Street* (*Brödskrivargata*) Brandell repeats that the description of misery is Gissing's salient feature. The biographical details correspond to those in the earlier translation. After giving an outline of the plot Brandell wonders to what extent the novel is autobiographical. Amy is the kind of woman Gissing hoped to avoid. Especially Gissing's attitude towards marriage is examined in some detail.

Brandell finally remarks that Reardon lived very near Sherlock Holmes. There is every reason to meet the great detective's sorely tried and much neglected neighbour.

1. *Här vilar Henry Ryecroft*, Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand (1929), introduced by Klara Johanson. Translated by Fanny Ekenstierna. Selections from *Henry Ryecroft* later appeared under the title of *Ur Henry Ryecrofts Privata Papper*, Stockholm: Bokvännerna

(1963), translated by Thure Nyman.

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Notes and News

Shigeru Koike reports from Tokyo that *The Whirlpool* is to appear in Japanese translation early in 1988. The book will be included in a series entitled "Literature of New Women," which is currently being published by the Tokyo firm Kokusho-Kankô-Kai. The translator is Mrs. Ryôko Ôta, who has translated *The Odd Women* for Shûbun International. Her name was given incorrectly when the five titles to be issued this autumn by Shûbun International were announced in our April 1986 number. The fifth title *Charles Dickens*, may not be ready simultaneously with the other four.

Oxford University Press will not publish *The Nether World* in the World's Classics until June 1989. The novel is being edited by Stephen Gill.

Andrew Whitehead, whose recent article on *Workers in the Dawn* offered valuable new information on Gissing's sources for his first published novel, is contributing a series of articles on "Forgotten Freethinkers" to the *Freethinker*. His first piece will be devoted again to Gissing's earliest full-length story to have achieved publication. The second article in the series will discuss *Stephen Remarx*, by James Adderley, a socialist clergyman who, like Gissing, attacks organised secularism. The next article will be devoted to Richard Whiteing's *The Democracy*, which Mr. Whitehead mentioned in his *Newsletter* discussion of *Workers*. Items 4 and 5 in the series will examine respectively *The Anarchists* by John Henry Mackay, a story which is part documentary, part political polemic in favour of individualist anarchism, and *The Atheist Shoemaker* by the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, a Methodist minister's controversial and

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supposedly factual account of the deathbed conversion of a prominent secularist. All these titles appeared in the late nineteenth century, and all are concerned with London. *Workers in the Dawn* is apparently the only one in print.

In our April 1986 number we reported that eleven Gissing quotations had so far been traced in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Another four have been found, two under *put* ("he did not put to himself the plain alternative," *A Life's Morning*; "he put no faith in Sidney's assertion," *The Nether World*), one under *wrying* ("Wilfrid spoke with a little wrying of the lips," *A Life's Morning*), and one under *turn off* ("Ada seemed about to rise but turned it off as an arrangement of her dress," *Isabel Clarendon*).

Two unfortunate typing errors appear in Clifford Brook's article on "The Invincible Curate" (January 1987), *times for items* (p. 18) and *1895 for 1985* (p. 19).

The ELT Press (University of North Carolina, Greensboro, N. C.) will publish *Gissing at Work: A Study of his notebook "Extracts from my Reading"*, edited by Pierre Coustillas and Patrick Bridgwater, at the end of this year.

The *New York Times* for 3 May published a letter to the editor signed Betty Gatewood and entitled "More Nonexistent Classics," on Reardon's and Biffen's imaginary novels. "I've long wished to have a look at the novels of Edwin Reardon, especially 'Margaret Home,' the novel he agonizes over, word by word, in 'New Grub Street'. Perhaps even more curious would

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be his friend Harold Biffen's novel of 'absolute realism in the sphere of the ignobly decent,' 'Mr. Bailey, Grocer,' the manuscript of which Biffen rushes into a burning building to save and hurls from the roof wrapped in his only coat."

Adeline Tintner, whose name is not unknown to readers of this journal, and who has been for years an authority on Henry James, has published a remarkable book entitled *The Museum World of Henry James* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1986), splendidly produced on glossy paper, and containing a hundred illustrations. It is a detailed study, superbly knowledgeable, of Henry James's interest in artists and art, and of the role they played in his imagination and in his books. In his Foreword, Leon Edel, the specialist in chief of Henry James, is enthusiastic. In producing this book, he writes, Adeline Tintner "has placed a new and highly original signpost on the long and crowded road of Jamesian studies." Her book is a genuinely interdisciplinary study, written from the standpoints of the art historian and of the literary critic. A guided tour among the artistic treasures which are integral to the structure and meaning of James's fiction, the book also makes full sense as a work of reference, as an illustrated dictionary which throws light on all matters concerning Henry James and art. Doubtless a less ambitious yet badly needed enquiry of the same kind could be done in relation to Gissing. It would have to cover all his life, from his early interest in Dürer and Hogarth to his references to Roman architecture in *Veranilda*.

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Recent Publications

Volumes

Pierre Coustillas, *Brief Interlude: The Letters of George Gissing to Edith Sichel*, Edinburgh: The Tragara Press, 1987. A limited edition of 170 copies (of which 145 are for sale). Of these, 140 copies are printed on white W S vellum parchment and sewn in brown card wrappers, price £12.50. Numbers 1 to 30 have been printed on a paper made by Amatruda of Amalfi, and bound in decorated boards with cloth spine, price £18.50. This 43-page booklet is hand-set in Bembo type, with two portraits of Gissing and Edith Sichel.

George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, edited with an introduction by Mark Storey, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. Pp. xxvi + 211. Pictorial paperback, £3.95. The critical material includes an introduction, a note on the text, a select bibliography, a chronology of Gissing's life, a six-page appendix consisting of a selection of passages in the draft MS which were subsequently altered or omitted in the final version, and explanatory notes. The cover illustration shows a detail from "High View, Fishpond," 1915, by Lucien Pissarro (The Tate Gallery).

George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, with an introduction by Elaine Showalter, New York: The

New American Library, [1987], pp. xxvi + 388. Pictorial paperback, \$4.95 (Canada \$6.25). This is the second impression of the edition originally published in 1983.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Brenda R. Silver, *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks*, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University

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Press, 1983. An entry on Gissing appears on p. 180.

Elizabeth Steele, *Virginia Woolf's Literary Sources and Allusions: A Guide to the Essays*, New York: Garland, 1983. Some details on Gissing appear on p. 103.

Billy T. Tracy, Jr., *D. H. Lawrence and the Literature of Travel*, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983. *By the Ionian Sea* is discussed briefly on p. 45.

Merryn Williams, *Women in the English Novel, 1800-1900*, London: Macmillan, 1984. Gissing is discussed at some length, in connection with Hardy in particular.

Norman Page (ed.), *Henry James: Interviews and Recollections*, London: Macmillan, 1984. James's well-known reminiscences of Gissing, as reported by Sydney Waterlow, are printed on p. 51.

Anon., "Literatur. — Ausgrabung," *Hessische Allgemeine*, 22 March 1986. Review of *Zeilengeld*, the German translation of *New Grub Street*.

Frank Dietschreit, "Lesezeichen," *Zitty* (a Berlin bi-monthly), September 1986, p. 53. Review of *Zeilengeld*.

Georg Engl, "George Gissing: Zeilengeld," *Sturzflüge* (Bözen), October 1986, p. 80.

Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Volume 2, 1898-1902*, Cambridge University Press, 1986. Contains a letter to Edward Clodd of 21 December 1902 mentioning Gissing, hitherto unpublished, a letter to Gissing of the same day, previously published in the *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, and a letter to Blackwood of 22 December 1902, with a passage on Gissing, published in Conrad's *Letters to Blackwood*.

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Anon., "Recent Books: II Books Briefly Noted," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. XLI, no. 4, March, 1987, p. 524. Notice of *The Paradox of Gissing*.

Jonathan Raban, "Unacknowledged Kings: The Author and the Corporate Publisher," *The Author* (The Journal of the Society of Authors), Vol. XCVIII, no. 1, pp. 9-11. Contains significant allusions to Gissing and *New Grub Street*.

Ian Britain, "Book Reviews," *Victorian Studies*, Vol. XXX, no. 3, Spring 1987, pp. 425-26. Review of Nigel Cross's *The Common Reader*.

Pierre Coustillas, "Notes and Reviews," *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, No. 25, April 1987, pp. 106-07. Review of *The Paradox of Gissing*.

Francesco Badolato, "Workers in the Dawn: Cercando il paradoso di George Gissing," *Il Corriere di Roma*, 14 May 1987, p. 4. Review of *The Paradox of Gissing*.

Anon., "Forthcoming Books June 1987: Language and Literature," *British Book News*, May 1987, p. 296. Notice of the World's Classics edition of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.

Pierre Coustillas, "The Publication of *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*: A Literary Event," pp. 137-52 and 225-28 in *Twilight of Dawn: Studies in English Literature in Transition*, Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1987. This is a full-length assessment of the public and private reception of Morley Roberts's book in 1912.

Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott (eds.), *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, Volume II: 1918-1919. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. Gissing appears on pp. 195-96 and 279-80. Katherine Mansfield is very critical of *Eve's Ransom*, which she obviously did not read very carefully.

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Norman Page (ed.), *Thomas Hardy Annual no. 5*, London: Macmillan, 1987, p. 176. In his "Survey of Recent Hardy Studies," Richard H. Taylor comments on L. R. Leavis's article on Gissing, Hardy and Lawrence (*English Studies*, February 1985).

Harold Orel (ed.), *Victorian Short Stories: An Anthology*, London: Dent, 1987. Orel reprints "The Scrupulous Father" and comments on the story.