

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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“Joseph”: A Forgotten Gissing Story
of the Mid-Nineties

edited by Pierre Coustillas.

It was in the mid-nineties that Gissing wrote and published the most part of his short stories and, although for years no one could claim to have read all those of which a printed version and/or a manuscript was known to be extant, no unrecorded short story of that period is now likely to be discovered. Neither the author’s private papers nor his correspondence refer to any sum received from a publisher or an editor which cannot be accounted for satisfactorily. The three short stories cryptically listed in his “Account of Books,” have ceased to puzzle biographers and critics. “A Freak of Nature,” written for the unborn *London Magazine*,

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eventually appeared in *Harmsworth’s Magazine* under the title “Mr. Brogden, City Clerk,” and its author was paid £13.10s a long time before Harmsworth decided what format to give his magazine. “Their Pretty Way,” printed from the manuscript in *George Gissing: Essays and*

Fiction (1970), was belatedly found to have originally appeared in *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* on 15 September 1895, while "Joseph" remained undisturbed in the files of the same newspaper for some eighty years, and has never been reprinted. Of the three stories it is by far the least accessible, and to virtually all readers of the *Newsletter* it will be an unknown piece.

The origin of the project which materialized as "Joseph" is somewhat unclear. Gissing's correspondence with his literary agent William Morris Colles implicitly suggests that Colles was approached by Thomas Catling, the editor of *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, in the autumn of 1895, about the possibility of commissioning a series of short stories by various writers to be published at regular intervals in that journal. Colles contemplated asking Gissing for a contribution to the series and, as weeks passed, he came to imagine that he had actually done so. Some evidence of his haziness appears in Gissing's replies to his letters of December 1895. No, the novelist averred on the 14th, after checking what stories he had sent to his agent earlier in the year, he had not written the story that Colles thought he had commissioned and received. His work was being confused with someone else's. When the agent mentioned Catling's name and the projected series, Gissing realized the nature of the case, and on 17 December promised to send a 2,000-word story within the next three months (letter in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library). He was then completing a series of short stories for Shorter and wished to turn as soon as possible to the novel, provisionally entitled "The Common Lot," which was to become *The Whirlpool*.

Not much was achieved in the next few weeks. *The Paying Guest* was published in

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January 1896; literary parties were attended, some extensive reading was indulged in, and Alfred was born. An attempt to revise *Isabel Clarendon*, which Bullen wished to reissue, came to nothing. Working in domestic chaos proved difficult, and it became downright impossible on 2 March, when, on returning home after spending the day in London, Gissing found his house wrecked by a gas explosion. Only after the material situation had been partly remedied and Edith, together with the children and nurse, had found temporary refuge in lodgings at Dorking, could he try to fulfil his promise to Colles. The diary entry for 9 March reads in part: "In evening got fiercely to work, and wrote 2,000 word story for Colles — promised long ago, name 'Joseph.' Miserable trash, but had to be done." A severe judge of other people's bad work, Gissing could occasionally be unfair to his own. At all events, "Joseph" must have been thought out carefully before he turned to composition, for in one evening the tale was completed. The accuracy of the diary jotting is confirmed by a note to Colles of the same day (also in the Pforzheimer Library). He said he was enclosing the manuscript, of which no trace apparently survives, and hoped he had not delayed it inconveniently. With commendable promptness Colles had the story typed, and the revised typescript was returned on 15 March, as is testified by another note in the Pforzheimer Library. This typescript has survived and is most likely in the hands of an American collector. When it first appeared in the sale room of the American Art Association on 26 February 1929 it was said to be the property of Thomas Hatton of Leicester, an English collector who had once owned many autograph Gissing letters. It is described as ten quarto pages long, amounting to a total of about 2,100 words, with corrections in the writer's hand. Together with a postcard of 18 May 1898 to Colles it fetched \$80, and reappeared on its own on 19 February 1941, as the property of Samuel T. Freeman & Company, of Philadelphia. On that occasion it was knocked down for a mere \$18. Some day or other it will doubtless

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emerge once more and find its way to some institutional library. In his "Account of Books," Second Part, 1893-1898, reproduced in Part 18 (1934) of *The Colophon*, Gissing recorded a

payment of £9.9s, which was more satisfactory than the £4.2s he had received for “Their Pretty Ways” from the same paper the year before.

What Thomas Catling (1838-1920) thought of “Joseph” is not on record, nor is his opinion of Gissing’s work. The third son of a florist and a man who had worked for twelve years in the composing room of *Lloyd’s Weekly London News* (afterwards *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*) before rising to the post of news editor in 1866 and ultimately to that of editor in 1884, he was above all a journalist, as is confirmed by his autobiography, which he published in 1910. Still, in the *Who’s Who* entry he was asked to write, he was anxious to point out that his work did not exclude literature — from 1878 to 1890 he had sole charge of literary reviews for the *Daily Chronicle*. Now if this statement is to be taken *au pied de la lettre* he did little enough to encourage his readers to read Gissing’s early novels. For one thing of all Gissing’s novels of the 1880s only *Demos* and *The Nether World* were reviewed in that paper, and they were scathingly criticised by a pen which would seem to have been that of a radical — which Catling was — unprepared to accept any candid view of the life of the lower classes. “The anonymous author of *Demos*”, the *Daily Chronicle* reviewer wrote, “displays no particular aptitude for the task he has undertaken. Some of his types of working people are natural enough, but there is nothing in them or the scenes in which they play a prominent part to warrant their being accepted as representative of any –ism ... Even Charles Reade failed to invest labour questions with sufficient interest for purposes of fiction; and the author of *Demos*, though successful enough with personal incidents, has not grasped either the reality or romance of Socialism” (“Fiction,”

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22 May 1886, p. 6). The allusion to Charles Reade, an index to an old-fashioned turn of mind in the mid-eighties, strikes one as typical of a mid-Victorian radical who had admired Reade, yet had been disappointed by a novel like *Put Yourself in His Place* (1870), written in strong criticism of the trade union practice of “rattening” or enforcing membership. The *Daily Chronicle* review of *The Nether World*, with its significant refusal to name Gissing, was almost certainly from the same pen and, if anything, even more hostile: “The author of *Demos* evidently does not know the real working man, and he is so inartistic as to describe a popular outing at the Crystal Palace in the same terms as a drunken orgie of one of London’s slums” (“Fiction,” 6 May 1889, p. 6).

It may not have been an accident that, in the year Thomas Catling left the *Chronicle*, this paper began to review Gissing’s works almost systematically (only three exceptions in twenty books have been traced) and in a most appreciative and intelligent manner — those were the days of H. W. Massingham and Henry Norman. The turn of the tide came when the *Chronicle* reviewed the third edition of *The Nether World* (“New Books and New Editions,” 23 August 1890, p. 7): “Mr. Gissing’s novel of ‘The Nether World’ (Smith, Elder & Co.) is a faithful if painful picture of the life led by the London poor. It is such a work as may be recommended to philanthropists and reformers; and, indeed, all persons might study it with advantage. It shows that the rough diamond of humanity may be discovered among the most sordid surroundings. The old, old lesson that one half the world knows not how the other half lives finds another exemplification in this striking story, which exhibits Mr. Gissing at his best. In this cheap edition in which it now appears it should command a large sale.” Obviously the task of assessing Gissing’s new publications had been entrusted to a more friendly commentator. This piece was forwarded to Catherine Gissing, a sign that her brother-in-law was not displeased with it.

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Placed alongside the damning reviews of the three-decker *Demos* and *The Nether World* the acceptance of "Joseph" by Catling is not devoid of irony. He had failed to appreciate these two strong novels of working-class life at a time when their author was still struggling to make a reputation for himself but he now willingly published such a modest tale as "Joseph," doubtless because he dared not turn down a piece by a writer who was acknowledged to be one of the three leading novelists of the day. So "Joseph" was to be read by that category of readers which, in *New Grub Street*, had been uncharitably, if lucidly, styled the quarter-educated, the readers of *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*.

"Joseph" is recognizably a story which Gissing could only have written in the period of intense activity between *The Odd Women* and *The Whirlpool*, and the novel around which it gravitates is *In the Year of Jubilee*. From his Brixton and Epsom homes, he could observe suburban life at close quarters. The servant question, because he was a man of his day who could hardly imagine middle-class comfort without the assistance of domestic help, was then uppermost in his mind. Mrs. Waterbury shares some unenviable characteristics with Edith Gissing, notably her perpetual dissatisfaction and incapacity to possess her soul in peace. She rails all day long at her maid of all work and reminds one thereby of Amy Reardon's mother and of the aptly named Mrs. Cross in *Will Warburton*. Her detestation of all women is characteristic of a certain type of lower-class young women whose aspirations to novelty, born of an irrational dissatisfaction with daily life, were annihilated by their cultural and temperamental atrophy. Variants of the type occur in some short stories written for such editors as C. K. Shorter and Jerome K. Jerome: "A Honeymoon," "The Tyrant's Apology" and "Their Pretty Ways." The destructiveness of social pretence naturally obsessed a writer who, here as in *The Paying Guest*, nonetheless chose to adorn social satire with the trappings of comedy. Mr.

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Waterbury smiles upon his wife's behaviour. He was conceived in another department of Gissing's brain than, say, Arthur Peachey or Harvey Rolfe. The atmosphere of the story, though not so obviously its themes, is closer to that of *The Town Traveller* than of the more solid novels of the 1890s, while the farcical ending, with its irony at Mrs. Waterbury's expense, is possibly a distant echo of that jocularly which we associate with the youthful Gissing who could hoax some guileless farmers at Alderley Edge and turn out a handful of light-hearted tales for American editors in 1877.

Altogether a colourful chip from a predominantly gloomy block.

"JOSEPH"

Mrs. Waterbury's cup overflowed with bitterness. She had come down to a miserable eight-roomed house in a dreary suburb; and who could guarantee her that the next change would not be to yet more miserable lodgings? Her husband was just the man to end in downright pauperism — a sanguine simpleton, whose money slipped through his fingers while he chased absurd schemes. She detested his ever-smiling face, his inexhaustible patience, his kindness to all the world. Her sole consolation (now that she had resolutely withdrawn from intercourse with friends and relatives) was in railing all day long, and day after day, at her maid-of-all-work, who presently, unable to stand the life any longer, forsook the house without notice. Coming home at his usual hour Waterbury found his wife in something more than her usual temper.

"I give it up!" she exclaimed. "You may keep house for yourself. I shall go into lodgings. I'll never engage another servant as long as I live."

Waterbury had heard this declaration too often to be much impressed by it. Their six years

of married life had been a ceaseless conflict with maid servants; some scores had come and gone, from the three prancing damsels with whom Mrs. Waterbury began housekeeping at Highgate to this latest deserter of the little house at Kilburn.

"The fact is, Mabel," he said, cheerfully, "you get them too young. Try an oldish woman."

"I hate women! I hate the sight of them!" There was a good deal of truth in this. Mrs. Waterbury had never got on very well with her own sex. Of all women she had the meanest opinion, and delighted in attributing all feminine actions to base motives. She herself, presumably, was a shining exception, for she had never been known to confess herself other than a perfect being.

"I have an idea," cried her husband, with his usual hopefulness. "Why not get a man — a lad — to do the housework? I believe it would be an end of all your troubles. Why not? Splendid idea, eh?"

After the natural sneer at a suggestion from that quarter Mabel seemed to reflect.

"Now do give it a try," he urged again. "Let me find a young man —".

"Don't talk stuff! It wouldn't be proper."

"Nonsense! A lad of eighteen or so. Of course, there are certain things — well, just for the sake of peace and quietness, you would not mind doing certain things for yourself."

"Oh, of course!" broke out his wife, fiercely. "That's what it'll come to. You'd like to see me blacking your boots — oh, yes. I *know* you would."

She railed for a quarter of an hour, yet all the time was thinking favourably of what had been proposed. After an evening as uncomfortable as she could make it Mabel agreed to let her husband try this experiment. She, of course, would accept no responsibility in the matter: if he liked to bring a man into the house, well and good; he must undertake all trouble connected with the charge, and bear the blame of disaster if it turned out badly — as, of course, it would. Mabel went to bed, slept soundly, and in the morning allowed her husband to do all the servant's work

before he went off to business.

Waterbury bestirred himself with no little energy, and in a week's time had discovered two young men, either of whom, he thought, would answer their purpose. Mabel desired to see both, and to make her choice.

"I'm sure *you* are not to be trusted," she remarked. "As likely as not, you'd bring a burglar into the house."

The youths called upon her. He who came first was immediately rejected, for a multiplicity of reasons not to be grasped by the masculine mind. The second — his name was Joseph — found favour with Mrs. Waterbury; she engaged him forthwith.

Joseph declared that his age was twenty but he had the look of seventeen; a form of elegant slimness, an upright carriage, a soft, discreet step, a fair complexion, and a most ingenuous smile. His upper lip shone with a pale growth, which might perchance develop into a moustache of golden hue; his chin he seemed to shave. Speaking with exemplary modesty, in a low voice, and with cockney accent, Joseph told a plain unvarnished tale. He had been an errand boy, a page, a pastrycook's apprentice, and one or two other things; his decided preference was for domestic service, and *not* in a large house. The place offered him by Mrs. Waterbury was exactly what he desired, it would be a "tranquil" life — yes, Joseph said "tranquil." His tastes were all for quietness and domestic peace. He flattered himself that he was no bad hand at cooking — it had been one of his special studies, he approached it in a "scientific spirit."

"I don't care for company, mem. All my leisure time is spent in study. I have collected a

little library, and I try to improve my mind. You wouldn't object, mem?"

"Oh dear, no." Mrs. Waterbury regarded it as a most laudable ambition.

"I think you will suit me, Joseph."

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"I really think I should, mem," he answered, with a smile of delightful simplicity.

And the experiment was a great success. After the first feeling of awkwardness had passed Mabel found it the most natural thing in the world to be waited upon by a youth-of-all-work; in practice, everything arranged itself quite simply and with the utmost propriety. The absence of children (whom Mrs. Waterbury hated) made it possible for Joseph to discharge all but every duty of a maid-servant, and he did his work remarkably well. The select library to which he had referred consisted of some two hundred volumes — cheap, but of a high literary standard. In the kitchen of an evening Joseph might be seen delighting his soul with the poets, the essayists, the superior novelists. He kept a commonplace book, and copied long passages, slowly, conscientiously. Waterbury thought the fellow excellent fun, and sometimes induced him to recite from Shakespeare while he was waiting at table: Joseph, who did nothing without zeal, suited the action to the word, and struck amazing attitudes. He was certainly very conceited, but in such an amiable way that one liked him the better for it. Then his cooking altogether surpassed that of the average servant; he scorned common dishes, and prepared little menu-cards for the dinner table, with French names accurately written. The house was kept in admirable order: cleanliness ruled throughout; everything was done at the proper time, and Joseph seemed to be shod with the shoes of swiftness and of silence.

"This is too good to last," said Mrs. Waterbury, when she had paid the first month's wages.

But Joseph seemed to delight in the praise bestowed upon him. He redoubled his exertions, and the comforts which surrounded her occasionally made Mabel forget that she was a wronged and embittered woman. She began to regard Joseph with maternal affection: she was flattered by his unflinching deference, his air of respectful homage. Secretly she told herself that the poor

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young man was overcome by her gracious sweetness. She began to suspect that he wrote verses in her honour.

At the same time Waterbury's circumstances began to improve. Mabel, able to array herself becomingly, took a little share once more in social life, and aired her grievances to people who could listen. "No; I *can't* ask you to come and see me. Our home is too disgraceful. One servant, and a boy — just fancy! after what I have been accustomed to!" It was not in her nature to tell the truth or she might have boasted of the singular arrangement which put her so much more at ease than people with a larger income.

One person there was, however, whose visits Mabel encouraged, and whose goodwill she tried hard to gain. Waterbury had an orphan niece, a ward in Chancery, resident with a well-to-do family at Hornsey, and on the principle that a moneyed relative should always be kept in sight Mabel desired to see as much as possible of this girl. Caroline Waterbury would soon pass out of tutelage, and her fortune, though it was not great, might in some way be made to benefit the Kilburn family. Not at all handsome, and soft-hearted to excess, Caroline would probably fall a prey to some shrewd young man of the City species, many of whom she knew. Mrs. Waterbury, assuming a tone of impartial affection, did her best to avert this danger.

"Ah! my dear! what stories I could tell you! Don't be misled by appearances. They are the ruin of most women."

"But, Aunt Mabel," replied the girl, on one such occasion, "I am the last to be deceived

by appearances. All I care for is a simple and quiet life. I like quiet people. I should wish to have just such a little house as this of yours. I'm far happier here than where it's all noise and glitter."

As she ceased speaking the door opened, and Joseph entered with the tea-tray. Caroline, glancing at him for a moment, smiled good-naturedly. When he was gone she talked about him with Mrs. Waterbury, who had always some new instance of Joseph's excellent behaviour to

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report and dwell upon.

"I feel half sorry for him," said Caroline, in her impulsive way. "He seems too good for such work — don't you think?"

"Oh, I hope he'll stay for ever! I should be in despair if he left. You must remember, dear, he's of common birth after all; I don't see why he shouldn't be *quite* content in service. And I am sure I treat him very well."

Caroline mused a little, then laughed. Perhaps she remembered the humble origin of her own parents. The girl was very simple-minded, and, it was generally thought, not at all the kind of person an heiress should be. She often did very foolish things in the way of extravagant alms-giving and the like. One saw in her eyes that she had not much depth of character or intellect — a weak and trivial, but sweet-natured girl.

Mrs. Waterbury was acquiring influence over her, and joyfully perceived the fact. Already Caroline had spoken of coming to live with her relatives at Kilburn when she was one and twenty.

She made a call one afternoon when Mabel was out. On her return, two hours later, Mrs. Waterbury found the young lady waiting for her. Caroline said merrily she had had quite a conversation with Joseph, who had brought her tea.

"He's really quite a gentleman. I know lots who haven't such good manners. It must be his reading, I suppose?"

"Oh, he improves," said Mrs. Waterbury. "He talks much better than when he came. Of course it's living with *us*".

Caroline was not seen again at Kilburn for more than a month. Then she came on a Sunday, spent the afternoon in her usual way, and could not be persuaded to stay for the evening. A day or two after she wrote briefly, saying that she was about to spend some few weeks in the North of England.

About this time Mabel suffered a shock. Joseph, on receiving his month's wages, began

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to speak with timid gravity, saying how greatly he had enjoyed the honour of serving in this house, how attached he had become to his master and mistress, and how it pained him — then words failed: he stammered, turned very red, averted his face. Mrs. Waterbury could not believe that she grasped his meaning.

"You are not going to *leave* us, Joseph!"

"I regret deeply, ma'am. I am under the necessity of giving a month's notice."

The mistress flew into boundless excitement; in the same breath she refused to accept his notice, and asked why he wished to leave. Joseph had but a vague explanation to offer; private circumstances, family duties, called him away — he had no choice. Losing all control of herself, Mabel tempestuously forbade him to speak of such a thing: it was the basest ingratitude! Why, had she not educated him? Had she not rescued him, so to speak, from the gutter? Did he not owe her everything? She would not hear of it; she refused to let him go. And Joseph, horribly perturbed, trembled out of the room. But the same evening, questioned by Mr. Waterbury, he

adhered to his resolution. Thereupon Mabel raged against him with astonishing vehemence. She would not have him in the house another day. From the first he had been a worthless impostor; he came with the sole purpose of causing trouble; instead of doing his duty he had sat reading by the hour — a lazy, good-for-nothing, impertinent creature! Not another day should he remain. For all that, Joseph stayed to the end of his month, and suffered all the extremities of Mrs. Waterbury's temper. He bore it with a meek air of martyrdom, answering insult with a sad smile, and seeming to the end an adorer of the lady's natural graces.

Six months elapsed. Mabel had engaged successively three young men, and was beginning to quarrel with the fourth, when, one afternoon, Caroline Waterbury made an unexpected appearance. There was a strangeness in her manner, and Mabel had not long to wait for its explanation.

"Aunt!" began the young lady, after apologising rather awkwardly for her long silence,

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"Aunt —you remember Joseph?"

"Joseph? Remember him? The worthless —"

"Please don't," interposed the other, half laughing, half crying. "I have just been married to him."

Stricken silent, Mrs. Waterbury heard the extraordinary narrative. It began with the afternoon when Caroline and Joseph were alone in the house together. The day after, Miss Waterbury was surprised at receiving a letter from Joseph — he wrote in the humblest manner — begging to be allowed to thank her for the encouraging words she had spoken when he told her of his inclination for studious pursuits. To this letter Caroline replied, and behold Joseph presently wrote again, and again she answered him; and their correspondence led at length to a meeting that Sunday evening (Joseph's evening out), when she declined to stay at Kilburn. By this time she was in love with Joseph, and she all but confessed it. The actual avowal came in the course of subsequent correspondence, while Caroline was away from London. Joseph thereupon gave notice, feeling it unworthy of him henceforth to occupy a menial position. Until his marriage he had lived penuriously on meagre savings.

Telling all this, Caroline blushed and shed tears — not of distress. Her relative, when at length able to utter speech, exclaimed with a gasp:

"Oh, you little idiot!"

Ryecroft, Schopenhauer and Leopardi

Clotilde de Stasio
University of Milan

The influence of Schopenhauer's philosophy on George Gissing has been extensively

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discussed by scholars, in particular since "The Hope of Pessimism" was published in 1970. Recent analysis has shown that after his first outburst against Comtean optimism, Gissing was moving steadily in his later novels towards a more humane interpretation of Schopenhauer's doctrine as well as a fresh appreciation of at least part of Comte's moral thought.¹ In *The Whirlpool*, for instance, as Gisela Argyle argued in an article which appeared in the *Gissing Newsletter* six years ago, compassion is shown to be the only way of avoiding egotism: in fact,

the protagonist's "growing perception of human suffering diminishes his egotism and creates a new sympathy."²

Gissing's last work to be published in his lifetime, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, appears to be influenced not so much by *Die Welt als Wille* as by *Parerga und Paralipomena* which, according to Pierre Coustillas, presents "Schopenhauer's views in their most attractive and least sombre garb."³ It is well known that *Parerga und Paralipomena* is explicitly referred to in *Workers in the Dawn*, and significantly in a passage where Schopenhauer's pessimism is held to be "the least valuable part" of his teaching.⁴ Though no such reference is to be found in *The Private Papers*, Henry Ryecroft's character and behaviour seem to be dictated by those "rules of a wise life" contained in the last section of *Parerga und Paralipomena*, entitled *Aphorismen zur Lebensweisheit*. Ryecroft's life is actually underpinned by a negative or passive idea of happiness, a form of happiness that derives from a state of inactivity and contemplation rather than an active striving towards a precise goal. After a long struggle for existence, after a time of drudgery and frustration, his life suddenly comes to a standstill and he realizes that he is happy:

Is it I, Henry Ryecroft, who, after a night of untroubled rest, rise unhurriedly,

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dress with the deliberation of an oldish man, and go downstairs happy in the thought that I can sit reading, quietly reading, all day long? Is it I, Henry Ryecroft, the harassed toiler of so many a long year?

Happiness comes to him as a kind of reward for not letting himself be crushed in the battle of life and for keeping himself prepared for a life of total inaction:

I know, if I know anything, that I am made for the life of tranquillity and meditation ... More than half a century of existence has taught me that most of the wrong and folly which darken earth is due to those who cannot possess their souls in quiet; that most of the good which saves mankind from destruction comes of life that is led in thoughtful stillness. (p. 32)

According to Schopenhauer, passive happiness is possible only in old age when one realizes that the best the world can offer is a quiet, enduring life without pain but also devoid of pleasure:

"Wir erkennen alsdann, dass das Beste, was die Welt zu bieten hat, eine schmerzlose, ruhige, erträgliche Existenz ist."⁶ Ryecroft actually insists that he feels old — "Mentally and physically, I must be much older than my years" (p. 41) — and that he considers death as a friendly companion "who will but intensify the peace I now relish." (p. 99)

Loneliness, both physical and spiritual, is also essential to this state of calm enjoyment, for — as the German philosopher suggests — man can be himself only when alone: "Ganz er selbst sein darf jeder nur so lange er allein ist." (p. 447) Ryecroft, in fact, left the noisy and crowded city to seek peace and isolation in a small rural dwelling where, as he says, "there is not the remotest possibility of anyone's calling upon me." (p. 27) Moreover, he never tires of

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saying that his loneliness is rooted in his own nature: "Such men as I live and die alone ... I do not repine at it." (p135)

Ryecroft also appears to be following Schopenhauer's advice that in order to live wisely one should meditate on past experience and contrast present judgement with past responses:

Um mit vollkommener Besonnenheit zu leben, und aus der einigen Erfahrung alle Belehrung, die sie enthält, herauszuziehn, ist erfordert, dass man oft zurückdenke und was man erlebt, gethan, erfahren und dabei ermpfunden hat rekapituliert, auch sein ehemaliges Urtheil mit seinem gegenwärtigen, seinem Vorlass und Streben mit dem Erfolg und der Befriedigung durch denselben vergleiche. (pp. 445-46)

Ryecroft, therefore, frequently compares his present state of calm enjoyment with his previous fretful activity as a young writer. Even his diary entries seem to represent a response to Schopenhauer's suggestion that diaries are useful as records of the unforgettable moments in one's life ("Hierzu sind tagenbücher sehr nützlich" — p. 446).

The influence of the German philosopher is yet again to be traced in Ryecroft's well-known praise of Art as "an expression, satisfying and abiding, of the zest of life" (p. 62) and of music for its soothing effect on the listener: Ryecroft recalls an episode from his youth when the flow of piano music from a window completely changed his mood: "When I reached my poor lodgings, I was no longer envious nor mad with desires, but as I fell asleep I thanked the unknown mortal who had played for me, and given me peace." (p. 124)

This being said, it is tempting to see in Ryecroft's withdrawal from life's struggle another literary influence. An entry in Gissing's own diary on Monday, November 5th, 1888 reads:

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"Should have mentioned that in the morning I bought several books: Leopardi's 'Poesie e Prose' ... and lectures by Mariani on Ital. Lit. in 18th and 19th Cents." Almost a year later (September 19th, 1889), Gissing mentions his having read "some of the prose dialogues of Leopardi" and, again, the following day, he writes: "Read Dante and Leopardi."⁷ The volume Gissing bought in Italy (he was staying in Naples at the time) could have been no other than the one-volume edition of Leopardi's *Canti* (Poems) and *Operette morali* (referred to by Gissing as "prose dialogues") published by Le Monnier in 1845, which enjoyed a fairly wide circulation in the second half of the century.

Gissing may have been spurred on to read Leopardi by Matthew Arnold's praise⁸ and not less by the Italian poet's well-known reputation as a pessimist. An Italian critic had even compared him with Schopenhauer. Leopardi's *Weltanschauung* has actually much in common with Schopenhauer's doctrine, though it is expressed in a less systematic way. The Italian writer — just like Gissing in *The Private Papers* — used material from his commonplace book (*Zibaldone*) to create a work of fiction, so that his *Moral Tales* (*Operette morali*), like Ryecroft's *Memoir*, retain something of the random and, at times, contradictory nature of the author's thoughts and observations. Besides, several characters in the *Moral Tales* appear to have certain traits in common with Henry Ryecroft. For instance Filippo Ottonieri who remains detached from human activity and is disliked by his fellow citizens because he seems "to take little pleasure in many things usually loved and much sought after by the greater part of mankind."¹⁰ Or again Torquato Tasso who endures his loneliness because it allows him to enjoy his own thoughts and feelings and to contemplate the world with detachment:

...being cut off from mankind and, so to speak, from life itself, brings with it

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this benefit: that a man, however sated, disenchanted and out of love with human things by virtue of experience; little by little getting used to looking

at them from far off, whence they appear much more beautiful and worthwhile than from close to, forgets the vanity and insignificance of them; he comes to form the world in his own way; to appreciate, love and desire life ...¹¹

Yet another case is that of Federico Ruysch who comes to learn that death is not inimical to man because it frees him from his pains and troubles. Even the sedate prose style in the *Moral Tales* can be seen as anticipating the tranquil tone of *The Private Papers*, though Gissing does not appear to have imitated the ironic undertones in Leopardi's work.

If, in 1889, Gissing probably captured only the most sombre aspects of Leopardi's pessimism — the hopelessness of the human condition in a hostile world and the failure of youthful expectations — later on he no doubt appreciated the ambivalence of Leopardi's outlook. In fact, though convinced of the futility of man's struggle, the Italian writer does not wholly deny the value of such feelings as love and patriotism¹² and of the quiet enjoyment arising from the contemplation of natural scenery. This last aspect is quite common in the *Canti* (Poems) — it can be noted for instance in the evocation of fascinating landscapes like the moonlit desert in *Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia* (The Night Song of a Wandering Shepherd in Asia) or the green hill in *L'infinito*; in the references to plants (*La ginestra* — The Furze) and to birds (*Il passero solitario* — The Solitary Sparrow), though it is seldom to be found in the *Moral Tales*, a famous exception being the piece *In Praise of Birds*

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where the joyful song of birds bears witness both to a general "delight in cheerful foliage, in fertile valleys, in the pure and shining waters, in beauteous landscapes"¹³ and to life's deceitful appearance.

Gissing does not say explicitly that he read Leopardi's poems, but, the words "Read Dante and Leopardi" would seem to imply that this was the case. If so, he could not have failed to appreciate the unique mixture of pessimism and love of nature pervading Leopardi's verse and he might have tried to reproduce it in *The Private Papers*. Leopardi's poetry largely stems from the contrast between the happy condition of plants and animals that live their lives unconsciously and the less fortunate condition of man, who is increasingly concerned about his destiny and is constantly regretting his own choices and decisions. Besides, the Italian poet often compares his present sensations with his past ones and weighs his present feelings either of resignation or despair with his youthful hopes and activity. Nature — the sea, for instance often prompts this kind of recollection both in Leopardi's poems:

And what sweet dreams, what vastity of thought
The sight of that far sea inspired in me,
And those blue hills I see from here, which I
Once thought to cross, conjuring up for me
Mysterious worlds, mysterious happiness!
Ignorant of my fate, and that so oft
I gladly would have changed this life of mine,
Naked and sorrowful, for death itself.¹⁴

and in the *Private Papers*:

I have been at the seaside — enjoying it, yes, but in what doddering, senile sort of way! Is it I who used to drink the strong wind like wine, who ran exultantly along the wet sands and leapt from rock to rock, barefoot, on the

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slippery seaweed, who breasted the swelling breaker, and shouted with joy
as it buried me in gleaming foam? (p. 102)

The yearning for youth and the role of Nature in shaping the artist's experience – we must not forget that Ryecroft is a writer – are of course major themes in Romantic poetry. As has been recently argued, “Gissing’s culture was largely influenced by his reading of the Romantic poets”¹⁵ and quotations from English poets are often to be found in his works, though in *The Private Papers* only Tennyson is mentioned. From Tennyson and, I believe, in a larger measure from Leopardi, Gissing must have derived this ambivalent attitude towards Nature: the distinction between Nature as an incomprehensible and often malignant force shaping man’s life, and Nature as embodied in the natural world surrounding us. In Section VIII of “Spring” Ryecroft meditates on the vanity of his past efforts but seems unable to discover a purpose in Nature’s work: “For this did nature shape me; with what purpose, I shall never know.” (p. 35) His words are akin to the questions the Wandering Shepherd asks the moon in Leopardi’s poem:

Dimmi, o luna: a che vale
Al pastor la sua vita,
La vostra vita a voi? dimmi: ove tende
Questo vagar mio breve,
Il tuo corso immortale? (lines 16-19)

(Tell me, o moon: what use | The shepherd’s life to him, | Your life to you?
tell me: to what end | This my brief wandering, | Your everlasting course?)

At the same time, both to Ryecroft and Leopardi nature is a source of quiet enjoyment:

This morning’s sunshine faded amid slow gathering clouds, but something of

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its light seems still to linger in the air, and to touch the rain which is falling softly. I hear a pattering upon the still leafage of the garden; it is a sound which lulls and tunes the mind to calm thoughtfulness.

(*The Private Papers*, pp. 136-37)

Almost the same mood and the same images are to be found in a few lines from *La vita solitaria* (The Solitary Life), a poem which is similar in many ways to *The Private Papers*, particularly to the “Autumn” sections:

I am awakened by the morning rain
When the cooped hen exults, flapping her wings
In her small room, and while the countryman
Looks from his balcony, and the new Sun
Darts trembling rays among the falling drops
Which gently tap upon my cottage roof;
And I arise, and bless the gentle clouds,
And the first murmur of the birds, and the
Cool air, and all the smiling countryside. (lines 1-12)

But the idea most clearly shared by Leopardi and Gissing-Ryecroft is that natural landscape has lost the reviving power it held for the early Romantic poets and can only exercise a soothing effect on man's troubled senses. "For me" — says Ryecroft — "Nature has comforts, raptures, but no more invigoration." (p. 90) In the last essay of "Autumn" the description of the solemn and calm scenery puts an end to his sad meditation on man's destiny:

Yesterday I passed by an elm avenue, leading to a beautiful old house. The road between the trees was covered in all its length and breadth with fallen leaves — a carpet of pale gold. Further on, I came to a plantation, mostly of

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larches; it shone in the richest aureate hue, with here and there a splash of blood-red, which was a young beech in its moment of autumnal glory. (pp. 171-72)

In much the same way, in *La vita solitaria*, the contemplation of a lake scene is able to dissipate the poet's previous despairing mood:

At times I sit upon a bank, and in
Some solitary part, beside a lake
Whose edge is crowned with silent trees. And there,
At the time when the noon rolls in the sky,
The Sun paints its calm image everywhere.
.....
The deepest quiet reigns upon those shores;
So I almost forget the world, myself,
As I sit motionless; and it already
Seems as though my limbs are loosened, unmoved.

(lines 22-26, 32-35)

In a letter to Clodd of March 1st, 1902, where Gissing said that in "*An Author at Grass*" (the first draft of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*), he had tried to put "a good deal of what I really think and feel in these latter days," he also wrote:

My mind, at all events, refuses to grasp the idea of a universe which means nothing at all. But just as unable am I to accept any of the solutions ever proposed. Above all, it is the existence of natural beauty that haunts my thoughts. I can, for a time, forget the world's horrors; I can never forget the flower by the wayside, and the sun falling in the west.¹⁶

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With these words in mind, it does not seem unreasonable to consider that Leopardi's mixed feelings towards life and nature were more in harmony with Gissing's mood at that time than Schopenhauer's complete detachment.

1. See Jude Brigley, "Gissing and the Limits of Total Pessimism," *Gissing Newsletter*, Vol.

XIX, no. 2, April 1983, pp. 12-20. According to T. R. Wright (*The Religion of Humanity*, O. U. P., 1986, p. 228), Ryecroft's ideas "are those of the Religion of Humanity very much watered down."

2. Gisela Argyle, "Gissing's *The Whirlpool* and Schopenhauer," *Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. XVII, no. 4, October 1981, pp. 3-21.
3. P. Coustillas, introduction to *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970, p. 17.
4. Quoted in P. Coustillas, *Ibid.*
5. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, London: Dent, Everyman's Library, 1964, p. 58, Page references hereafter noted in the text.
6. Arthur Schopenhauer, "Aphorismen zur Lebensweisheit," *Parerga und Paralipomena, Samtliche Werke*, J. V. Brockhaus, Wiesbaden, 1972, Vol. 5, p. 435. Page references hereafter noted in the text.
7. *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England, The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas, Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1978, p. 65 and p. 166.
8. Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (1888), ed. S. R. Littlewood, London: Macmillan, 1960, pp. 111-14. (See G. Singh, "Leopardi and Matthew Arnold,"

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Italianistica, Vol. IX, no. 1, January-April 1980, pp. 369-408.) Leopardi was also known in England through Gladstone's disparaging remarks: see J. H. Whitfield, Introduction to *Leopardi's Canti*, Naples, 1962, p. 9.

9. F. De Sanctis, "Schopenhauer e Leopardi," *Rivista Contemporanea*, Vol. XV, December 1858, pp. 369-408.
10. Giacomo Leopardi, *Moral Tales*, translated by P. Creagh, Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1983, p. 139.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 97. While most of the characters in the *Moral Tales* are imaginary, a few of them, like Torquato Tasso or Christopher Columbus, are historical.
12. Witness the poem "All'Italia" (To Italy). As for Gissing, expressions of patriotism are frequent in *The Private Papers*, especially in the "Winter" sections (see, e.g., pp. 175, 183, 191, 195).
13. *Op. cit.*, p. 164. A reference to the song of birds is also to be found in *The Private Papers* (p. 171).
14. "Le ricordanze" (Recollections), lines 20-27 (*Leopardi's Canti*, translated into English Verse by J. H. Whitfield, *op. cit.*)

15. Pierre Coustillas, "Gissing as a Romantic Realist," *George Gissing, Antologia critica* a cura di F. Badolato, Rome: Herder Editrice, 1984, p. 66.
16. *The Letters of George Gissing to Edward Clodd*, ed. Pierre Coustillas, London: Enitharmon Press, 1973, p. 82.

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Notes to *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*

P. F. Kropholler,
Paris.

[The edition referred to is the first English edition published by Blackie & Sons in 1898.]

- page 12, line 2
"these little ones," St. Matthew, X.42: "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones."
- page 14, line 22
"He," said Samuel Johnson, 'who aspires to be a hero, must drink brandy.'" From Boswell: *Life of Johnson*, April 7, 1779.
- page 17, line 19
"many of the originals of Dickens ... still pursue the objectionable, or amusing, tenor of their way." Gray: *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, XIX ("They kept the noiseless tenor of their way").
- page 35, line 32
"a first acquaintance with rare Ben." A reference to Jonson's epitaph: "O rare Ben Jonson."
- page 36, line 22
"Toute ma valeur, c'est que je suis un homme pour qui le monde visible existe." From *Journal des Goncourt*, 1 May, 1857. However, Gautier said "le monde extérieur."
- page 40, line 33
"those who literally earn bread in the sweat of their brows." Genesis, III.19: "In the sweat

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of thy face shalt thou eat bread."

- page 54, line 2
"Dickens never so boldly defied the modesty of nature as here." Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, III. II.21 ("with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature").
- page 68, line 30

“not without protest from the many-headed.” Massinger: *The Unnatural Combat*, IV.II [“The fury of the many-headed monster”) or Pope: *Epistles and Satires of Horace Imitated*, First Epistle of the Second Book, line 305 (“The many-headed monster of the pit”).

- page 69, line 4
“a stone of stumbling.” From Isaiah, VIII.14.
- page 70, line 4
“some quite unparliamentary utterance such, for example, as Scott made use of ...” When it was suggested Scott should alter the ending of *The Black Dwarf* he wrote to his publisher, Blackwood: “I’ll be cursed but this is the most impudent proposal that ever was made” (Lockhart: *The Life of Sir Walter Scott*).
- page 73, line 20
“Heedless of Pilate’s question.” St. John, XVIII. 38: “Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?”
- page 74, line 16
“He who as a young man had unconsciously obeyed Goethe’s precept.” Goethe: *Faust*, line 167 ff, (“Greift nur hinein ins volle Menschenleben! | Ein jeder lebt’s, nicht vielen,

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ist’s bekannt, | Und wo Ihr’s packt, da ist’s interessant”).

- page 77; line 12
“Using a phrase germane to the matter.” Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, V.II.165 (“The phrase would be more germane to the matter”).
- page 81, line 12
“to follow the path of the just.” Proverbs, IV.18: “But the path of the just is as the shining light.”
- page 82, line 14
“justice is tempered with mercy.” Milton: *Paradise Lost*, X. 77 (“Yet I shall temper so | Justice with mercy”).
- page 82, line 20
“nothing could be more in accord with the fitness of things.” An 18th-century phrase found for instance in Fielding: *Tom Jones*, IV.IV (“the rule of right, and the eternal fitness of things”).
- page 85, line 31
“And hereby hangs another point.” Reminiscent of the Shakesporean phrase “And thereby hangs a tale,” for instance in *As You Like it*, II.VII.28.
- page 92, line 31
“At such a thing as this, crawling between earth and heaven.” Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, III.I.132 (“What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth?”)

- page 97, line 32
“sportive themselves and a cause of infinite mirth in others.” This may be an echo of Shakespeare: *Henry IV*, pt. II, I.II.10, where Falstaff says “I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men.”

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- page 98, line 13
“all who walk in ‘the valley of the Shadow of the Law.’” An allusion to Psalms, XXIII. 4: “I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.”
- page 103, line 24
“The ‘gentleman’... in echo of Burns’s phrase.” A reference to Burns: *Elegy on Capt. Matthew Henderson*, from the title “A Gentleman who held the patent for his honours immediately from Almighty God.”
- page 103, line 28
“the poor in spirit.” St. Matthew, V.3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”
- page 108, line 30
“midsummer madness.” Shakespeare: *Twelfth Night*, III.IV.62 (“Why, this is very midsummer madness”).
- page 108, line 34
“behaves after her kind.” Genesis, I.11: “and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind.”
- page 109, line 10
“all that are in any way afflicted, in mind, body, or estate.” *The Book of Common Prayer*, A Collect or Prayer for all Conditions of Men (“We commend to thy fatherly goodness all those, who are in any ways afflicted, or distressed, in mind, body, or estate”).
- page 109, line 25
“certain lunatics are of imagination all compact.” Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, V. I. 7 (“The lunatic, the lover, and the poet, | Are of imagination all compact”).

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- page 111, line 8
“in threescore years and ten.” Psalms, XC. 10: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten.”
- page 111, line 20
“Let the galled jade wince.” From Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, III.II.256.
- page 112, line 21
“he had done the state some service.” Shakespeare: *Othello*, V.II.338 “I have done the state some service, and they know it.”
- page 113, line 21
“the law’s delay.” From Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, III.I.72.

- page 115, line 12
“it was root and branch.” An expression ultimately from Malachi, IV.1: “it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”
- page 117, line 35
“a joy for ever.” From Keats: *Endymion*, I.1.
- page 120, line 25
“a shining light.” From Proverbs, IV.18.
- page 121, line 21
“he should ‘keep a gig.’” In his essay on Boswell Carlyle divided men into “noblemen, gentlemen, gigmen and men.”
- page 121, line 26
“the honest root of the matter.” Job, XIX. 28: “the root of the matter is found in me.”
- page 122, line 11
“I waive the danger of the sin.” From Burns: *Epistle to a Young Friend*, where the line actually reads: “I waive the quantum o’ the sin.” In the second edition of *Charles Dickens*

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(London: The Gresham Publishing Company, 1902) Gissing had the misquotations in the four lines of Burns duly corrected.

- page 123, line 8
“his tower of strength.” Shakespeare: *Richard III*, V.III.12 (“the king’s name is a tower of strength”). Cf. also Tennyson: *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* (“O fall’n at length that tower of strength”).
- page 123, line 21
“‘A man’s a man for a’ that’” Burns: *For a’ that and a’ that*.
- page 123, line 29
“to avow, in and out of season.” 2 Timothy, IV.2: “be instant in season, out of season.”
- page 125, line 12
“Goodman Dull.” This looks like an allusion to a fictional character. There is a female character called Dull in Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.
- page 126, line 23
“her death in life.” Shakespeare: *The Rape of Lucrece*, line 406 (“life liv’d in death, and death in life”).
- page 127, line 11
“(it came from Chelsea).” An obvious reference to Carlyle.
- page 128, line 7
“Justice Greedy... Anthony Absolute, Mrs. Malaprop.” Justice Greedy is a character in

Massinger: *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. Gissing's interest in this play is shown by an entry in his *Commonplace Book*, page 28. Anthony Absolute and Mrs. Malaprop are characters in Sheridan: *The Rivals*.

- page 128, line 33
"houses... of the kind which we now call slums". The use of this last word is older than

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Gissing seems to think. The *Oxford English Dictionary* has traced it to 1825.

- page 135, line 11
"God's great gift of speech abused." From Tennyson: *A Dirge*, VII.
- page 138, line 24
"the pangs of death." Shakespeare: *King John*, V.IV.59 ("For I do see the cruel pangs of death").
- page 138, line 26
"moping and mowing." Shakespeare: *King Lear*, IV.I.63. This was changed to "mopping and mowing," the correct form, in the second edition.
- page 138, line 28
"with toothless gums." Shakespeare: *Macbeth*, I.VII.57 ("from his toothless gums").
- page 140, line 24
"the little man shall have rest neither day nor night." Revelation, XIV.11: "and they have no rest neither day nor night."
- page 154, line 5
"this is considering altogether too curiously." Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, V. I. 226 ("Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so").
- page 156, line 25
"gall the kibes of the daughters." Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, V.I.150 ("he galls his kibe").
- page 164, line 18
"Holcroft is forgotten." Thomas Holcroft, a miscellaneous writer, lived from 1745 to 1800.
- page 166, line 6
"English history tells its tale." Milton: *L'Allegro*, line 67 ("And every shepherd tells his tale").

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- page 168, line 30
"Laughter holding both his sides." Milton: *L'Allegro*, line 32.
- page 171, line 33
"yon mountain of a man in Eastcheap." In Shakespeare: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*,

III.V.19, Falstaff refers to himself as “a mountain of mummy.”

- page 173, line 24
“to go and do likewise.” St. Luke, X. 37: “Go, and do thou likewise.”
 - page 183, line 8
“It is not germane to the matter.” Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, V.II.165.
 - page 186, line 6
“a metre made familiar by Longfellow.” A reference to *Hiawatha*, which is in trochaic tetrameters.
 - page 188, line 18
“his hand at once had lost its cunning.” Psalms, CXXXVII.5: “let my right hand forget her cunning.”
 - page 188, line 34
“This thing cometh not by prayer and fasting.” Although the sentence has a biblical ring it would appear to be no literal quotation. It is however based on the biblical collocation “fastings and prayers” in St. Luke, II.37.
 - page 190, line 34
“darkness visible.” Milton: *Paradise Lost*, I.63 (“No light; but rather darkness visible”).
 - page 195, line 22
“‘from precedent to precedent.’ From Tennyson: *You ask me, why*.
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- page 197, line 4
“more or less grotesque sovereigns, who play pranks before high heaven.” Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*, II.II.121 (“Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven | As makes the angels weep”).
 - page 199, line 7
“when want breeds gall and bitterness.” Vaguely reminiscent of “thou art in the gall of bitterness,” in Acts, VIII.23.
 - page 199, line 14
“He ... had no stinted sympathy with the revolt against pride of place.” A reference to *In Memoriam*, CVI, where Tennyson writes: “Ring out false pride in place and blood.”
 - page 199, line 16
“A hackneyed strophe in Vere de Vere”. No doubt a reference to strophe 7 of *Lady Clara Vere de Vere* (“Kind hearts are more than coronets,” etc).
 - page 205, line 25
“no man’s censure.” Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, I.III.69 (“Take each man’s censure”).
 - page 208, line 2
“It goes to the root of the matter.” A phrase ultimately of biblical origin (“the root of the

matter is found in me,” Job, XIX.28).

- page 209, line 15
“cash was the sole nexus.” Carlyle: *Past and Present*, III,9 (“Cash-payment is not the sole nexus of man with man”).
- page 210, line 9
“a light not of this world.” Vaguely reminiscent of St. John, XVIII.36: “my Kingdom in not of this world”.

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- page 211, line 26
“It was reserved for Thackeray to make a great artist of a butler’s son, and for Kingsley to show us a tailor writing ‘The Sands of Dee’.” The butler’s son is John James Ridley (“J. J.”) in *The Newcomes*. The second reference is to the hero of *Alton Locke*.
- page 212, line 15
“moping and mowing.” Again a reference to Shakespeare: *King Lear*, IV.I.63, duly corrected in the second edition.
- page 217, line 31
“his palpable hits.” Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, V.II.295 (“A hit, a very palpable hit”).
- page 220, line 22
“he seeks to justify the ways of God.” Milton: *Paradise Lost*, I.26 (“And justify the ways of God to man”).
- page 232, line 26
“city of the mind.” Carlyle: *Sartor Resartus*, II.8 (“a wonder-bringing city of the mind”).
- page 233, line 21
“that ‘removed ground’.” Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, I. IV. 61 (“It waves you to a more removed ground”).
- page 233, line 23
“to possess their souls in peace.” St. Luke, XXI.19: “in your patience possess ye your souls.”
- page 237, line 10
“to glorify the flowing bowl.” Anonymous in the *Oxford Song Book*: “Come, landlords, fill the flowing bowl.”

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Review

George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (The World's Classics), 1987.

Here is *Henry Ryecroft* in a new garb, and a strikingly new one if one places the book alongside the scores of editions and impressions which have appeared since 1903 in a variety of countries, England and America to start with, but also the British colonies, Holland and Sweden, France and Italy, as well as Japan, Korea and China. No publisher had hitherto looked for a cover design suited to the image of the landscape Gissing had in mind when he conceived a home for his *alter ego*, and the choice of O. U. P. is a felicitous one — a detail of *High View, Fishpond*, 1915, by Lucien Pissarro. Save for a female figure in the lane that runs along the unassuming foreground cottage — a figure which Ryecroft would anyway disregard — the illustration is powerfully suggestive of the Devon landscape in spring and the green cover is attuned to the rapturous enjoyment of nature expressed in the book.

The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft is indeed, in another sense than the commercial sense of the publishers, one of the world's classics. The volume has appealed to generations of

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booklovers, nature worshippers, down-at-heel literati, pacifists and lovers of English culture; it was celebrated in verse between the wars, together with *By the Ionian Sea*, at a time when, with the exception of *New Grub Street*, which had always held its own, Gissing's novels were unduly neglected for the greater profit of his later volumes — works readily styled belles-lettres by librarians with an eighteenth-century approach to literature. And a world's classic deserves to be edited with adequate knowledge and care. Few if any of Gissing's works are more worthy of being edited and annotated. The book is a summing-up and reflects many of Gissing's cultural experiences — he invites us to explore his period of near starvation in London garrets, to visit in his company classical sites on Mediterranean shores, to reconsider English poetry and art, to ponder matters of life and death — and its abiding value, despite a few temporal landmarks which make it very much a book of the turn of the century, is left unaltered by the passing of years.

Mark Storey, a new name in Gissing studies, has had many predecessors as editor of *Henry Ryecroft*, but he has not allowed himself to be disturbed unduly by their lore. Wisely and quietly he has taken their findings into consideration and carried investigation a little further in several directions. His familiarity with the eighteenth century and the romantic period is definitely an asset. Without ignoring the many complexities of the book as a reminiscence essay and an exercise in philosophic meditation, he puts it into a new perspective born of his knowledge of those essayists in whom Gissing once confessed his absorbing interest. The quiet tone of his editorial comment accords well with that of the veteran of letters whose memories are presented

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by Gissing as *mémoires d'outre-tombe* of a new type — what Mark Storey calls the valedictory nature of the book. He first sets out to define this “strange miscellany” which at first glance looks like a series of observations on the writer's life, and, rather than with the correspondence between Ryecroft's experiences and Gissing's, he concerns himself with the emphasis shift from the material in the *Commonplace Book* to its literary rendering in *Henry Ryecroft*. John Halperin's literalistic *Gissing: A Life in Books* is brushed aside. “For all the biographical interest, Gissing is too careful a craftsman, too astute an artist, for us to talk in simple reductive terms.” Nor does Mark Storey choose to view the book in terms of the times it reflects. He views it as “a

text with a particular appeal for an age that has come to distrust categorical closure,” an approach favoured by Andrew Hassam in his excellent article, “The Oscillating Text: A Reading of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*” (*English Literature in Transition*, 28 (1985), 30-40). The book is analysed as an ambivalent one — Gissing being at once the editor of Ryecroft’s recollections and, in a complex manner, part of Ryecroft himself. The contents are confessional, but also self-critical and even masochistic since Gissing deliberately invented a personality whose achievements are by no means comparable to his own and enjoying forms of contentment which were denied him. Furthermore Ryecroft’s position is not as secure as he himself imagines. His present sense of unease shows through the act of remembering the horrors of the past. Rather like Wordsworth, Mark Storey argues, “Ryecroft is haunted by dreams and nightmares, which have to do with a disturbing sense of himself as in fact two people.”

The most admirable part of Mark Storey’s introduction, also the most substantial,

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discusses the interplay of past and present in connection with Ryecroft’s two selves. The passing allusions to *Rasselas* and *Villette* — works by authors that Gissing had read and greatly admired — are particularly appropriate, as is the *rapprochement* with a statement of Hardy’s in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* on the world as a psychological phenomenon. Ryecroft’s essays, one comes to think, might well have been given such a philosophical title as “Time and the Ego.” One of their least apparent though recurrent themes is the pains and joys of remembering, an intellectual area of the book which was first marginally explored in this journal years ago when a thought-provoking article triggered some correspondence about “Henry Ryecroft’s trick” of memory. Comfortably settled in his Devon cottage Ryecroft “is dragged back, almost against his will, to a past that he depends upon, and yet from which he feels irrevocably separated.” Hence the impression one has that these *Private Papers*, however different they may be in many respects from Gissing’s novels of modern life, have one major theme in common with them — the theme of alienation which runs obsessively through the whole of the author’s work, from his first published tale, “The Sins of the Fathers,” to his unfinished story of Roman and Goth in sixth-century Italy. All things considered, it is probably better to trust one’s admittedly imperfect memory than to put it to the test of a fresh contrast with realities — spatial in nature — that were formerly enjoyed. Doubtless much of the appeal of the moving description of English landscapes in Winter XXIII derives from its being remembered, that is reconstructed within an unreliable framework. Distance, a Scottish poet observed, lends enchantment to the view, but an enchantment tinged with pathos of which Ryecroft is fully aware. And Gissing in turn is fully aware of Ryecroft’s delusions in his reconstruction of the past. Mark Storey subtly

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comments on an early section, Spring VII, in which Gissing ironically presents Ryecroft’s meditations on the temptations of self-pity: “The irony at Ryecroft’s expense is symptomatic, and structural: it becomes clear that Gissing is setting his character up, for the whole book is based on retrospection, which is in turn based on the past. When Ryecroft goes on to say how glad he is to have borne suffering, he is blind to the very querulousness he blithely denies. So perverse is he in relation to himself and his past, that in the very next section, he goes on to contrast his present happiness in the countryside, reacting to the changing seasons, with his early years in London, when he was oblivious to the natural world: the contrast evaporates, as he declares that he felt, at the time, no sense of loss or deprivation.” Mark Storey convincingly demonstrates, although he does not put things that way, that unqualified enjoyment was to Gissing a constitutional impossibility. In Ryecroft’s semi-fictional reminiscences as in Gissing’s actual life, we witness “the past and present cancelling each other out.” Horace’s lucid

acknowledgement of *non sum qualis eram*, "I am not as I was," rings through the whole book.

The interest of this new edition extends far beyond the perceptive, stimulating introduction. For one thing the book remains what it was in 1903 — a remark which would not apply to a number of editions like those issued by Dent, Dolphin Books and Kenkyusha — that is, it is complete from Gissing's preface to the selective index he compiled for the first edition. The three-page Note on the Text throws much light on the composition of the book and the early unpublished version whose draft survives in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library. The original epigraphs to the four seasons — quotations from Sophocles, Goethe, Browning and Petrarch —

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are printed here for the first time, it would seem, and this Note, with six new readings based on a close examination of the MS, is supplemented by an Appendix containing a selection of seventeen passages in the draft MS which were subsequently altered or omitted in the final version. Until a more ambitious critical edition of the book is available, these extracts from the Ur-version of *Ryecroft* are likely to remain the only source readily accessible for a detailed study of the process of composition — at least for those scholars who have no access to the bilingual edition of the book published by Aubier in 1966. The editor has a number of useful Explanatory Notes to add to those of his Japanese and French predecessors. For instance the epithet "sick-dazzled" is usefully connected with a passage in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, while the phrase "chamber fellow" is traced to Evelyn and Steele, and "esoteric buddhism" is shown to be the title of a book by Alfred Percy Sinnet published in 1883. The twenty-three pages of notes will certainly repay close study. Naturally, as no book can be perfect, a few factual errors have crept in — Gissing did not marry Edith Underwood in Exeter, nor is "The Hope of Pessimism" unpublished to date — but such small blemishes will easily be corrected in the next impression. A problem, implicitly raised on p. 189, about the three notebooks which Gissing used for "An Author at Grass," will soon be solved when the second notebook, "Extracts from my Reading," is published later this year in America. If no bibliography proper is given, all the references to Gissing scholarship in the editorial material amount to a list of basic references to sources and criticism, and few readers will be at a loss where to find additional information.

Mark Storey has put all Gissing scholars in his debt. His shrewd, unobtrusive editorial

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contribution should give *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* a new lease of life. The World's Classics edition fully deserves to make its way to the shelves of all libraries, private and institutional, in which English literature is represented.

Pierre Coustillas.

Notes and News

A new critical study, *Gissing: The Cultural Challenge*, by John Sloan, is soon to be published by Macmillan. The book will be available from another firm in America. The proofs of *Gissing at Work: A Study of his Notebook "Extracts from my Reading"*, were read recently. The book will be published in the Spring by ELT Press in America and distributed in England by Colin Smythe.

According to Peter Kemp's review of the book in the *Times Literary Supplement* for 11-17 December 1987, *For Love and Money* by Jonathan Raban (Collins and Harvill) contains significant allusions to *New Grub Street*. The same novel is mentioned by Margaret D. Stetz in "Turning-Points: Mabel E. Wotton," *Turn-of-the-Century Women*, Winter 1986. A forgotten short story by Mabel E. Wotton is reprinted in the same number. The author may have been influenced by Gissing's novel. The main character, Miss Suttaby, is compared by Margaret Stetz with Marian Yule and the woman painter of "A Victim of Circumstances."

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A biography of George Smith, the publisher, appeared last year, *Prince of Publishers* by Jenifer Glynn (Allison and Bushby), and it was reviewed favourably by John Adlard in the *Times Literary Supplement* (1-7 January 1988, p. 8). The blurb describes George Smith in glowing terms and we are straightaway introduced by Mrs. Glynn to her subject as the ideal Victorian businessman, a generous man deservedly beloved of authors. Mrs. Glynn cannot have studied her subject very closely. It is significant that she never refers to Gissing. The manner in which Smith and Payn dealt with him, especially as far as the copyrights of *Thyrza* and *A Life's Morning* are concerned, gives the lie direct to Mrs. Glynn's rosy view of the firm and its head.

An article on Gissing in China, where his work has been discovered in recent years, will be published in one of the next few numbers of the *Newsletter*.

Recent Publications

Volume

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, edited by Bernard Bergonzi, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987. Pp. 556. This is the eighth impression published by Penguin Books since 1968 and the second in the Penguin Classics.

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Articles, reviews, etc.

Joe W. Kraus, *A History of Way & Williams, with a bibliography of their publications: 1895-1898*, Philadelphia: George S. Macmanus Company, 1984. Way & Williams were the first publishers of *The Emancipated* in America. A detailed description of this scarce edition is supplied by the author.

David L. Derus, "Gissing and Chesterton as Critics of Dickens," *The Chesterton Review*, Vol. XII, no. 1, February 1986, pp. 71-81.

John Sutherland, "Reviews," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. XLII, no. 1, June 1987, p. 124. Review of Nigel Cross's *The Common Writer*, with comment on Gissing and *New Grub Street*.

Pierre Coustillas, "Comptes Rendus," *Études Anglaises*, Vol. XL, no. 3, July-September 1987,

p. 356. Review of *The Paradox of Gissing*.

Francesco Badolato, "Lettere inedite di Gissing a Sichel," *Il Corriere di Roma*, Anno XXXVIII, no. 526, 18 October 1987, p. 3. Review of *Brief Interlude*.

Thomas Hughes, "The Image of Victoria in the Year of Jubilee," *Victorian Studies*, Vol. XXXI, no. 1, Autumn 1987, pp. 7-32. The author often refers to Gissing's novel.

Anon., "ELT Press Publishes Books on Gray Gissing," *Victorian Studies Bulletin*, Vol. XL, no. 4, December 1987, p. 2. Announcement of *George Gissing at Work: A Study of his*

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Notebook "Extracts from my Reading."

Pierre Coustillas, "Hardy, Gissing, Bennett, Lawrence," *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. XXX (1987), no. 4, pp. 506-509. Review of *Social Mobility in the English Bildungsroman*.

Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, eds., *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, Vol. II, 1918-1919, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. Gissing and his work are referred to in letters to J. M. Murry and Ottoline Morrell.

Pat Rogers, *The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*, Oxford and New York: O. U. P., 1987. A few paragraphs are devoted to Gissing on pp. 395 and 397.

Hilary Marland, "The Medical Activities of Mid-Nineteenth-Century Chemists and Druggists with special reference to Wakefield and Huddersfield," *Medical History*, Vol. XXXI (1987), pp. 415-39. Contains a paragraph on Thomas Waller Gissing, on p. 436.