

THE GISSING NEWSLETTER

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

Volume XXV, Number 4
October, 1989

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Subscriptions

Private Subscribers: £5.00 per annum
Libraries: £8.00 per annum

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and the Mutability of Freedom and Repression.

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As Coustillas and Partridge point out in their introduction to *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, “*Eve’s Ransom* puzzled most critics and failed to satisfy completely even those most sympathetic to Gissing’s cause ...” (28) Contemporary reviews varied drastically in terms of acceptance of this work, and modern criticism has continued this trend. From Mabel Collins Donnelly’s view in 1954 that it is “the finest of the trio of short novels” (176) to John Halperin’s more recent argument that “*Eve’s Ransom* is an indifferent trifle among the works of Gissing’s fruitful middle period” (207), the controversy over the value of this work continues. When it is included in general discussions of Gissing’s works, *Eve’s Ransom* is not only given very short shrift, but is referred to only in terms of how it reflects on the argument of Gissing’s feminist point of view or how it relates to the overall theme of the role of women within his canon.

Of the contemporary reviews of this novel, one of the most vicious attacks appeared in the April 27, 1895 issue of the *Saturday Review* and was a supplement to an earlier criticism which was also highly negative in tone. The reviewer, who was later identified by Gordon N. Ray as H. G. Wells, says about the title character,

Eve Madeley is a real and credible woman, fundamentally mean as is the way with his women, with a sweet intellectual face and an inherent refinement and seriousness that extort our respect, and with just one dash of sordid romance with a married man to vary her dull life of work and parsimony.

Wells’ assessment of Eve has been the most accepted one throughout the years, and this

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general consensus is at least partially responsible for the story having been ignored by feminist critics who find it difficult to break through this firmly established opinion on the characterization of Eve Madeley. Another problem critics seem to have with the book is related to the overall question of Gissing’s feminist (or lack of same) approach. As we shall later see, Markow and Eakin give the best analyses of this aspect of Gissing’s work and are most helpful in trying to come to terms with the general problematic nature of his conclusions and the apparent ambiguity of his “feminism.” Particularly with this short novel, the title character’s final actions seem disturbing to the reader and have damned her in the eyes of more than one critic. The time has come, however, to turn away from the traditional “male” reading of this novel and look past the dominant male narrative to the more hidden female narrative of Eve herself.

It has been argued that despite the title of this work, Gissing was primarily interested in depicting the sexual and pecuniary testing of Hilliard, the principal male character, and that the primary function of Eve within the work is to act as the tempting object with whom Hilliard must contend.¹ Thus, Eve becomes precisely the type of woman Wells depicted in his review. Yet this reading fails to take into account Gissing’s use of language within the male narrative to undermine the male point of view and it misses the flashes we get of Eve’s very deep feelings and motivations. Moreover, the dominant theme in the novel of the mutability of freedom and repression is almost totally ignored. Although the anonymous author of a May 9, 1895 *Daily Chronicle* review feels that both Hilliard and Eve “suggest untold depths of grim repression,” it

is obvious that he views repression in a social context and not within one of gender as I suggest. He says they stand “as types of the toilers emerging,” but what Gissing reveals about the differences in gender perception through this theme tends to negate the more narrow assessment of the novel that we have come to know and accept.

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In *Eve's Ransom*, Gissing presents a very clear cut distinction between genders, the ways in which men and women view their own lives, and how their basic conceptions of freedom and repression differ. This distinction of gender perceptions is made quite deliberately by Gissing in order to explore not only the conceptual differences within the theme, but also to illustrate how the terms freedom and repression ultimately become interchangeable. In short, by trying to impose his idea of freedom upon Eve, Hilliard is in reality guilty of repression by not allowing her to search for or gain freedom as she views it. What is even more interesting about the story is how Gissing is able to present Eve's point of view while keeping the narrative point of view that of the male protagonist. Ironically, as Eve's point of view is surreptitiously revealed to the reader within this male dominated narrative, it remains hidden from Hilliard himself throughout most of the action.

The lack of a dominant feminine narrative in the bulk of the book has been noted both by contemporary reviewers, such as George Cotterell in the *Academy*, and modern critics, such as Donnelly. This absence of vocalization on the part of the title character is not surprising since Eve literally has no voice in the opening chapters, introduced as she is via a photograph, and she is later silenced by Hilliard each time she does attempt to speak. It is not until the conclusion of the novel, when she has overcome his attempts to control her and has achieved the financial independence she has craved, that she finds a voice and is heard by both the reader and Hilliard.

The gender distinctions between the concepts of freedom and repression also emerge gradually as the narrative shifts from one wherein the male point of view is dominant to one in which the female point of view finally finds a voice. As the novel opens, Maurice Hilliard is presented to us as a man unhappy with his job, his responsibilities and his life in general. When he does become disencumbered of his family responsibilities and attains a modest financial

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independence, Gissing allows Hilliard to explain his concept of repression and to put into practice his theory of freedom from that repression. Only money, or death, will free Hilliard from the monotonous demands of both job and family. His sudden windfall enables him to realize his plan of using his money to live on without having to drudge for anyone else for as long as the money will last – a year or two. Once it is gone, he will return to working for his living and will be content with the memories of his brief taste of freedom from responsibilities. Obviously, Hilliard views freedom as short-term and transitory; a viewpoint which is in direct opposition to that expressed by the title character of the novel.

Significantly, Eve first appears to Hilliard as a photograph in his landlady's album – as a mute object. Gissing writes, “...the longer he gazed at it, Hilliard found an ever-increasing suggestiveness of those qualities he desired in woman.” (16) These are not even qualities desired in a *particular* woman, but woman in general. In this case, it is fairly easy to regard Eve as a tempting object and to see Hilliard's fascination with her as a woman. Yet Hilliard's attraction comes entirely from within himself. Eve has used no arts to “seduce” him since at this point in the narrative, she is only a paper image in an album, surrounded by other paper images. Hilliard even admits that there are other, more attractive faces in this album, yet he is drawn to Eve. As he describes her appearance, Hilliard does more than recount what he sees; he begins unconsciously to bestow certain character traits upon Eve and forms a myth around her. Eve's

appearance in the photograph is simple and unadorned, and for this reason she seems to stand out amongst the more bedizened photos. He notes that she is dressed in a "homely cloth gown" and her "abundant hair" is simply worn. "Her features were comely and intelligent, and exhibited a gentleness, almost a meekness of expression which was as far as possible from seeming affected." (16) Yet he is unable to decide whether she is smiling or looking sad. At this

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point, Hilliard doesn't consider Eve as a person, but as a passive object of his interest. As a photograph, she is totally voiceless and can gain identity only through Hilliard's imagination and narrative voice.

Eve continues to appear as an object even after Hilliard locates her in London and makes himself known to her. He could have presented himself to her through a proper introduction, but he chooses instead an action which smacks of voyeurism and which most women would find extremely menacing. Moving into a building across from Eve's, Hilliard keeps her under surveillance until *he* decides to make her acquaintance formally. The first face-to-face meeting comes only after Hilliard has surreptitiously followed her twice, even going so far as to sit silently in the same railway car with her so that he could "observe her at his leisure and compare her features with those represented in the photograph." (26) Gissing's choice of words in describing Hilliard's activities during this portion of the novel are most revealing of Hilliard's obsession with the "object" Eve. They also do much to undermine the dominant male point of view. He "observes" by day and night, "pursues her," and his purpose is one of "espial." Gissing has choreographed these scenes in London and in the railway car in such a way that Hilliard is seen as the active/pursuer and Eve as the passive/pursued. However, the inferences of the language he uses to describe the chase make it obvious that Gissing is attempting to heighten the reader's awareness of the threatening implications to the female character. This situation may easily be read as the preliminaries of a rape scene. Even Hilliard is momentarily made uneasy by his actions, but he comforts himself with the age-old response of shifting the blame unto the woman by convincing himself that she tempted him.

There can be no denying Hilliard's obsession with Eve, particularly when he finally tracks her down in London. However, the question here is one of author intent. Did Gissing intend the

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reader to view Eve with the same eyes as Hilliard or did he expect his audience to look at her with more discernment than does Hilliard? Certainly, it takes no little effort to penetrate the veil of the dominant male narrative and come to view Eve as more than merely the passive object of any personal test in which Hilliard may be involved. The reader is seemingly not given a great deal of assistance in this task since the lack of personal information about Eve tends to reinforce this image of her as an object. We get no more information about her than does Hilliard, whose narrative this appears to be. We never know her thoughts, and her actions are reported by means of either Hilliard's point of view or through that of her friend Patty Ringrose – neither of whom are reliable sources for or observers of Eve's feelings and behavior.

It is also difficult to ignore the very clear evidence of Gissing's own development of the theme of freedom and repression and how he juxtaposes the male and female perceptions of these terms. While Hilliard is seen as an oppressive presence prior to his meeting with Eve, his behavior after they meet is definitely repressive. The first example of this appears to be rather innocent; however, Eve is aware of what is taking place and attempts to assert her own will over his. When they meet by chance, he begins to walk with her in spite of her saying, "...I think it would be wiser if you did go." (42) He wants to turn up a byway, she wants to walk straight on. He wants to take her to dinner at a restaurant. She refuses. He wheedles. She finally consents.

It is during the course of their subsequent conversation that we are introduced to the tone of their relationship as Hilliard wishes to establish it, as well as to Eve's concept of freedom and how it differs from Hilliard's. When he explains about his windfall and his plans for it, he expects her to agree with his reasoning. Instead, she questions his plan and suggests he use the money to better his employment situation in a long-term sense. This is counter to his own idea of freedom and he condescendingly rejects her suggestion out of hand, confident in his

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abilities to judge what is best for himself. When he asks her in passing what she wishes for in life she promptly replies, "Safety ... from years of struggle to keep myself alive, and a miserable old age." (46) Obviously, Eve's view of freedom is something of a more permanent nature than the financial independence of a year or two that Hilliard is determined to experience.

But Gissing does more than present a gender-based difference of aspirations; he shows how the male Hilliard attempts to impose his ideas of freedom upon the female Eve. While she, as a woman, can only suggest alternatives to Hilliard's own plans for his future, Hilliard, convinced of his superior, male prerogative and the necessity of guiding this less capable woman through the maze of her life, feels justified in forcing his opinion on her and dismissing her own plans as either worthless or just downright foolish. When Eve is forced to ask Hilliard for the loan of thirty-five pounds, he in turn demands to know why she needs the money because he has "an uncomfortable suspicion that harm may come of it." She responds with, "Why not treat me just like a man-friend? I'm old enough to take care of myself," to which he replies, "You think so, but I know better." (55) Once again he is displaying his conviction that women are no more capable of managing their own affairs without the assistance of the more knowledgeable, superior male than are little children. More importantly, Eve's request to be treated with a certain equality in the matter is totally ignored. If asked for a loan by a male friend, Hilliard would comply without asking for the type of explanation he demands from a woman. Obviously, the loan is of great importance to Eve, and Hilliard is aware of her anxiety over it. His method of offering assistance is to make a bargain with her: he will lend her the money if she and Patty will go to Paris with him in a purely platonic relationship with Hilliard assuming all the expenses. He explains to her that, as in his own case, she is suffering from

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"years of hardship and misery ... The only hope for me was a complete change of circumstances – to throw off the weight of my past life, and learn the meaning of repose, satisfaction, enjoyment. I prescribe the same for you." (57) Thus, he is not only imposing his idea of freedom on her, he is in essence blackmailing her into placing herself in his power for as long as *he* wishes. Plainly speaking, she is to leave her country, family and job and travel with a man to whom she is not related and who could abandon her in a strange place at any time without money. To her objections to this arrangement he assures her, "...you will remain just as independent of me as you ever were." (57) Considering that he has imposed himself upon her constantly since their first meeting, and she has never really been independent of his presence, this is rather an empty promise. But, desperately needing the loan, Eve reluctantly agrees to his terms.

It is during the Paris sojourn that Hilliard begins to be troubled by Eve's behavior, which is icily polite. He is annoyed when her manner makes him conscious of his power over her. He dislikes her "occasional suggestion of forced humility" and the "note[s] of self-abasement." He prefers to think of himself as nobly saving Eve from a life of disgrace; she should be grateful to him, not hostile.

The depths of her feelings of repression at Hilliard's hands is demonstrated to the reader

during Hilliard's absence in Switzerland with his friend Narramore and another companion. While Hilliard is gone, we see Eve make an effort to enjoy Paris in a more natural manner than she could in his company. She and Patty move from the luxurious rooms he had chosen for them into more modest and comfortable rooms of their own choice. Upon his return, Hilliard makes the egotistical assumption that Eve's more open and friendly manner is due to the success of his cure, not to her temporary freedom from his overwhelming presence.

His conception of Eve as a voiceless object is further confirmed when he proceeds to tell

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her of the opportunity he has been offered of using a portion of his money to enter an architectural firm as a trainee with an excellent opportunity for advancement. When Eve had earlier suggested this same use for his money she was ignored, but now that the suggestion comes from another man it gains validity and is acted upon. Hilliard has successfully repressed everything about Eve that runs counter to his own conceptions of what she should think and feel.

At this point in the novel, when she knows she will be returning to England and will be able to resume more control over her life, Eve finally relates some specific facts about her past to both Hilliard and the reader, and we clearly hear her voice in the narrative for the first time. With her revelations also come the beginnings of an awareness of Eve, on Hilliard's part, as something more than an object, although still much less than an equal. However, Hilliard continues to see Eve not as she truly is, but as he wants her to be. When she tells him the details of her aborted love affair with a married man and the real reason she needed the loan, Hilliard once more displays his tendency to repress the true meaning of her words by interpreting her disclosure as a wish on her part to confess her past as a prelude to intensifying her relationship with him in a romantic sense. That she is using the truth in an attempt to both force him to see her as she really is and as a lever to detach herself from him never crosses his mind.

When the topic of marriage again crops up between them, it leads to a very frank discussion on Eve's part of ideas Hilliard would prefer to leave untouched and unknown, and Hilliard's hitherto unexpressed ulterior motives. She begins by reaffirming her belief that poverty in marriage is to her the worst form of repression and something she dreads more than being alone for the rest of her life. Correctly interpreting this statement as a reluctance to enter into marriage with him, Hilliard spitefully presses on to ask her if she is sorry they ever met, to

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which she replies, "Not a day passes but I feel sorry for it." (89) The crux of the argument comes, however, when she tries to tell him of the stifling sense of gratitude and obligation he has instilled in her and how burdened she feels by their relationship. Up to this point, Hilliard has been able to retain the illusion that Eve was a voiceless object who accepted his guidance, although reluctantly, knowing that it was the best thing for her in the long run. However, once she gives voice to her inner feelings and conceptions in such a way that he is forced to listen to her, his fantasy of her is finally and completely destroyed and his reaction is both sudden and violent.

"Your gratitude be hanged! Pay me back with your lips – so – and so! Can't you understand that when my lips touch yours, I have a delight that would be well purchased with years of semi-starvation? What is it to me how I won you? You are mine for good and all – that's enough." (90)

He has finally put into words the unspoken obligation and expected payment between them,

and, ironically, by doing so he has unwittingly freed her of the debt. As long as the payment of the debt was merely an abstraction there was no way for Eve to offer or deny payment. However, once the method of payment is voiced she is free to either pay it or to refuse it as a price too high. She chooses the latter, and in doing so regains her sense of freedom and moves to detach herself completely from Hilliard's repressive actions.

The method by which Eve battles Hilliard's attempt to control her is based upon Hilliard's own character flaw – egoism. She ceases to consult him about personal matters and begins to take charge of her own life. He is unwittingly treated to a dose of his own medicine when she listens to what he has planned for her without comment, then does what *she* thinks best in the situation. Reason has failed with him because he cannot accept the reasoning of a woman as

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being as valid as that of a man; therefore, she is reduced to behavior which appears dishonorable to him in order to free herself from his hold on her. Once again, Gissing demonstrates how an action or group of actions may be interpreted differently by men and women. Since Hilliard will not approach his friend Narramore about procuring Eve a job, she does so herself. Although she continues to correspond with Hilliard and occasionally to visit, she has kept her acquaintance with Narramore a secret. This duplicity on Eve's part manifests itself in an "unknown restraint" between her and Hilliard as he begins to notice an increase in her ill health, a condition which occurs whenever Eve is under a considerable mental strain. However, if her health is being adversely affected by her behavior, isn't this a direct result of Hilliard's repression of her? She had tried explaining her wishes and desires to him and he rejected her point of view as being worthless. He is in essence creating a situation in which Eve's only alternative is to lie to and deceive him. The fact that this behavior makes her physically ill is proof that such actions are contrary to her nature.

If these differences in perception of freedom and repression between men and women are clearly presented in the body of the novel, the conclusion of the work is seen as problematic at best. Both Eakin and Markow offer critical arguments on Gissing's seemingly ambiguous or contradictory conclusions to works which appear to begin in a highly feminist tone, yet end with his independent and unconventional female protagonists reverting to traditional female roles. While Eakin feels that this contradiction can be directly linked to the general ambiguity of the age with regard to the role of women, Markow is a bit harsher in her conclusions which state that while his works "illuminate the various permutations of the Women's Movement" they end by "conveying an implicitly negative judgment concerning the possibilities for real equality between the sexes." (72) By closely examining the conclusion of this work, it is possible to see

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both the ambiguity these critics allude to and, at the same time, how Eve comes to ransom herself from an existence which she finds intolerable.

From the narration, once again firmly in the hands of Hilliard, we learn of Eve's social relationship with and later marriage to Narramore. Yet before this marriage can take place, Eve is forced to both "confess" her past to Narramore and absolve Hilliard of all blame in their own peculiar relationship. From the male perspective, what Eve has done in her dealings with both men is reprehensible; however, from the feminine perspective she has acted in the only manner open to her. By his own actions toward her, Hilliard has forced Eve to deceive both him and Narramore and to discover an answer to her dilemma herself. It must be remembered that Gissing prepared us earlier in the work, in her first conversation with Hilliard, for Eve's decision when she tells him that her idea of freedom is "Safety from years of struggle to keep myself alive, and a miserable old age." (46) Knowing this, but not believing it, Hilliard

continues to extract payment from Eve for deceiving him and preferring the attentions of Narramore over his own. She is not allowed to free herself from the repression of poverty until she places herself in the conventional position of a woman with a past who is forgiven by the man of her choice and elevated to a new social platform through marriage. While Halperin suggests that “the title of the novel refers to Eve’s ‘ransom’ from poverty by Hilliard, who acquires a little money, and ultimately her ‘ransom’ from Hilliard by Narramore, who has more.” (208) I believe it is obvious that Eve ransoms herself from both Hilliard, by seeking a solution to her problem on her own and paying the price he demands of revealing her past to Narramore, and poverty, by marrying Narramore. As in Hilliard’s case, Eve’s only solution to her problem appears to be either money or death. Since fate has not stepped in with the former, and she will not consider the latter, the only option she seems to have within this limited, and

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ambiguous, society is marriage with a wealthy man. By the novel’s end, both protagonists have escaped from their repressive lifestyles as outlined in the opening chapters and have gained the freedom they were searching for throughout the book – Hilliard through his more challenging work with its promise of advancement and Eve through her marriage. By the time Hilliard sees Eve for the last time, the novel has come full circle but with a decided twist. Hilliard may feel she has “sold” herself to the highest bidder and, by entering this new social sphere, has lost her individuality and become merely one of the crowd, but while his first view of her was as a voiceless object, in his last encounter with her it is by her voice that he distinguishes her from the other beautifully clad women in the room.

1. This viewpoint was expressed by John Sutherland when this article was first presented as a paper at the Dickens Conference, Winter 1988.

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The Nether World: A Centenary.

Pierre Coustillas

The Nether World, Gissing's seventh published novel, appeared in early April, 1889. A sort of farewell to Nell, it was to be his last full-length working-class story, the darkest of all those he wrote between his return from America and his first journey to Italy. After years of semi-oblivion from the late 1920s, when Nash & Grayson, in collaboration with E. P. Dutton, reprinted the five titles originally issued by Smith, Elder, to the 1970s, when two English publishers brought out new editions simultaneously, the book has become a classic story of proletarian life. Oxford University Press was to confirm this status by including the book, edited by Stephen Gill, in its attractive series of *The World's Classics*, and the volume was scheduled to appear exactly a hundred years after Smith, Elder added the title to their list, but this pleasant prospect has been deferred owing to the editor's inability to complete his task in time. Doubtless

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the publication of a new edition would have been the most appropriate manner of celebrating the novel's centenary. Since this possibility has now vanished we offer as a substitute a selection from the 32 reviews which are known to have appeared in the English and American press in 1889 and 1890. None of them has been reprinted in the critical anthologies currently available, and one or two have apparently never been mentioned in modern criticism. They are characteristic of the varied Victorian responses to earnest fiction. The average commentator of the period did not like his mental peace to be disturbed. In this respect few reviews could be more typical than that which the *Athenæum* published belatedly on 27 July 1889. It combined social prejudice with critical obtuseness in a rare degree. But it need not be revived. *The Nether World* is still a living book while the *Athenæum* has gone the way of all periodicals. The comments reprinted below, even when they fail to do the book full justice and presuppose an attitude to fiction which we can no longer share, are interesting as an index to what the average reviewer expected a novel to be. They are given in chronological order and may perhaps be taken to represent English, Scottish, Irish, American and Australian opinion.

The Queen

20 April 1889, p. 541

The author of that cleverly written story, *Demos*, here again takes the reader into some of the crowded metropolitan regions, whose inhabitants he depicts with artistic force. A great deal of his novel is occupied with the dwellers in Clerkenwell – a locality where workers for wealth and luxury too often drag out for themselves only a miserable existence. A variety of characters are introduced into the tale, the interest chiefly centring upon an old man and his granddaughter,

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who had been deserted by her father after the mother's death, and left to the brutal treatment of strangers. The old man returns from Australia with means, and finds his poor young descendant with some difficulty; but the incidents of the story seem rather to be intended to depict life as it is among the poor classes than to give any of the usual elements of plot to the average reader. The book is in many parts sympathetically written, and is likely to excite commiseration for the poor in our over-populated districts.

The Glasgow Herald

22 April 1889, p. 9

These volumes are a distinct advance on Mr. Gissing's previous work, but whether his progress is in a direction likely to meet with popularity appears doubtful. There is evidence of developed strength; there is a clearer maturity of thought, and a more assured mastery of expression. These excellences will, however, be discounted for many readers by the abundance of unsavoury details, incidental to a realistic progress through *The Nether World*. Of plot there can scarcely be said to be any. The author's design has been to present a vivid picture – and it is as depressing as it is luridly interesting – of the life of the London poor, and to show how, in the midst of our nineteenth-century civilisation, men and women, born with aspirations to better things, are crushed down by circumstances. The scene is the slums of Clerkenwell, and the struggle for existence, the horrible brutality, the crime, the filth and squalor, the very language, are reproduced with a fidelity which Zola himself might commend. The effect would be simply revolting were it not for two bright creations – Jane Snowdon, a sweet young girl rescued from a life of drudgery to be the instrument of her wealthy grandfather's benevolence towards the

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people from whom he sprang; and Sidney Kirkwood, the brilliant working jeweller who loved all beautiful things. The story of the struggle of these two against an irresistible fate and their mutual self-sacrifice is told with a dramatic intensity which carries the reader away in spite of himself. Mr. Gissing justifies his work by prefixing to it a motto from Renan – “La peinture d'un fumier peut être justifiée pourvu qu'il y pousse une belle fleur.” There is no denying the beauty of Mr. Gissing's flower, but what a revolting *fumier* it is!

The New York Times
16 September 1889, p. 3

Mr. Gissing's work is to be looked at in a serious light. It is a study of the very poorest class in London. The elements of fiction found in *The Nether World* may or may not be well compounded. There is complexity in the double plot which runs through the romance, for, though Clara and Sidney are described with a master hand, the characters of Michael Snowdon, Scawthorne, Jane, and Mr. Hewett are less understandable, more difficult to appreciate. There can be no trouble, however, in seizing at once on the traits of Clem Peckover, Bob Hewett and Pennyloaf Candy.

Mr. Gissing belongs to the realistic school, and is impressed with the higher aims of what is the natural, the only method. He feels no possible inclination toward pruriency. The pictures he draws, well and forcibly, stand out strongly enough on his canvas and want no coarse details. He never could have written so powerful a story, descriptive of life in the slums, without having made a careful study, not that which skims over the surface, for he has been at the very bottom of it all. He must then have known more, much more, than those who go in such dismal abodes of the poor intent on gaining some scant literary harvest. He has not sought for the

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eccentricities, the amusing side of misery, nor has he catered to those people who find a fund of enjoyment in such description. There was a House of Commons of half a century ago which rippled over with laughter when Richard Cobden told them that women were starving to death because they made 3d. a day sewing breeches while a pound of bread cost 4d. The merry side of Clerkenwell Close or Shooter's Gardens, of the dark alleys, the many festering dens of London, Mr. Gissing fails to discover. *The Nether World* is the most distressing of stories. We have had

lately in the United States some opportunity of judging of the condition of the London poor. Leading English revisers have published long accounts of their absolute distress. Fiction has dealt with the matter, but in an amateurish way. Mr. Gissing knows more about the absolute condition of the London slums than Mr. Besant, and he tells what he knows. He does not go out of his way, as does Zola or Moore, to bring out the repulsive side of it. He is even on his guard about its licentiousness. He does not parade what he sees, as if they were discoveries. This is a story where the downfall of men and women is told as a natural sequence. It is cause and effect, and when the sadness of the scenes is most impressive, the reader thinks – bearing in mind the logic of it – “How could it be otherwise?” The minds of these unfortunates are as diseased as are their bodies. Here is a description of a visit paid to Hanover Street: “On all the doorsteps sat little girls, themselves only just out of infancy, nursing or neglecting bald, red-eyed, doughy-limbed abortions in every stage of babyhood, hapless spawn of diseased humanity, born to embitter and brutalise yet further the lot of those who unwillingly gave them life.”

What is it that ruins this London poor, just as it does New York’s indigent classes? It is the vice of alcohol. And how are we to help it? Aside from what are normal cravings for stimulants come the abnormal manners brought about by want of proper food and miserable surroundings. The alcoholic vice is contagious, and must continue until conditions of life are

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changed, and when that change is possible God only knows. Someone who had been more successful than others in a London mission wrote that without “the passion for patience” all hopes of ameliorating these conditions would be impossible. It is the drinking habit which seems, then, to be the most constant among the characters Mr. Gissing presents, and this inevitably leads to damnation. The author has his say in regard to English amusements for the lower classes, and we are fast adopting them. The end of it is that nowhere can be found “any amusement appealing to the mere mind, or calculated to effeminate by encouraging the love of beauty.”

The Nether World shows how Clara and Sidney fought for a higher life, a better, nobler phase of existence, and did not reach it. “He, with ambitions of his youth frustrated, was neither an artist nor a leader of men in the battle for justice; she no savior of society by the force of a superb example, no daughter of the people holding wealth in trust for the people’s need; yet to both was their work given. Unmarked, unencouraged save by their love of uprightness and mercy, they stood by the side of those more helpless, brought some comfort to hearts less courageous than their own.” It is likely that sorrow came to both the man and woman, and disappointment, for what were these two who tried to fight against “those brute forces of society which fill with wrecks the abysses of the nether world.”

Editor’s note – in the last paragraph, the reviewer obviously meant Jane Snowdon, not Clara Hewett.

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The Daily Telegraph (Sydney)
19 October 1889, p. 9

In this story Mr. George Gissing has carried further than in his earlier novels *Demos* and *Thyrza* his purpose of endeavoring to make intelligible to the English reading public the kind of life lived by the toiling millions on whose labor the whole framework of society ultimately rests.

The scene of his present story is laid in the thronged and busy London suburb of Clerkenwell, and the life depicted is that lived by the swarming population of that district. The nature of the descriptions sufficiently shows Mr. Gissing's intimate knowledge of the place and the life he describes, and that he writes with a keen sympathy with the suffering and oppression and hopeless misery he depicts is made evident on every page. The book indeed deals so largely with these elements of poverty and wretchedness as to make it almost a painful one. If these materials were used for mere purposes of entertainment, then, indeed, the work would be quite repulsive. But the reader feels that the author's purpose is a very different one, and that he has been moved to write by a sympathy and compassion as genuine and strong as those which inspired the authors of *Oliver Twist* and *The Children of Gibeon*. Whether any influence of a beneficial kind is effected by these vivid representations of the misery which darkens the lives of great multitudes of the London poor, it would be indeed hard to conjecture. But it cannot be denied that that misery ought at least to be known – known in its depth, its extent, its hopelessness. The responsibility for the result then rests with society at large, which can determine for itself whether measures are to be taken for the alleviation of the evil, or whether it is to be left to grow on unchecked and to produce its inevitable result of a universal catastrophe.

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[There follow three long paragraphs in which the reviewer relates the main events in the story and quotes at length from various descriptive and narrative passages.]

There are some points in which we think that the strong and vivid pictures in Mr. Gissing's book fail to give a faithful representation of the "nether world" which he describes. We believe that he is in error in assuming so close a relation between the lower ranks of the working classes and those of the criminal classes, as though crime was produced only or mainly by poverty. He seems to view crime as the natural outcome of misery acting on human weakness. Surely the criminal class is too well defined and separate for this to be a fair account of its origin. Then his pictures are too dark and unrelieved. It does not require a very large acquaintance with the poorer classes to know that whatever may be their privations their feelings are not so devoid of cheerfulness as Mr. Gissing paints them. He views their condition apparently as unalterable. He is free from the weak optimism of Dickens and some other novelists who have dealt with these subjects and who contrive to secure a cheerful ending by scattering fortune and happiness over their few select favorites, leaving the great ocean of misery to welter hopelessly as before. This is merely a puerile concession to the sentimental preferences of the reader. Mr. Gissing's mistake is in the opposite direction. He is too fatalistic, not in direct assertion but in feeling and in the impression he conveys. All the good reforming work ever done in the world was done by resisting this impression and by holding that human conditions largely result from human causes and are alterable by human effort. And to the stimulation of such effort such books as these, showing the misery and horror of the nether world close to us and around us, ought to lend great assistance.

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The Daily Chronicle
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 of the world knows not how the other half lives finds another exemplification in this striking story, which exhibits Mr. Gissing at his best. In the cheap edition in which it now appears it should command a large sale.

The Dublin Review
October 1890, p. 465

Mr. Gissing's tale of life among the lower working classes of London is, whether the author meant it so or not, a terrible picture of a world without religion. No heathen community has ever been so entirely devoid of supernatural motives as that which he portrays, and the British workman of his pages is so far inferior to the African savage, that he has not even a fetish to represent to him a power exterior to himself. The writer does not seek to idealise his *dramatis personae*, and it is not their material sufferings but their moral condition, their total absence of any principle of self-control, their perversity of mind, aggravated rather than corrected by so-called education, which strikes the reader as so appalling. Family life, embittered either by the undutifulness of children, the brutality of husbands, or the vices of one

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or several of the parties, representing only the burdens of existence unsweetened by its affections, is portrayed with startling realism, in the interiors of many struggling households. In Clara we have a powerful picture of a rebellious soul self-condemned to torment in this world and the next by the fierce cravings of a nature self-centred in passionate egotism, unredeemed by a single touch of tenderness, and gifted with higher sensibilities and aspirations only to become a more blighting curse to herself and others. Bob Hewett's career is an illustration of the descent of a nature, in youth merely pleasure-loving and careless, through various phases of deterioration to brutality and crime. A hopeless fatality dogs every one of Mr. Gissing's characters, the bad become worse, the good are sacrificed to the selfishness of others, and even the abortive scheme of a fanatical philanthropist results only in the misery of the one gentle and lovable personage in the book.

From the bibliographical point of view the history of *The Nether World* is simple enough. The first English edition in three volumes was followed by a new edition in one volume, dated 1890, which Smith, Elder announced late in 1889. It sold at 6 shillings. New attempts to increase the sales were made in 1890 with the publication of a yellowback edition at 2 shillings and of another in red limp cloth priced at half a crown. Further Smith, Elder impressions came out in 1903 and 1907. Some copies, dated 1903 with the John Murray imprint, are known to be extant and they have puzzled collectors, but they were not actually issued until 1917 at the earliest, that is when the firm of Smith, Elder closed down and its stock was acquired by John Murray. The book was given a new lease of life by Nash & Grayson in 1927 and 1928 and apparently remained in print until the eve of the Second World War. By the time the revival of

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interest in Gissing's work began in the late 1950s *The Nether World* had become very scarce on the secondhand market, but it was not until 1973 that Dent brought out a new edition, with an introduction by Walter Allen in both hardback and paperback. It was reprinted in both formats two years later and in paperback only in 1982 and 1986. Almost simultaneously *The Nether World* became available in hardback from the Harvester Press with an introduction by John Goode early in 1974, and again in both hardback and paperback in 1982. Like most of Gissing's titles this story was issued in a Colonial edition when the publisher, E. A. Petherick, bought the

book in sheets from Smith, Elder. Copies dated 1890 and 1891 have been traced. Harper and Brothers also purchased sheets from the English publisher for the first American edition (1889), no. 646 in their Franklin Square Library. American readers were offered no new edition until 1929, when Dutton again imported copies in sheets from Nash & Grayson. This edition remains of special interest because of its introduction by Morley Roberts, whose fictionalized life of Gissing, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, was still at the time the only "biography" available. More recently the Dent edition was distributed through Dutton in the United States, but no special edition with the introduction by Walter Allen appeared under Dutton's sole imprint; the Dent-Dutton edition had to compete with the Fairleigh Dickinson University Press reissue of the Harvester edition.

Just as no one can reasonably claim to have exhumed all the reviews of *The Nether World* that appeared in English and American newspapers and periodicals in the year or so that followed original publication, so few libraries, institutional or private, are likely to have on their shelves all the editions and impressions of the book on record. Although potential purchasers of the first American and Australian editions would hardly like book dealers to be fully aware of

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this, it must be admitted that if scarcity was always a reliable index to prices, bookdealers would be justified in charging daunting prices for fine copies of the novel with the Harper and Petherick imprints.

A hundred years after it was first published, *The Nether World* enjoys a sound reputation not only among Gissing's work as a whole, but in the Victorian social novel. Together with *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*, *Born in Exile*, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, possibly also *Demos* and *The Whirlpool*, it is one of his novels which, in the eyes of Victorianists, have best stood the test of time and go to make their author's fame what it is at the close of the 1980s. The fact that a publisher like Dent, who has been only moderately committed to Gissing, should have kept the book in print since 1973 is encouraging; so is the prospect of the World's Classics edition. No one can safely predict whether the proletarian novel as a genre will become more or less popular in the next decade or two, but it may be hoped that the translations of the story which are either completed or in progress will rather enhance than detract from its reputation.

Reviews

George Gissing, *De Intieme Geschriften van Henry Ryecroft*, Dutch translation and Afterword by Geerten Meijsing, Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1989.

Although recent criticism has been less interested in *Ryecroft*, with its unashamed escapism, than in Gissing's novels, the book still attracts readers as appears from its inclusion in

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the World's Classics series and the publication of a new Dutch translation, the latter quite unexpected. Indeed, despite widespread interest in English literature in the Netherlands Gissing has received comparatively little attention. This was made clear by Marysa Demoor in an article (*Newsletter*, October 1984) in which she echoed the reactions of some prominent Dutch men of letters to Gissing's work. Translations have so far been limited to *Eve's Ransom* (1904) and *Ryecroft* (1920), both have been out of print for many years and second-hand copies are extremely difficult to find. Consequently a new translation by a man who is a writer himself is

of special interest.

The most original feature of this edition is the Afterword, a blend of biographical details and critical assessment. In it Geerten Meijnsing sets forth his own approach. Like many admirers of Gissing he feels a strong personal commitment to the author. He confesses that the authors whom he has found the most comforting in moments of depression are Frederick Rolfe and George Gissing, not that they had a cheering effect, but rather that their struggles have encouraged him to face his own difficulties as a literary man. Having dealt with Rolfe elsewhere Meijnsing devotes the most part of his Afterword to Gissing, emphasizing his own affinity to him. Throughout Gissing's writings he recognizes his own feelings, indeed the man who wrote *New Grub Street* speaks for all writers when describing the miseries of the literary life. Meijnsing has himself suffered from that literary disease, the "Gissing syndrome," most of the keys to which can be found in Gissing's works. The novels, he reminds us, contain thinly disguised portraits of the writer's own personality. In addition there is something prophetic in them since Gissing's own conduct had often been foreshadowed in his fiction.

Meijnsing next discusses one of the most important symptoms of the syndrome, viz.

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Gissing's attitude to women.

Gissing idealized women and at the same time he despised them. He aspired after refined women, such as had become unattainable after his own initial faux pas. So he turned to working-class girls, not only because they were more accessible, but also because they attracted him. In *Born in Exile* we read that the truly emancipated woman is nearly always asexual. Now Gissing himself had strong sexual impulses. There is plenty of evidence of this in the novels. Meijnsing even goes so far as to wonder whether something more than mere household duties is implied when Ryecroft says that his housekeeper renders him all the service he requires. One element in Gissing's attitude to lower-class women is his tendency to reform them. His efforts to instil literary culture into them are astonishingly naïve. Even the highly cultured Gabrielle was advised to learn Greek. After referring to come characters with strong sexual instincts Meijnsing concludes that throughout his life Gissing showed a passionate sentimentality, witness his longing for a kind of domestic stability he never achieved. The ideal is a well educated woman with the domestic virtues which he found less and less in Gabrielle. Like the chief character in *Our Friend the Charlatan* he was looking for incompatible qualities in one and the same person and his romantic desire was coupled with disgust. Often enough in his works he outlined his ideal woman and went on to give an acid description of the women he actually met. Love he viewed as a clash between different temperaments, a kind of struggle between opposing wills, stressing that what women ultimately admire is success, status and strength. If Gissing was surprised at the number of women who turned to him for advice, to us the reason is obvious: his own female characters are treated with understanding and imagination; he deals with typically female problems, such as the choice between the Church and Art (*The*

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Emancipated), an active solitary life and sacrifice in marriage (*The Odd Women*), superior social status and loyalty in love. Female emancipation, both its positive and negative aspects, remained throughout his career one of his favourite themes. Although he may strike one as a male chauvinist, he is at bottom in sympathy with women. It is no wonder his characters often prefer cohabitation to conventional marriage, which may be destructive of real love. All these points Meijnsing illustrates by references to Gissing's novels. The love affairs with which most of their plots are concerned point to the symptoms of the syndrome: the choice of the wrong partner, extramarital relationships, the cooling off as a result of constantly living together,

unattainable ideals, happiness that turns stale, foolish decisions owing to unbridled desires and intolerable loneliness. Love, being selfish, is bound to lead to unhappiness.

Yet female emancipation would create its own peculiar problems. Gissing showed remarkably little interest in the few emancipated intellectual women who during the latter part of his life helped to straighten out his domestic entanglements.

Meijsing then takes up another characteristic of the Gissing syndrome, viz. "creation and work." He describes the formidable difficulties the novelist often had to face in his career. He thinks Gissing was particularly productive when he complained most bitterly, e.g., when he was married to Edith. His artistic genius thrived on suffering. The struggling author is among his favourite themes, especially of course in *New Grub Street*. His hardships were partly the result of his high ideals as an artist, partly of his Schopenhauerian pessimism. There was something paradoxical in his attitude to books. He loved books, yet hated writing them for a living, and at the same time he thought good books were written only by destitute authors living in self-imposed exile. Regular artistic work seemed to him the only cure for the miseries of life. At

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times these torments seem to attract him almost erotically. He detested commercialism but he had to make his living by his art. He finally believed his intellectual efforts entitled him to a place in the "cultivated circles" he admired, feeling superior to the class from which he had sprung and to the even lower class among which he was forced to live. He was not good enough for those he considered his equals because of his past and his unpresentable wives.

Meijsing views all these conflicting ideas as the basic material for Gissing's novels, which are based on contrasting opinions and situations. Antitheses and parallels are the ingredients of his fiction. No author has written so frankly about money and the evils of poverty. His fundamental pessimism is balanced only by his faith in the individual will. Initially a positivist with a deep concern for the fate of the poor, he came to regret his early philanthropic efforts, thinking that at best the individual might free himself from the evil influences of his surroundings.

Gissing's mordant tone, Meijsing argues, helps to make his novels highly readable. They are written with a kind of despairing enthusiasm and they teem with minute social details. Especially remarkable is the slow building up of psychological tension and unsparing moral analysis. He refrains from taking sides. His characters are never wholly virtuous or wicked. Under his critic's pen, the organic development of his plots and characters comes in for special praise. If no impression of monotony prevails, the reason is that Gissing's views of social issues developed as years went by. His own social exile was partly a matter of character, since he longed for company but shrank from any encroachment on his privacy; in actual life it manifested itself through extreme restlessness. Disliking the society he had to live in he hankered for the Continent, especially Italy and Greece.

For a general character analysis of Gissing Meijsing finally refers to the presentation of

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Harvey Rolfe in *The Whirlpool*.

Naturally some pages of the Afterword are devoted to *Ryecroft* proper. After an exposition of the circumstances in which the book was published and an account of its subsequent history Meijsing remarks that its prissy tone does not represent the real Gissing. The author merely emphasized Ryecroft's reactionary tendencies. Besides the volume was written in abnormal conditions (failing health, homesickness and unsatisfactory food).

This "Afterword" contains a number of orthographic and factual inaccuracies. For instance, on p. 223, "Lidow" should be "Lindow" and on p. 226 "The Hope of Pessimism" is

said to date from the late eighties whereas it dates from 1882. Crewe is not a character in *The Whirlpool* but in *In the Year of Jubilee*. *Charles Dickens* came out in 1898, not in 1903. On p. 250 Ryecroft is said to die at the age of fifty-four. He must have been a little older. He received his annuity at the age of fifty and died “after little more than a lustrum.” “Henri Maitland” should read “Henry Maitland.”

There are also some inaccuracies in the translation proper. A few examples must suffice. The term “avoirdupois” (not “avoirdupoids”) in Spring XII seems to have been misunderstood. “Commissionnaires” (Spring XIV) are not “bookmakers.” “Calling” (Spring XVIII) is nearer to “profession” in “the literary calling.” In Summer IV “even” means “evening,” not “eve.” “Quitted the world” has been translated as if the world were “entered” (Summer VI). The expression “his mind misgave him” (in Summer XVII) has been misunderstood. At the beginning of the third paragraph in Autumn XV “most” has been left untranslated, which makes the sentence almost meaningless. “I have much ado to believe” in Winter V means “I have great difficulty in believing.” In Winter X “English” has been omitted from Gissing’s praise of the steamed English potato. “Compassionate” in Winter XII has been misread as “passionate.” The final sentence of Winter XIII is missing. In Winter XV Gissing correctly referred to the olive as

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the “emblem of peace.” He did not say, as does the translator, that Athene is the “goddess of peace.” The list might have been added to.

Fortunately there is also much to praise in the translation. Translating *Ryecroft* poses its own problems. The book was written nearly ninety years ago in an archaizing style. The present-day translator has to steer a middle course between the obtrusively old-fashioned and the blatantly modern. In any case the numerous echoes of English literature cannot be properly conveyed. By and large Meijssing has been successful.

The book ends with translations of foreign phrases and quotations used by Gissing, some of which are identified. There is also a note on money-values in Gissing’s time. Here again errors have crept in: definitely a sovereign was not worth twenty-two shillings and sixpence, nor is “pence” a singular form. Finally the book offers an index to the subjects touched on by Ryecroft.

All lovers of Gissing will be pleased that this edition has come out. Let us hope that it will be followed by translations of some of his major novels.

P. F. Kropholler.

George Gissing, *Aphorisms and Reflections*, edited with an introduction by P. F. Kropholler, Edinburgh: The Tragara Press, 1989.

This minor little collection of aphorisms from Gissing’s prose fiction and his nonfictional prose presents, in concentrated form, the author’s special saturnine and meditative voice: e.g., “Only the one man in half a million has fate for his friend” (*The Nether World*, Chap. 40). P. F. Kropholler may have found a model for his Gissing Chrestomathy in Jacob Korg’s 1962 edition of *George Gissing’s Commonplace Book*, with Korg’s rearrangement of its miscellaneous

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contents under well chosen general headings. *Aphorisms and Reflections*, of course, lacks the unusual interest of previously unpublished items, but it does resemble the *Commonplace Book* in format and effect. Kropholler’s 43-page collection appears in a limited edition of just 125 copies – a small provision of literary caviar suitable for a very select Gissing audience.

Kropholler provides snippets from Gissing under such topics as “The Arts,” “Life and

Death,” “Literature and Books,” “Marriage,” and that inevitable Gissing subject – “Money, Poverty, and Riches.” Understandably enough, the largest group of quotations comes from the intrinsically aphoristic *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Yet all the novels but *Sleeping Fires* and *Veranilda* also contribute their sayings. Snippets also crop up from Gissing’s short stories and even from his critical essays and books.

Kropholler provides a brief introduction that stresses Gissing’s tendency to express his personal views within his fiction – a valid point that needs, however, a certain qualification. Fiction is not autobiography, not even so-called autobiographical novels of the kind that Gissing often wrote. When, for example, we read the following from *Will Warburton* – “Merriment is the great digestive, and an unspeakable boon to the man capable of it in all but every situation” (*Will Warburton*, Chap. 23) – we can hardly separate this cheerful saying from the exceptional optimism of this happy-ending Gissing light novel. The voice seems less Gissing’s than that of a specifically situated narrator.

In addition to this small reservation about Kropholler’s introductory remarks, one would also have welcomed more detailed comments about a few especially interesting items in *Aphorisms and Reflections*: for example, “History is a nightmare of horrors ...” (*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Winter xvii). This saying resembles Stephen Dedalus’s famous remark in Joyce’s *Ulysses*: “History ... is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” (James

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Joyce, *Ulysses*, New York: Vintage, 1961, p. 34). We know that Joyce read, and ultimately disliked, both *Demos* and *The Crown of Life* (Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 242), but did he ever see the Ryecroft Papers? Or are we dealing, instead, with a mere parallel of pessimism; use of a common source; or even, a fear-and-trembling attitude in the general cultural atmosphere stretching from 1903 to 1922? In any case, Gissing’s closing twist to his form of the aphorism separates it from Joyce’s: “we relish it [history] because we love pictures, and because all that man has suffered is to man rich in interest” (*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Winter xvii). This fascination with the long span of human suffering exemplifies Gissing’s essential sadness in contrast to Joyce’s basically comic vision. Here and elsewhere, Gissing’s *Aphorisms and Reflections* should stimulate, in turn, further reflections by his knowledgeable readers.

Robert L. Selig
Purdue University Calumet

Notes and News

With deep regret we announce the death of Mr. Yao Zaixiang, of Hangzhou University, which occurred last February in New York. He was the author of “Gissing in China,” which we published in April 1988. Whether his projects will be carried out by his wife and/or his friends is uncertain. He planned to translate a selection of Gissing’s short stories and, the problems involved by the availability of texts having been solved, he was to set to work on his return to

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China early this year.

He would have welcomed the new developments in Gissing studies which were noticed by Wulfhard Stahl last May in China. A fruitful week-end in Bern enabled the editor of the *Newsletter* to examine various Chinese publications of Gissing interest which had escaped the

notice of Mr. Yao Zaixiang. The most unexpected was a second translation of *New Grub Street* published in Shanghai three years ago. Just as two Japanese translations of *The Odd Women* appeared simultaneously in Tokyo last year, two Chinese translations of *New Grub Street* appeared within a few months in two provinces of China.

The two translations are worth comparing, and this has been done with the collaboration, not only of Wulfhard Stahl, whose name is associated with the German translation of *New Grub Street* (Greno, 1986), but of François-Yves Damon, a teacher of Chinese in Lille, and a Chinese student, all of whom are to be thanked for what proved a daunting task to the uninitiated. The first to have appeared is that of the Zhejiang Literature Press. It was issued on 1 July 1986, the first impression consisting of 4,000 copies. Wen Xin, the translator, used one of the 1978 impressions of the Penguin edition. The text, which runs to 462,000 characters, covers pp. 1-596. A number of footnotes are appended of the kind that any publisher might wish to include in a good edition. The first of these notes is devoted to the phrase "Grub Street," the last to Robert Burns. Bernard Bergonzi's notes in the Penguin edition were obviously helpful to the translator, who nonetheless had to throw light on various matters that no English-speaking reader could possibly fail to understand spontaneously. Besides the footnotes the editorial matter includes four illustrations, the fourth of which shows Biffen in the moonlight before committing suicide. These illustrations are preceded by one of the portraits of Gissing taken by Alfred Ellis in 1893. The introduction, dated 1983, is a brief survey of Gissing's career; Jacob Korg's *George*

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Gissing: A Critical Biography (1963) seems to have been the most recent work on the novelist consulted by Wen Xin. In this translation the original division into three volumes has been preserved, and the author has attempted to find a title (*Xin Han Shi Jie*) which conveys the flavour and sense of the original while transposing the semantic contents of the phrase "Grub Street." The effect of "New Paupers' Street" is similar to that produced by Gabrielle Fleury's title: *La Rue des Meurt-de-Faim*.

The Shanghai translation (*Xin Gelapu Jie* – literally, New Grub Street) is less ambitious in some respects. The first impression, which consisted of 6,000 copies, was published on 1 October 1986 and the text used by the translator, Ye Dong Xin, was that of the Modern Library edition first issued in 1926. The translation, it would seem, is somewhat more concise – 444,000 characters, that is 18,000 less than in the other translation. The notes in this volume deal with very much the same linguistic and cultural difficulties as in Mr. Wen Xin's version, but the five-page afterword introduces Gissing and his subject much more briefly and no illustrations or portrait of the novelist help the reader to visualize the characters, however subjectively, and their creator. The price is 4 yuan as opposed to 3.30. Still the books are published in exactly the same format, and if the earlier edition is thinner, the difference is due essentially to the quality of the paper used.

The editor's week-end with Wulfhard Stahl has also made it possible to compare two impressions of the recent Chinese translation of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, published by the ShanXi People's Press. The first edition, which was published on 1 October 1985, consisted of 1,000 copies; the other copy in hand (described in our April 1988 number), published on 2 March 1987, was one of the tenth thousand. The two volumes are alike in most respects, but one notes with satisfaction that a good many misprints were corrected between

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1985 and 1987, two of them on the title page. A number of modern critics are mentioned by Professor Li in his introduction and their names are now given correctly, which was not always the case in the first edition. Still there is some room left for improvement. Gilbert Grail has lost

the last letter of his Christian name and *Demos* by a curious typographical accident with an unintended significance, still reads *Demons*. One notices on the back covers that the price rose from 1.15 to 1.30 yuan.

In his article on "Gissing in China" Yao Zaixiang referred to the presence of Gissing in various anthologies of literature published in China. Now Wulffhard Stahl has discovered one more work of that kind which includes Spring XII of the Ryecroft Papers, *The Arts and Delights of Reading* (Beijing: Chinese Friendship Press, 1988). It is a pleasantly produced paperback selling at 2 yuan, with portraits of English, American, French, German, Russian and Chinese authors. The portrait of Gissing (1895) faces those of Will Durant and Arnold Bennett. The two co-editors and translators of the anthology offer their own translation of the pages from *Ryecroft*; perhaps they were not aware of Professor Li's translation.

The bibliographical investigations with Wulffhard Stahl were extended to the extremely scarce German translation of *Demos* by Clara Steinitz. The book was first published by Victor Ottmann in 1892 but as he soon went bankrupt, the three volumes scarcely had time to sell before the stock was taken over by another publisher. The copy borrowed by Stahl from a Swiss Library, although issued nearly a hundred years ago, is still in pristine condition; its red cloth as vivid as it is likely ever to have been. It contains advertisements for the even scarcer periodical published by Ottmann, *Das litterarische Echo*, of which a complete file still has to be located. *Demos*, it would seem, was also published by Ottmann in paper covers.

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Mrs. Ryôko Otah, whose translation of *The Odd Women* appeared last year under the imprint of Shubun International, has now published a translation of *The Whirlpool*. The book belongs to a series entitled "Heroines are coming" which is edited by Professor Fumio Hôjoh. The titles chosen by the general editor and the publishers aim at showing that at the turn of the century the heroines of English fiction were offering a new image of woman. They were no longer "angels in the house," but women with a life and identity of their own. Each of the six novels selected, it is claimed, has a striking heroine of a new type that you can never forget:

1. George Moore, *Esther Waters*, translated by Fumio Hôjoh. 3,400 yen.
2. Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, translated by Shizuko Kawamoto, 3,400 yen.
3. George Gissing, *The Whirlpool*, translated by Ryôko Otah, 3,500 yen.
4. John Galsworthy, *The Man of Property*, translated by Akira Usuda, 3,200 yen.
5. H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica*, translated by Shizuko Tsutiya. 3,300 yen.
6. Arnold Bennett, *Hilda Lessways*, translated by Ken Onodera, 3,300 yen.

Two more volumes, shortly to be published, have been announced, a collection of *Critical Essays* entitled *Heroines are coming*, and an illustrated volume, *Victorian Women*, both edited by Shizuko Kawamoto and Fumio Hôjoh.

The publishers are:

Kokusho- Kankoh- Kai
3-5-18, Sugamo, Toshima, Tokyo, 170.

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Although he does not claim that this is news in the strict sense of the term, Mr. Kazuo

Mizokawa offers some bibliographical information which is not likely to be known except to some of his countrymen. In 1979, he reports, Haruo Suzuki, honorary president of a leading Japanese enterprise, Shôwa Denkô, published a book entitled *Learning from the Classics: The fifty books which have given me courage and spiritual wealth* (Goma Shobô). The book is divided into five parts: literature, philosophy and thought, poetry, Music and art, and religion. The part devoted to literature includes eight classics (four Western and four Japanese titles) and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* comes after *The Divine Comedy*, a book dear to Gissing, whose copy has appeared in no sale room since his death, *Faust* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. In his preface Haruo Suzuki observes that the Ryecroft Papers may not be a classic as widely acknowledged as Dante's and Goethe's masterpieces, but that Gissing's book is his favourite and he cannot well ignore it. His comment and quotations are not unexpected from an educated Japanese. He says: "I feel inexpressible sympathy for this book and cherish it as a friend who will, give me comfort in my closing years. Some people in the world experience the same feeling, and probably Mr. Yukio Otsuka, author of *Kanteki-shô*, ranks first among them." Mr. Suzuki was sixty-six years of age at the time his book was published. No one alive is likely to make reservations about his remark on Mr. Otsuka, who is not unknown to readers of this journal.

Catherine Clarke, editor of World's Classics, the well known series published by Oxford University Press, reports that Stephen Gill's edition of *The Nether World*, which was scheduled for publication last June, will not appear until June or September 1991. Mr. Gill's biography of Wordsworth, published a few months ago, took priority, but he is now at work on Gissing's novel.

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The Gissing Trust has published two postcards: (i) George Gissing by Lily Waldron, a portrait in oils from photographs (ii) The Gissings' family home, Thompson's Yard, Wakefield, ink and water-colour by Joe Clay. Orders can be sent to the Hon. Secretary and Treasurer of the Gissing Trust, Anthony Petyt, 10 Station Street, Sandal, Wakefield, West Yorks., WF1 5AF, Price: 10p each.

Recent Publications

Volumes

John Sloan, *George Gissing: The Cultural Challenge*, London, The Macmillan Press, 1989. Brown cloth with gilt titling. White, red and brown dust-jacket, ix + 172 pages. £27.50. This book discusses all the major titles from *Workers in the Dawn* to *The Crown of Life*. It will be reviewed in one of our next few numbers.

George Gissing, *The Whirlpool*, Tokyo: Kokusho-Kankoh-Kai, 1989. Translation, commentary and notes by Ryôko Otah. White cloth with black titling. The white jacket reproduces "Woman Reclining on a Sofa" by Augustus John (Fitzwilliam Museum). 467 pages + 1 page about the series of which this book is no. 3. See "Notes and News," 3,500 yen.

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George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, with an introduction and notes by Sanki

Ichikawa, Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1988. Red cloth with gilt titling. Yellow dust-jacket. This is the latest impression in the Kenkyusha British and American Classics. The book was first published in the Kenkyusha English Classics in 1921 and included in the present series in 1954. There have been 31 impressions in 34 years. 2,100 yen.

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, Shanghai: Yi wen chu ban shi, 1986. Translation, commentary and notes by Ye Dong Xin. Paperback with white, pink, blue and purple covers. Chinese title (*Xin Gelapu Jie*) in black on front cover and spine. English title in pink on front cover, in blue on back cover. 632 pages.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Alvin Sullivan (ed.), *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837-1913*, Westport, Conn. and London, 1984. This guide to the major periodicals of the nineteenth and early twentieth century covers a number of weeklies and monthlies to which Gissing contributed, and some of his contributions are noted briefly. It also offers information on many journals in which his work was reviewed, in particular the names of editors.

Anthony Kearney, *The Louse on the Locks of Literature*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press,

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1986. In this study of Churton Collins the author specifically mentions that there are no references to Gissing in Collins's criticism. He notes that Collins felt "threatened by a succession of enemies" which led to "sharp confrontations rationalized partly justifiably as stands for particular rights and principles" and "in this way bears some similarity to Gissing's Alfred Yule, an idealistic literary man but embittered by years of frustrating struggle and lack of success and driven to agonizing self-reflections" (p. 164).

Brian Redhead and Sheila Gooddie, *The Summers of Shotton*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987. This is a history of the Summers family, with whom Gissing was in touch from his Lindow Grove days to the period, recorded in his diary, when Mrs. Buckley, the sister of William, John and Alfred Summers, sought his assistance about the memoir of William she wished to publish. The authors of the book have much material to offer, including excellent illustrations.

Lin Heng Zhe and Mzao Yun Fan (translators and editors), *The Art and Delights of Reading*, Beijing: The Chinese Friendship Press, 1988. Contains an extract from *Henry Ryecroft* (pp. 96-101) and a brief introduction to Gissing (pp. 250-52), also a portrait of him.

Francesco Badolato, "George Gissing: an English Italophile" (Part 4), *Anglo-Italian Club News*, June 1989, pp. 9-10.

Pierre Coustillas, "The Relevance of George Gissing," *Eigo Seinen* (Tokyo), August 1989, pp. 230-32.

Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1989. An extract from the description of the book on the dust-jacket

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will give some idea of the author's aims: "In a series of parallel narratives, Dr. Keating challenges received assumptions, and sets the business of letters as the poles of his account. On the one hand authors' contracts, the royalty system, serialisation and the invention of the best-seller: on the other the readers, libraries, bookshops, an expanding literate market that sustained fiction as commerce. Between these poles, Keating holds fiction up to the light of developing later-Victorian attitudes on liberty, on marriage, economics, the family, trade, religion, psychiatry and post-Darwinian social theory. By scrutinising the progress of the novel from these various angles, he reveals new facets of fiction in its proper context, embedded in the rapidly changing culture that had refined old forms, and was struggling to shape the profiles of the new."

Like Arnold Bennett, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Rudyard Kipling, George Meredith and H. G. Wells, Gissing figures prominently in this book, which will be reviewed in one of our next few numbers.