

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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Gissing’s Characterisation

III. Temperament

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(This is the concluding installment of the article whose earlier parts appeared in the issues of April and June.)

In the recognition of the complexity of character, the “illogicality” of human actions, the deterministic beliefs of the Realists showed their superiority over what I will for the convenience the “moral” approach. The latter tended to limit the problems of motivation to questions of right and wrong; the deterministic approach, intelligently handled, did not over-simplify by excluding spirituality, as was the common accusation, but rather complicated the study of character by admitting classes of motive that were otherwise ignored.

Gissing did not, in any sense, emulate Dostoevsky in touching on the unconscious mind. All the operations of the mind in his books are conscious and explicable; they are illogical not in being mysterious but merely in not following necessarily the recommendations of morality and common sense. But he had firmly grasped the third aspect of the realistic approach to character: the study of temperament, the action of the physical upon the mental constitution.

It is hardly necessary to remind oneself of the damage done to literary psychology by Victorian prudery; how the taboo primarily directed against sex had extended itself to cover other motives connected with physical survival, even hunger itself, and encouraged the idealised character free not only from physical desires but from anger, avarice, jealousy and the like. Consequently, Realism, by merely making allowance for urges perfectly well known to exist, had the quality of a reaction against this trend, and necessarily encouraged renewed attention to the real complexities of human behaviour.

Somewhat unfortunately, it did more: naturally, the reaction against convention in some cases took the form of emphasis, on such subjects as sex, drunkenness and brutality. As always, its tendency was to dwell primarily on the things with which conventional literature did not deal.

In France in particular the exclusiveness of these interests gave a handle to those who protested in the name of morality and good taste – and indeed they were so far right, that in some cases the intention to shock the reader did take precedence of pure artistic motives. In England this development was neither so soon nor so extreme, but the signs of it were there. Gissing is by no means free of this motive; it is clearly present in *The Unclassed* and *The Nether World*, and the

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suspicion of it is unavoidable in many other places.

Besides these reactions against convention and the desire to reveal the truth, the general ways of thought of the Realist drew his attention to the physical. As an evolutionist he was interested in demonstrating the animality of man, his brutality in the exact sense. He rejoiced to find men evil because it confirmed his pessimistic philosophy; he rejoiced also to find him brutal, because this likewise supported the beliefs that lay at the root of his thinking. Gissing demonstrates clearly a belief in the essentially animal quality of man in his description of the more degraded of the poor:

“Whence comes it they are animal, repulsive, absolutely vicious in ugliness? Mark the men in their turn: four in every six have visages so deformed by ill-health that they excite disgust; their hair is cut down to within half an inch of the scalp; their legs are twisted out of shape.”
(*The Nether World*, Ch. XII)

Gissing here chooses especially those aspects of ugliness that suggest the animal; the reference to the bristling scalp, which is not properly a deformity, is clearly included to that end. The description of Clem Peckover has the same purpose:

“Her forehead was low and of great width; her nose was well shapen, and had large sensual apertures; her cruel lips may be seen on certain fine antique busts.” (*The Nether World*, Ch. I)

Here the intention is to suggest that she is a throwback to the primitive human animal; there are also frequent references to her muscularity, and to her animal savagery:

“Clem would have liked dealing with someone who showed fight – some one with whom she could try savage issue in real tooth-and-claw conflict. She had in mind a really exquisite piece of cruelty.” (*The Nether World*, Ch. I)

In Clem Peckover Gissing describes a person moved largely by pure brutality. Another human animal appears in *The Unclassed*:

“In Slimy there were depths beyond Caliban, and, at the same time, curious points of contact with average humanity, unexpectedly occurring [...] Of late, Slimy had seemed not quite in his usual health; this exhibited itself much as it would in some repulsive animal, which suffers in captivity, and tries to find some remote corner when pains come on.” (*The Unclassed*, Ch. XXVIII)

Slimy is a grotesque, as the Caliban comparison indicates, and yet Gissing makes clear that he is not a member of another species but a human being, related to the average man.

Drunkenness Gissing describes often, usually among the lower classes, as in Mrs. Candy

of *The Nether World*; but also in Virginia Madden in *The Odd Women*. He permits even his best characters to be guided by their needs, describing Biffen, for instance, revelling over bread and dripping, exhilarated by ham and eggs and coffee, breaking off from artistic work to calculate the price of bread. In a bitter mood, Harvey Rolfe notices

“that women came up from supper with flushed cheeks and eyes

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unnaturally lustrous. What a grossly sensual life was masked by their airs and graces!” (*The Whirlpool*, Pt. I, Ch. IV)

This is a direct rejection of the Victorian pretence that women did not have appetite.

Money is the primary aim of many characters. The minor necessities of living are given their due. These, however, are comparatively superficial symptoms of the admission of the physical as a motive; there are also more complex applications of the study of temperament.

Zola distinguished between temperament and character, as normally understood, in these words:

“Dans *Thérèse Raquin*, j’ai voulu étudier des tempéraments et non des caractères. Là est le livre entier. J’ai choisi des personnages souverainement dominés par leurs nerfs et leur sang, dépourvus de libre arbitre, entraînés à chaque acte de leur vie par les fatalités de leur chair. Thérèse et Laurent sont des brutes humaines, rien de plus. J’ai cherché à suivre pas à pas dans ces brutes le travail sourd des passions, les poussées de l’instinct, les détraquements cérébraux survenus à la suite d’une crise nerveuse [...] L’âme est parfaitement absente.” (*Thérèse Raquin*, Préface)

Gissing does not specialise in human brutes, and even in Slimy the “soul” is not perfectly absent. But he does indeed admit the drive of instinct, of sex, of nervous disorder, into the motives of his characters and shows their power. He shows that good characters as well as bad are thus affected by the physical, and, though of course there is always a moral tone to which actions are eventually referred, there is never any condemnation of characters, even implicit, for possessing and being influenced by physical urges. Amorous psychology is one of his specialties and he analyses at length such a typical case as that of a man simultaneously desiring two women; though, at the same time, he remains always reserved, refraining from too blunt a discussion of sexual matters, and also from suggesting explicitly that women are influenced by sexual desire. This may be merely prudent, but it is more probable that he was unable entirely to throw off the Victorian habit of reticence and “delicacy.” That he wished to throw it off is indicated by his public remarks on literary prudery,¹ and Morley Roberts describes his quoting from *Nana* in support of realistic directness about sex.² He does handle prostitution honestly, and is sometimes surprisingly direct in speech for him, as in the line which describes Fanny French’s reaction to an amorous advance:

“No second year graduate of the pavement could have preserved a completer equanimity.” (*In the Year of Jubilee*, Pt. II, Ch. II)

This book also contains a straightforward and sensitive account of a seduction. In his analysis of amorous psychology he refrains from too blunt expressions; yet he does not draw back from admitting the physical part of sexual attraction:

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“Her hair, her lips, her neck, grew present to him, and lured his fancy with a wanton seduction. In self-defence – pathetic stratagem of intellectual man at issue with the flesh – he fell back upon the idealism which ever strives to endow a fair woman with a beautiful soul; he endeavoured to forget her body in contemplation of the spiritual excellencies that might lurk behind it.” (*The Whirlpool*, Pt. I, Ch. X)

He shows how desire can overcome reason; Harvey Rolfe, trying to decide whether to propose, finds himself “aching, sore, with impatience; reason utterly fled, intellect bemused and baffled.” (*The Whirlpool*, Pt. I, Ch. XI)

There is careful analysis of Waymark’s feelings for Ida Starr and Maud Enderby: for the former he feels strong physical desire; his feeling for the latter is more intellectual. This is to simplify; Waymark has a great respect for the potentialities of nobility of character to be found in Ida, but this clashes with a suspicion, bred of his knowledge of her past life, that she may be unable to love fully; and also with his natural jealousy of her past. But though Waymark’s motives and self-analysis are complex – how much so I cannot demonstrate without lengthy analysis of the development – nevertheless this rough distinction can be made between the two attractions. Maud satisfies a spiritual ideal of goodness, purity and intelligence. Ida, although she has noble possibilities (physical desire entirely unsupported would not have so distracted Waymark), yet is uneducated, has a past which tortures him with doubts; her attraction is largely of beauty and physical vitality.

“Each answered to an ideal which he cherished, and the two ideals were so diverse, so mutually exclusive.” (*The Unclassed*, Ch. XII)

Waymark again and again attempts a logical analysis of his feelings:

“This affection [for Ida] he could not trust. How far was it mere passion of the senses, which gratification would speedily kill?

In the case of his feeling towards Maud Enderby there was no such doubt. Never was his blood so calm as in her presence. She was to him a spirit, and in the spirit he loved her [...] the links between them were not of the kind which easily yield [...]

So far logical arguing. But the fact remained that he had not the least intention of breaking off his intercourse with Ida, despite the certainty that passion would grow upon him with each of their meetings, rendering their mutual relations more and more dangerous [...]

It was significant that he did not take into account loyalty to Maud as a help in resisting this temptation. He was too sure of himself as regarded that purer love; let what might happen, his loyalty to Maud would be unshaken. It was independent of passion, and passion could not shake it”. (*The Unclassed*, Ch. XXI.)

Here is a clear case of Gissing putting forward physical desire as a significant motive in the mind of a good man, one who is by no means insensitive to the demands of spirituality and the need of their satisfaction. Indeed, Gissing goes further, and the fact of his loyalty to Maud not helping him to the resistance of temptation makes clear the actual insufficiency, in sexual matters, of a spiritual love unsupported by desire.

Note also that advance in psychology which shows that logical analysis of motives rarely

leads to decision, when those motives are not exclusively intellectual. Right and wrong are insufficient to decide questions such as this, when a man is so twisted by indecision as to lose sight of right and wrong. Adherence to a strict moral code would demand that Waymark put aside the temptations of the flesh; but all heroes are not romantic heroes, and Waymark is not a man who adheres strictly to any code; consequently he knows well that the satisfaction of righteousness, not being for him an emotional satisfaction, may well not be the way to happiness. Life is more complex for Waymark than for a romantic hero, and he must take into account his physical needs.

After long drawn-out analysis, not a logical decision but impulse or accident usually intervenes to produce a result; and so it is with Waymark. A long discussion with Maud, in which the intellectual satisfactions come to the fore, coupled with the fact that Ida is temporarily out of sight, brings him to the point of proposal to Maud.

“It was no result of deliberate decision, he had given up the effort to discover his true path, knowing sufficiently that neither reason nor true preponderance of inclination was likely to turn the balance. The gathering emotion of the hour had united with opportunity to decide his future.” (*The Unclassed*, Ch. XXVII)

He remains doubtful of the wisdom of the choice even after it is irrevocably made.

For presumably sentimental reasons, Gissing makes Maud herself withdraw from the engagement, and Waymark turns to Ida in the end; but as far as psychological analysis of Waymark is concerned the story ends at that point, when, without any Zola-like **insistence** on brutishness, it has been shown how powerful are the drives of passionate instinct and how they can detract from logical analysis. One notes also that the consciousness shown here of men's habit of thinking about their emotions in such a way as to affect their actions, or, Hamlet-like, to prevent them, is another aspect of the complexity that the Realists brought to their study of psychology.

If there is a fault in Gissing's handling of amorous and other psychology, it is the general lack of any overwhelming passion, be it physical, spiritual, or both combined. Gissing speaks of “that sustained energy of imaginative and sensual longing, which ideal passion demands,” but he does not contrive to convey it. It may be that an approach which has for basic intention the analysis of “le mécanisme humain” tends towards a cold and matter-of-fact analysis. But I should say that the fault lies less in the method than in Gissing himself. Overwhelming passions of all types are beyond his range: he can observe them, he can analyse them, but he cannot communicate them. He is too restrained, too limited, to reach the emotional level that Zola and the Russian novelists attain without losing their objectivity.

There is another facet of temperament that is less easily described than is amorous psychology. Zola refers to “une crise nerveuse”; nervous sensitivity (for lack of a better phrase) is an aspect of character to which Gissing pays some attention – probably encouraged in this by his reading of Dostoievsky.

Nervous strain in a romantic novel is suffered usually by the heroine, and occasionally by the villain when he is “tortured by remorse.” But Gissing realises that all people, very nearly – certainly most of the introspective dreamers whom he prefers to describe – may suffer in this way. It is a further complexity in the sources of human actions. Outbursts of temper under stress and the like are the results of nervous strain. Godwin Peak's social incapacity in his early days – his inability to behave graciously to Lady Whitelaw when applying to her for financial aid (*Born in Exile*, Pt. I, Ch. V.) arises out of the conflict of pride with the necessity of being

humble, causing uncertainty of self-control. Reardon, in *New Grub Street*, oppressed by domestic and financial troubles, is unable to concentrate, suffers from mental exhaustion, cannot sleep. His incapacity to maintain mental calm in conditions of strain is the tragedy of his life and the cause of his failure.

Kingcote, in *Isabel Clarendon*, is another morbidly contemplative, nervously sensitive man. Although he loves and is loved by Isabel, his sensitivity renders him unable to find calm in this; doubt and unhappiness drive him into unreasonable behaviour and eventually into illness. One is reminded that Gissing, like Schopenhauer, believed love to be merely turmoil; for it introduced passions which disturbed the doubtful mental equilibrium of his nervous characters.

Their behaviour is often decided by the disturbance arising from nervous strain. That Gissing was aware of the physical nature of these disorders is fairly clear, and especially when he takes an almost medical standpoint in discussing them. One chapter in *The Nether World* is headed, bluntly, "Pathological." It describes how repressed ambition, pride and rebelliousness unite with harsh exhausting work to bring Clara Hewett to a state almost of insanity. Consider these sentences:

"In proportion as her bodily health failed, the worst possibilities of her character came into prominence. [...] Sometimes in the silence of night she suffered from a dreadful need of crying aloud, of uttering her anguish in a scream like that of insanity. [...] A doctor would have bidden her to take to bed, as one in danger of grave illness." (*The Nether World*, Ch. IX)

The story of Alma Rolfe in *The Whirlpool* is entirely one of an unstable temperament gradually overcome by the effects of nervous excitement – the excitements of society, of a public concert she performs, of a guilty secret and the witnessing of a crime – until she comes to physical collapse and dies at last from an overdose of a narcotic she takes to quiet her nerves. Her husband suffers in the same way:

"The miseries through which he had gone were troubling his health, and health disordered naturally reacted upon his mind, so that, owing to a gloomy excitement of the imagination, for several nights he had hardly slept." (*The Whirlpool*, Pt. III, Ch. I).

The same is true of Hugh Carnaby; Gissing observes, after one of his outbursts of anger,

"A specialist in nervous pathology would have judged Hugh Carnaby a dangerous person on this Monday afternoon". (*The Whirlpool*, Pt. II, Ch. XII)

These examples indicate clearly that Gissing regarded physical influences as very important in motivation. Victorian critics of Realism objected to its pathological and physical aspects, presumably partly because they felt them to be in bad taste, and partly because they felt that the spiritual influences on character were thereby ignored. But, of course, the Realist was interested in the truth about character, and the study of temperament was an advance in that direction. In particular, it showed that persons suffering from pathological states of mind and body were not "abnormal": that almost all persons did so suffer in some degree; and

consequently that the study of the apparently abnormal character was not merely a purposeless exercise in the unusual.

1 "The New Censorship of Literature," *Pall Mall Budget* (December 19, 1884).

2 *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, p. 86.

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Book Review

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"The heritage a great man leaves the world is to force it to explain him."¹

The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft by George Gissing. Edited and translated into French by Pierre Coustillas. Paris. 1967. (*Les Carnets d'Henry Ryecroft*)

To have a work published in so reputable a series as the "collection bilingue Aubier-Montaigne," just like Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley or Tennyson would certainly have delighted Gissing for whom fame was late in coming, and who took a strong interest in the French language and its literature from an early age.

M. Coustillas is a well-known authority on Gissing and his contributions on the subject have already been numerous. In his introduction, after the traditional survey of the writer's life which, in the present case, is both documented and lively, he proceeds to a succinct but penetrating analysis of the work, refusing to underestimate the novelist in comparison with the essayist as some hasty critics have done for years.

However it cannot be denied that *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* has been for a long time Gissing's best-known book and the most often republished. As Mr. Oswald H. Davis writes in his recent book, *George Gissing. A Study in Literary Leanings*: [Ryecroft] "... is the first name on the lips of the man whose acquaintance with Gissing is academic only,"² and Mr. Davis is astonished at such a vogue. M. Coustillas for his part suggests several explanations.

As far as the original readers and critics are concerned the success was above all the result of curiosity. Gissing had always been singularly sparing of information about himself, and a book written in the first person could lead some of them to hope for some private confessions. For others the success of the book had a different origin; bored with novels they used to consider "sordid" and "depressing," they were ready to welcome a new mode of expression in which some praise for his country could at last be found in so gloomy a novelist. Gissing himself could fairly imagine the impact of his work when he wrote to Bertz:

"I have expressed very freely my views with regard to the present tendencies of English life; but, at the same time, I have put into relief the old English virtues. So there will be things pleasant as well as disagreeable."³

Now most readers chose to close their eyes on "things disagreeable" to enjoy and eulogise "things pleasant." It was all the more easy because the text that aroused eulogy and still finds favour with today's reading public is in fact considerably different from the one which Gissing

spoke about to his German friend.

The first version was written in France at Saint Honoré-les-Bains where Gissing had taken a villa to live with his French wife Gabrielle and her mother for the whole summer of

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1900. He had worked at it for nearly two months from September 1st until October 23rd and it was on the very day after he had completed the final touches that he wrote the above-mentioned lines. He was in a hurry to see the manuscript published, but as in March 1901 nothing had been done, he decided to revise and expand the text. His stay at Nayland sanatorium in England from May to August 1901 prevented him from carrying out his scheme. When at Nayland he thought a great deal about the text (he mentioned this fact in his letters to his wife twice), but it was only when he was back in France that he wrote the second version at a villa at Couhard near Autum in Burgundy, in August-September 1901, exactly one year later than the first version. From this place he wrote once again to Bertz, that he was working on "An Author at Grass," which he was "Considerably altering and improving." Then *An Author at Grass* was serialised in the *Fortnightly Review* from May 1902 to February 1903 before being published by Constable in January 1903 under the new and definitive title of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.

The manuscript of the first version was thought to have been destroyed or lost, but in one of the most rewarding sections of his introduction, M. Coustillas tells the story of the "forgotten" manuscript which has been for more than thirty years the property of the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library in New York.

Next, we are presented with a scrupulous analysis of the two versions, which puts into relief the major transformations wrought by Gissing in 1901. To make these alterations clearer, M. Coustillas compares the two versions, first by tabulating the old and new sections for each "season" with the help of Roman numerals printed in a different way for the first and for the second versions. Then he gives a detailed account of the alterations and abridged passages one by one. Whenever a passage has been cut out in the second version, we have a summing up of its contents and of the tone in which it had been written: bitterness, disillusion, regret, irony, rage or rancour. If a theme has been suppressed from one section to become the object of another, it is of course mentioned; even the minutest alterations: allusions, anecdotes, protests or fears are not overlooked but summarized. If an omitted passage was related to the *Commonplace Book*, we are informed of it; and if it was a quotation it is likewise recorded. Indeed we have a distinct view of the first version. The only regret we are likely to feel is that such engrossing revelation should be exhibited as an enumeration referred only to figures. We resent the lack of context. To print the alterations with the notes and to inform us of their place by means of references would certainly have enabled the reader to better realize the differences of contents and tone in the course of his reading, but on the other hand, he would have missed this comprehensive view of the first version in its totality.

Curiously enough, authorities on Gissing have until now cared little about the genesis of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. However, if the form was new the writing of a book of essays had long been in Gissing's mind. It can be traced as far back as 1887 in a letter to his sister Ellen. It is precisely about this time that he began recording material for his essays in a notebook, the *Commonplace Book* edited by Mr. Korg. In his introduction Mr. Korg brought to light the source of most of *Ryecroft's* sections. His survey of the similarities and differences between the two books was a first attempt to determine what was fictional and what was autobiographical in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. But M. Coustillas enlarged the investigation, as the result of the discovery of two new documents: the first version of *The Private Papers* as seen above, and another notebook written between 1895 and 1902 which was recently acquired by the Huntington Library in California.

In this *Memorandum Book*, one can already see a rough draft of "An Author at Grass"

together with the calculations, railway timetables, and thoughts and anecdotes related to the *Ryecroft Papers*.

Consequently, the great originality of the present edition by M. Coustillas consists in a

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“methodical, deliberate research of the writer’s inspiration” through its three main stages, namely:

1. The first jottings in the rough, which can be found in the pages of the *Commonplace Book* and the *Memorandum Book*.
2. The first version of 1900.
3. The second version of 1901.

For this purpose a wide range of references and pieces of information is to be found in abundant and meaningful notes gathered at the end of the volume, almost forming a section by themselves.

M. Coustillas has already accustomed us to informative and illuminating footnotes with his edition of *The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*. In the present case much is to be learnt once again from the fifty pages of notes. On the one hand we find the usual information

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about quotations, literary allusions or reminiscences. Yet, on the other hand, there is not a thought, feeling, memory, state of mind or opinion uttered by Ryecroft which is not minutely compared with his creator’s life and various writings. Of course they are referred to the principal documents mentioned above, but also to many other sources where comparison is particularly convincing, chiefly in the case of such an author as Gissing whose many writings still remain unpublished, and to which M. Coustillas has had access.

Undoubtedly, the devoted reader of Gissing will enjoy reading these notes which, in addition to their informative value, will always be likely to awaken a personal echo, a further remark or comparison. So, when Ryecroft, in Autumn XXI recalls his London days and the description of a sunset “on Battersea Bridge” he wrote for a paper, we are immediately reminded by the notes of an essay of the same title published by Gissing in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on 30th November 1883. We are even informed that he wrote a similar one in the same period, entitled “Along Shore,” as yet unpublished. These are interesting details, it is true, but the confirmed Gissingite will probably also think of a passage in *Isabel Clarendon* (Vol. II, p. 195) which was inspired by the same kind of circumstances. In this book, Ada Warren, after strolling along the Thames at sunset as Gissing had done and as Ryecroft will do, writes an essay entitled “River Twilight” which is accepted by *The Tatler*, and she experiences the same raptures as Gissing and Ryecroft on seeing her work published.

In the same way, the Gissing reader will appreciate a particularly long note devoted to Puritanism and prudery, and motivated by Ryecroft’s statements in Winter XXII; but he will almost certainly think of Mallard’s statement in *The Emancipated*:

“If ever I have children, they shall from the first be taught a natural morality, and not the conventional [...] I’ll have no contemptible prudery in my house.”

A statement which perfectly corroborates Gissing’s opinions as worded in the *Commonplace Book* and also as reported by Morley Roberts.

However, this does not mean that M. Coustillas fails to refer to the novels himself. In fact he does so many a time, and it cannot be denied that one of the major interests of his notes is that they enable him to use his erudition and his intimate knowledge of detail and background to provide a penetrating study of Gissing's craftsmanship. A new light has been flashed on the themes and methods of the writer, and there is no doubt in the mind of M. Coustillas that the revisions of 1901 was justified, even if it accentuates the differences between Ryecroft and Gissing. We have no room for complaint, for the revision was due to technical and artistic

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motives: a deliberate attempt at suppressing harsh notes, at silencing personal rancours, in order to obtain a certain uniformity in the tone more in keeping with Ryecroft's quiet life and character. The result indeed has only to meet with our approval, for Ryecroft, though based on the personality of Gissing, is not Gissing, but rather an effort of the imagination, "an aspiration," as his creator wrote to Frederic Harrison. That is the reason why M. Coustillas, in his Introduction and notes, particularly approves of the suppression of the masochistic passages, and his edition gives him the opportunity to allocate *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* their right place in Gissing's literary production.

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One has to be cautious about Roberts' and Wells' declarations, because they liked to consider their friend as a misled novel-writer. In fact Gissing had the "artistic impulse" from the beginning, and M. Coustillas is right to remind us of the lines he wrote precisely when his first novel had just been rejected by the publishers:

"Yes, I *do* feel sure that fiction is my forte; every day more sure of it.
[...] You will see that I shall force my way into the army of novelists."

He has indeed forced his way into their ranks, and it is in the "army of novelists," that his true place lies.

"L'été de la Saint-Martin ne saurait éclipser les pleins feux du printemps et de l'été"

as M. Coustillas so neatly words it in the last section of his introduction, which is a literary appreciation of the *Private Papers*. There the book is related to similar works in French and English literature, as far as the form and spirit are concerned. "As a bit of English", Gissing felt he had done something good, as he wrote to his friends Clara Collet and Bertz, and his impression was right. His prose is fine and quite in keeping with the wonderful calm and contentment of his hero, as well as with the tone of his favourite writers Izaak Walton and Walter Savage Landor. Some memories of his London days and some passionate descriptions of the English countryside are of exquisite, poignant appeal for the Gissing reader, as they act as a kind of counterpoint to so many passages in the novels.

How not to recapture, for instance, the atmosphere pervading the closing pages of *The Crown of Life* when we read in Winter XXIII, p. 482:

"I am in Wensleydale climbing from the rocky river that leaps amid broad pastures up to the rolling moor. *Up and up, till my feet brush through heather* and the grouse whirrs away before me. Under a glowing sky of summer, this air of the uplands has still a life which spurs to movement, which makes the heart bound. The dale is hidden; *I see only the brown and purple wilderness, cutting against the blue* with great round shoulders, and,

far away to the west, an horizon of sombre heights...”

Thanks to M. Coustillas the French reader will be able to appreciate how such a passage sounds in his native tongue, for the French translation offered by this edition is the first one, and it shows a remarkable skill in capturing the tone of Gissing’s style. M. Coustillas is undoubtedly aware of recent methods of translation as investigated in Vinay and Darbelnet’s book: *Stylistique comparée du français et de l’anglais*, and this knowledge, allied to great sensibility, leads to a most elaborate translation which takes great care in finding the right word as well as its right position in the French sentence. Importance is given to both rhythm and sounds. Let us

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take as an example the above mentioned passage and examine its translation:

Je suis dans Wensleydale, et, de la rivière rocailleuse qui bondit dans les vastes pâturages, je grimpe vers les ondulations de la lande. Je poursuis mon ascension; mes pieds froissent maintenant la brande et le coq de bruyère s’envole devant moi dans un vrombissement.

In the French text, the introduction of the conjunction “et” and the commas, together with the repetition of the pronoun “je” breaks the sentence into three parts, bringing about a smoother rhythm and stressing the idea of the climb by placing “Je grimpe” in a dominant position in the last part of the sentence. In the same way, the use of the semi-colon and the alteration of “till” into “maintenant” in the second sentence are an improvement both in rhythm and meaning if compared with a literal translation. “Maintenant,” on the one hand, avoids the heavy rendering “jusqu’à ce que mes pieds”, and the repetition of “Jusqu’à” in the last part of the sentence, while on the other hand, it shows, together with the semi-colon, that some progress has already been achieved in the ascent. This treatment of punctuation and connective devices is an indication of the translator’s respect for the logical tendencies of French as well as of his knowledge of the usually less obvious English constructions. One will also notice the choice of the verb “froisser” which is successful in suggesting both sound and movement, whereas “frôler” or “fouler” would have conveyed only a part of the idea expressed in “brush through.” But if M. Coustillas cares for accuracy in his rendering, he also cares for the evocative power of words: “brande” is far more suggestive than “bruyère” and quite in accordance with the poetic atmosphere of the text and the other two words “moor” and “wilderness”; it conjures up in the reader’s mind the vision of a large desolate expanse of terrain. As we can see from this passage, the translator succeeds in remaining on the same level as the English text, and yet the French version does not read at all like a translation because it is never unnecessarily literal, but follows a definitely French pattern satisfactory both for matter and style.

In the following lines:

“It was a bitter thought that, after so long and hard a struggle with unkindly circumstance, he might end his life as one of the defeated” (Preface, p. 102)

Après une lutte longue et difficile contre des circonstances défavorables, il *entrevoyait avec amertume le risque de terminer ses jours parmi les vaincus de la terre.*

The French sentence is improved by the verb “entrevoyait” which forges a link between the ideas expressed by the noun “thought” and the verb “might,” the idea of eventuality being on the other hand accentuated by the presence of the noun “le risque.” In this way the rendering of the “message” is improved while the addition of “de la terre” at the end of the sentence is allied

to a care for rhythm. In many sentences the translator shows his skill by taking the quality of the style in French and the desirable faithfulness to the English text equally into account. Cf. p. 142 and 143:

“I enjoyed without retrospect or forecast; I, the egoist in grain, forgot to scrutinize my own emotions, or to trouble my happiness by comparison with others’ happier fortune. It was a healthful time; it gave me a new lease of life, and taught me – in so far as I was teachable – how to make use of it.”

Dans ma joie, j’oubliais le passé et l’avenir; moi, l’égoïste invétéré je ne pensais plus à disséquer mes émotions ni à altérer mon bonheur en le comparant à la meilleure fortune d’autrui. Epoque salubre qui me donna un nouveau bail de vie et m’apprit – dans la mesure ou j’étais réceptif – à en faire usage.

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The satisfactory character of the transposition of a verb into a noun and of a preposition into a verb in the first sentence, so as to make the “message” more explicit are worth noting. Then, by suppressing “it was” and using a relative instead of repeating the pronoun “it,” the idea expressed in “Healthful time” is placed in a dominant position at the beginning of the sentence and thereby made more forceful.

At the end of Summer XXVII (p. 312), talking about Shakespeare and England where Rycroft confesses: “I cannot think of them apart,” it would have been possible to translate literally and to end the sentence with the adverb “séparément” or with “isolément,” but how much better the rendering: “Ma pensée est impuissante à les dissocier,” which has a more literary ring with the verb “dissocier” in a final position.

In short all the alterations we have noted so far illustrate how perfectly at home M. Coustillas is with the English text and the very atmosphere of the book. The alterations also underline the ease with which he handles his own language with his ever constant care for its style (choice and place of words, rhythm), and for its logic and precision.

In addition to his exceptionally valuable introduction and notes, M. Coustillas has compiled a bibliography which lists magazine and newspaper articles from 1904 to the present day in English, American, French and Japanese publications. This interesting bibliography is followed by a clear and helpful chronological table correlating the events in Gissing’s life and literary output with the work of his contemporaries and the events of his day.

In fact, here is a book which will be a credit to the Aubier-Montaigne publishing house, and of no little importance among the publications devoted to Gissing.

¹A quotation from Hegel that Gissing jotted down in his diary.

²Chapter VII: “Belles-Lettres and Veranilda,” p. 47.

³*The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz 1887-1903*, edited by Arthur C. Young. Constable, London, 1961, p. 289 (letter of 24 Oct. 1900). American edition: Rutgers, The State University, 1961.

Selected Recent Publications

- Bourcier, Elizabeth. "Gissing Studies," *Les Langues Modernes*, LXI, Jan-Feb. 1967, pp. 118-119. A review of Coustillas' *Les Carnets d'Henry Ryecroft*.
- C. S. C., Review of Coustillas' *Les Carnets d'Henry Ryecroft*. *Etudes Anglaises*, XIX, Jan.-March, 1967, pp. 96-98. Makes the suggestion that Gabrielle's French translation of *New Grub Street* be published.
- Davis, Oswald H., *George Gissing: A Study in Literary Leanings*, London, 1966.
- Gissing, George, *New Grub Street*, London, Bodley Head, 1967. 35s. Preface by John Gross.
- Rosengarten, Herbert J., "Gissing Studies," *Les Langues Modernes*, LXI, Jan.-Feb. 1967, pp. 118-119. A review of Coustillas' *Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*.
- Swinnerton, Frank, *George Gissing: A Critical Study*, Third Edition, with an introduction by the author. Kennikat Press, Port Washington, N.Y., 1966. A reprinting of Swinnerton's 1912 study.
- Vernier, J. P., "H. G. Wells Critique," *Etudes Anglaises*, XIX, Oct-Dec. 1966. Wells and Gissing are discussed, pp. 432-434.
- Young, Arthur C., "Poems by Thomas W. Gissing," *Rutgers University Library Journal*, XXX, December, 1966, pp. 23-26. Convincingly identifies Gissing's father as the author of the obscure *Margaret and Other Poems by an East Anglian*, a fact never mentioned by Gissing.

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