

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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Negotiating Gissing Manuscripts

Pierre Coustillas  
University of Madagascar

When Gissing died on December 28, 1903, all his literary papers were to pass into the hands of his brother, Algernon, whom he had named co-executor of his will with his friend Clara Collet. Although he had intended to alter some of its provisions after he became acquainted with Gabrielle Fleury, his will remained the document he had drafted in 1897 when he separated from Edith. All Gissing’s papers did not reach Algernon up in Northumberland easily. They were scattered at least in three places – at Wakefield, where lay the older batches; at Boulogne-sur-Seine, near Paris, in the flat he and Gabrielle had rented in 1901 prior to settling at Saint-Jean-de-Luz; and Ispoure, the Pyrenean village where death descended upon him as he was writing *Veranilda*. Of all these papers the easiest to recover were those left to the care of his mother and sisters in Yorkshire. They were in safe hands and their value would sooner or later be recognized in the salesroom. That all the relics that remained in France eventually reached Algernon’s home cannot be asserted and we may wonder whether the voluminous notes gathered by Gissing in the course of years did not perish with many papers that are known to have disappeared at Gabrielle’s death in 1954.

However that may be, the manuscripts of Gissing’s novels have survived; if not all of them at least the greater part. I have located the whereabouts of eighteen and those of as many published short stories, although doubtless a larger number of the latter have been preserved. Some catalogues of sales by auction in the interwar years give titles which must now be private collectors’ property. Not a few MSS of literary works which Gissing had never sought to publish

should be added to the list but these unlike many of the letters never entered a sale-room. They were traded off to some dealer in London who found ready American collectors.

Had it not been for Algernon's chronically straitened circumstances, the sale would have been delayed perhaps until after his own death, but necessity became so urgent in 1912 that the piecemeal yet steady sale began that same year. It should be recalled that George's brother had then for some twenty-five years been pursuing the career of an obscure novelist partly out of misplaced vanity. Not one of his books had run into a second edition and the sums he had obtained from his successive publishers – Hurst & Blackett, Hutchinson, Chatto & Windus, Methuen, Arrowsmith, John Long and F. V. White – had not even enabled him to maintain his wife and five children at starvation level. With a weary sigh, George had signed many cheques small or big, to pay his brother's debts or make it possible for him to rest mentally without the harassing prospect of creditors' bills to honor, and the sisters at Wakefield had contributed to the

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upkeep of Algernon's household in similar fashion. No wonder then that in 1912, when Gissing's name was in all reviews and newspapers owing to the controversy about Roberts' and Swinnerton's books, Algernon felt that the time was come to start selling the precious material left to his care since 1904.

He took this step very reluctantly as is testified by a letter he wrote to H. G. Wells in May. The relations between the two men had been tense since the affair of *Veranilda*, but Algernon pocketed his pride and asked Wells to lend him £50. If he could not repay the loan before the end of the year, he would sell the MSS. Whether Wells lent him the £50 or not is a matter of conjecture, but it is certain that the sale started shortly after Algernon's solicitation. In 1912, no less than six MSS were disposed of at the remarkably low price of eleven guineas each – they were those of *Denzil Quarrier*, *The Whirlpool*, *The Crown of Life*, *Thyrza*, *The Nether World* and *In the Year of Jubilee*. They were all acquired after laborious negotiations by the same dealer, Frank Redway, of Wimbledon. Some more went off at the same price in the following year – *Demos*, *The Emancipated*, *Our Friend the Charlatan*, *Isabel Clarendon*; but at length Algernon rebelled when Redway offered him only £20 for the MS of *Workers in the Dawn*, his brother's first published novel, a scarcity even in printed form. He then turned to another dealer, Walter T. Spencer of 27 New Oxford Street and did not have to regret it. Spencer was keener than Redway on the autograph material left by Gissing and offered better prices.

Among other things from Gissing's pen that passed into his hands were the manuscripts which he later described in his book *Forty Years in My Bookshop*. One of them, "All for Love," overlooked up to now, is 58 hand-written pages long and I have recently discovered one

interesting phase of its negotiation. Although Redway had repeatedly disappointed him Algernon chose to offer him this manuscript of which no mention occurs in Gissing's correspondence available either in print or in its original form. His letter, as well as that addressed a few days later to Mrs. Redway and hereafter reproduced, is transcribed from a photocopy kindly sent me by Mr. C. C. Kohler, the Dorking bookseller.

7th March '16

Fernleigh  
St. Mark's Avenue  
Leeds

Dear Mr. Redway,

I have found another old MS of George Gissing's for which I am going to ask offers. It is a long story of 58 pp. small quarto, very small writing, and dated Feb. 1880. It has the R. in the signature and must come just after "Workers in the Dawn." It is unpublished, so of course if I sell it I shall strictly reserve all copyright and right of reproduction. As a very early study I need not say I attach considerable value to it. Would you care to make an offer or inquire promptly of any American clients? At any rate money is not scarce in America! Whatever the offer I should want your cheque down as hitherto.

Yours very truly  
Algernon Gissing

I may mention there is a characteristic note by the author on the back of one of the pages as to dealing with "blackguards" when the MS had been returned to him in fragments!

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On the same day Algernon wrote to Walter T. Spencer a letter couched in similar terms, save for the reference to America's wealth. He must have received an encouraging reply by return of mail for, as the letter to Mrs. Redway shows, he seemed confident three days later that he could dispose of "All for Love" in another quarter. Algernon's correspondence with Redway had always been full of difficulties – the seller being compelled by his financial quandary to part with his treasures at a ridiculous price, the buyer taking full advantage of a situation Algernon did not even attempt to conceal. Algernon's memory of Redway doubtless was of a mixed character as he must have felt his poverty was unfairly played upon.

Fernleigh  
St. Mark's Avenue  
Leeds

10th March '16.

Dear Madam,

I am grieved to hear of Mr. Redway's death and sincerely sympathize with you in your loss. Though we had only done business by letter he told me of his weakness a year or two ago but I had no idea he was in danger of passing so soon. I do hope you will be able to do well with the stock in your hands.

I think the account I gave of the MS in my former letter will be enough for any collector interested in George Gissing's work. If communicating with any clients in America you might mention it but don't go to any expense in the matter as in these sad times mails are uncertain and if I get a good offer from others I have asked I might have disposed of the MS in the next few weeks.

Yours very truly,  
Algernon Gissing.

Mrs. Redway

On the next day Algernon wrote again to Spencer, with good results. He sold him "All for Love" as he had sold him the MSS of *Charles Dickens* and *By the Ionian Sea* in 1914. This short novel, which is really unlike anything Gissing wrote before or after is divided into fifteen chapters. It is a brave attempt to write an attractive tale with plenty of suspense. There are of course typical Gissing situations and the suspense arises from a no less typical Victorian predicament. Some elements of it were taken up in *Denzil Quarrier*, but in a completely different context. The background has nothing political about it; nor are we given any hints of the feminist aspirations later to be vented by the mysterious Mrs. Wade. The interest of the tale is rather to be found in Gissing's handling of (melo)dramatic situations than in the social message. The text of "All for Love," together with two essays and five short stories, forms the bulk of a critical edition of early unpublished material by Gissing which I have prepared and hope to bring out in book form soon.

Sixty-five years after the novelist's death, there remain a good many minor mysteries to be solved in his life and literary activities. Who, I wonder, has ever read "Joseph" or "A Freak of Nature," two short stories which achieved publication in obscure magazines no copy of which seem to have survived in libraries? Who shall discover the proofs of *Mrs. Grundy's Enemies*? It would seem that the time when Gissing manuscripts were currently negotiated has closed for ever and there will be some of us to repeat after Victor Hugo: "Je suis né trop tard dans un siècle trop vieux."

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Book Review

Jacob Korg  
University of Washington

*Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction.* Critical essays on some English and American novels. Edited by David Howard, John Lucas and John Goode. Barnes and Noble, New York. 1967.

It is the attractive thesis of these six essays by three different authors that a number of nineteenth-century novels attempted to mediate the division between the established ideals of bourgeois culture and later attitudes generated by the conditions of life in industrial civilization. These are the "tradition" and "tolerance" of the title. The relevance of Gissing's work to this transition is inescapable, and two of the essays which make up the volume, both by John Goode, have to do with it. One of them is an extended study of *The Nether World*; the other is an examination of the debate between Sir Walter Besant and Henry James on the nature of the novel, in which Gissing appears as a significant instance. The attention of this review will be confined to the material on Gissing, though the volume contains many interesting considerations about an unusual range of novels written on both sides of the Atlantic. The other essays develop the book's theme in terms of Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* and Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* (by David Howard), and Dickens' *Dombey and Son* and Mrs. Gaskell's novels (by John Lucas).

The introduction, which is signed by all three essayists, offers the book as "frankly polemical," and the nature and limitations of this approach appear immediately as the effort of the writers in question to link old and new is branded a failure, and as this failure is ascribed to "deliberate limiting of imaginative intelligence." It is pleasant to have Gissing's treatment of the problem ranked above that of James in *The Princess Casamassima*, but when the reason for James' inadequacy is given as "sentimental refuge in ignorance," little is done to allay the skepticism such a claim naturally arouses. The novelists, it seems, are to be judged according to their success in anticipating the knowledge future generation would have about the social conditions of their time.

While this approach does not inspire confidence, the formulation of Gissing's position given in the introduction is both illuminating and convincing. Gissing, it is said, was not sufficiently aware of the nature of social change. "This means that he is never completely certain whether he is offering a fixed metaphysical image or a changeable historical one. Partly

this is because of his personal predilection for a symbolist philosopher like Schopenhauer and an inability to sort out whether his own alienation is from the social system or the rest of humanity". One would want to qualify this very apt characterization of one of Gissing's dilemmas by adding that he was exceptionally sensitive to certain kinds of social change, such as the incursion of advertising and the kinds of social change, such as the incursion of advertising and the rise of the well-educated, but alienated young man. He could also be vigorously critical of some of the basic tenets of bourgeois culture, such as money value, religion, and imperialist ideals. But there is no question that, on the whole, the things he valued most were associated with the middle-class way of life, and that he opposed the democratization of society. The attitude of bourgeois authors who tried, and failed to meet the new conditions is described by the phrase, "defeated tolerance", which applies exceptionally well to Gissing and his confrontation with social problems.

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John Goode's essay on *The Nether World* is the most sustained critical discussion ever devoted to this novel. Mr. Goode has easy access to the social, historical and literary context of Gissing's work and has given more attention to the conflicts and motivations of the characters than any previous critic. He has tried to formulate the presuppositions that control Gissing's presentation of poverty with precision. His analysis of Gissing's depiction of the life of the poor seems perfectly accurate. This is a world governed by laws operating from without, but it is anarchic within; the people are helpless victims of these laws, and are therefore not subject to moral judgment. The better people try to offer resistance, but only suffer for it. Want, toil, and narrowness of means warp human possibilities so grotesquely that Jane's inheritance, Bob's talent, Kirkwood's ambition and love for Clara, and all the other potentialities for good that arise are ironically shaped into afflictions. Mr. Goode's treatment of these and many other features of the novel will attract and inform all who are interested in Gissing; but it also invites discussion and debate.

Mr. Goode begins with a brief review of Gissing's attitudes toward socialism and the part positivism played in them. According to Mr. Goode, his rejection of socialism was due, not only to an innate, if lately-discovered conservatism, but also to the positivist's distrust of a system based on metaphysical foundations. The observation that "ordinary radicalism belongs to the metaphysical polity" may seem too casual a way of linking socialism with Comtian categories, but it is not an unfair way of representing Gissing's opinion of it. He felt that socialism was based upon an unverifiable, or "metaphysical" conviction that human nature was essentially good, and recorded his most cogent objection to it in his *Commonplace Book*, quoting Herbert

Spencer's aphorism, "There is no political alchemy by which you can get golden conduct out of leaden instincts," and adding "... if Society were ready for pure Socialism, *it would not be such as it now is*". Mr. Goode's account of *Demos* as a conflict between the theological approach of Eldon and the metaphysical one of Mutimer provides an excellent link between the novel and the traces of the positivist habit of thought that lingered in Gissing's mind. Nevertheless, there is something wrong with casting positivism and socialism in opposing roles in Gissing's mind, for he embraced them at the same time, and left them at the same time.

Mr. Goode identifies the main theme of *The Nether World* as "scarcity." "The central irony of the novel is that, in a world dominated by scarcity, talent is either misdirected or superfluous, and that it is precisely the scarcity which creates the waste." "The only real villain in the book is the objective fact of scarcity." It is hard to see how an objective fact can be a villain, and "scarcity" is, in fact, a concept so lacking in human or moral values that it cannot be of much use as a critical tool. No doubt their pinched and starved existence is the overmastering condition that makes the people in *The Nether World* what they are, but it is necessary to go beyond this obvious fact if the situation is to be exhibited in some depth and detail. Mr. Goode often refers to the dehumanization which Gissing emphasizes throughout *The Nether World*. While this is hardly less obvious, it seems at least to be more meaningful as a theme. The people, Gissing often asserts and implies, have been reduced to the condition of animals, and the necessities that have accomplished this are "brute forces". In reverting so often to this metaphor, Gissing is implying unstated notions about human nature, and social forces. It would be useful and interesting to ask what these notions are.

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This is not to say that Mr. Goode does not make use of the theme, as he has identified it, to go beneath the surface of the story. At this point one might justifiably regret that he does not accept the admission made in the introduction that Gissing's social analysis is inadequate, for his procedure is to evaluate Gissing's art according to its historical validity, and to justify it on the basis of "polemical" views forced on the novel. For example, Mr. Goode explains the "scarcity" that pervades the nether world as the work of an exploiting class. While there can be no doubt of this as a historic truth, it is a mistake to find any awareness of it in *The Nether World*. Mr. Goode sees the soup-kitchen as the representative in the novel of the forces of exploitation, and ascribes the rebelliousness of the poor who memorably refuse to accept the soup to their knowledge that the energy of the woman who supervises it "derives from the recognition of the necessity of the nether world." But the soup-kitchen prospered for years and the people willingly accepted its dispensations until it was conducted in a way which infringed

upon their self-respect. Then they protested until the former way of doing things was restored. If the soup-kitchen is to be regarded as an arm of the capitalist system, Gissing would have to feel that the poor approved of this ancilla to exploitation, for he tells us that when they upbraided Jane, who worked in it, they did so in the insolent manner of “the degraded poor receiving charity which they have come to regard as a right.” Mr. Goode’s views about the soup-kitchen as a social instrument, and the relation of rich and poor are unexceptionable; but they are not Gissing’s views, and they do not appear in *The Nether World*.

The fact that the social analysis Mr. Goode presents is perfectly relevant to historical facts, but not to *The Nether World*, does not, however, mean that Gissing’s novel is inaccurate. It means, simply, that it is a novel, and not a diagnosis. Gissing, as the introduction states, did not have a coherent view of society as a whole. By the time of *The Nether World* he realized this, and was ready to follow in earnest the objective policy he had claimed to be following in *The Unclassed*, that of making his novel, “not a social essay, but a study of a certain group of human beings.” His disgust with the poor is, to be sure, unmistakable at certain junctures, but Mr. Goode ingeniously reconciles this with the generally objective impression by pointing out that the presentation of human lives which the novel as a whole amounts to is more effective than the descriptions of individual characters. He was content to see the novelist’s responsibility as that of conveying the impression life made upon him, without questioning or explaining it even if it involved contradictions. Thus, while certain causalities in Gissing’s view of character do operate in *The Nether World*, he does not try to determine ultimate causes or seek out the guilty. No one who is responsible for what is happening appears in the novel. Mr. Goode fixes upon Miss Lant, the supervisor of the soup-kitchen, as a representative of the ruling classes, but she is a poor surrogate for capitalism. In fact, one of the most despairing qualities of what Mr. Goode accurately calls a “depressing” novel is its helplessness in the face of the facts it depicts. Normally the novel, particularly the realistic novel, foregoes metaphysical or theological pretensions, but *The Nether World*, perhaps involuntarily, conveys a powerful sense of fatalism.

Mr. Goode sometimes seems to acknowledge this, for, following the perception which H. G. Wells contributed to Gissing criticism in his *Contemporary Review* article of 1897, he remarks that the people of *The Nether World* are controlled by “an unknown and impersonal force.” When he identifies this force with “industrial capitalism” or “free enterprise,” however, he is improving on Gissing’s own analysis. Mr. Goode is, of course, entirely right to see in *The Nether World* a final eloquent declaration on Gissing’s part that man is molded by economic

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reality, and that character is, to a great extent, dependent upon cultural opportunities. Perhaps it



is too much to say, as Mr. Goode does in his second essay, that in Gissing, “Environment *totally* prescribes the individual,” for Gissing’s people are not like Zola’s, and seem subject to a lesser degree of determinism. The discriminations developed in George Levine’s article, “Determinism and Responsibility in the Works of George Eliot” (*PLMA*, 1963) might usefully be applied to Gissing’s treatment of the interplay between character and environment. But Mr. Goode is at least safe in saying, “Poverty then, predestines and defines personality in *The Nether World*, to a degree of hardness and completeness which radically differentiates it from any of Dickens’ novels.” Because of this, he says, Gissing refuses to judge the abased poor he depicts. In the case of Pennyloaf Candy’s incompetence as a housekeeper, “ethical considerations, personal judgments, are pointless,” and though one may criticize the drunken Mrs. Candy for her vice, “blame can be no more than a sick laugh.”

Though Gissing refused to enter into an analysis of this determinism, he was willing to show that the people in *The Nether World* are helpless before the mysterious social laws that victimize them. In one of his valuable perceptions, Mr. Goode points out that the novel is different in this respect from the social novels written earlier in the century. Among the works examined in Louis Cazamian’s *Le roman social en Angleterre*, the idea that man can re-shape and reform society prevailed. But this attitude changed later in the century, as various measures that were tried failed to improve the condition of the poor or to mitigate the effects of competition and economic cycles. As a result, Gissing, in his maturity, adopted a skeptical tone toward social reform, and his skepticism is nowhere more clear (or more painfully jocose) than in a passage of authorial commentary which Mr. Goode, led astray by his notion that Gissing was engaged in a war against the exploiting classes, unfortunately misreads. His quotation is seriously incomplete:

To humanise the multitude two things are necessary – two things of the simplest kind conceivable. In the first place, you must effect an entire change of economic conditions: a preliminary step of which every tyro will recognize the easiness; then you must bring to bear on the new order of things the constant influence of music. Does not the prescription recommend itself? It is jesting in earnest. For, work as you will, there is no chance of a new and better world until the old be utterly destroyed. Destroy, sweep away, prepare the ground...

*The Nether World*, Ch. XII

“If we are to take this passage seriously as Gissing’s own point of view...,” comments Mr. Goode, apparently meaning “literally” as well as “seriously,” Gissing’s ideas must be close to

those of William Morris. But it is hard to see how anyone can miss the irony of the passage. Surely the exaggeration and the “tyro” tell us that Gissing does not for a moment believe a word of what he is saying. As a matter of fact, the passage is introduced with the ponderously ironic, “Well, as every one must needs have his panacea for the ills of society, let me inform you of mine,” and it ends with the inflated, “... then shall music the holy, music the civiliser, breathe over the renewed earth, and with Orphean magic raise in perfected beauty the towers of the City of Man.” Clearly, Gissing had not changed his opinion of Morris; he was attacking Utopians, violent revolutionaries animated by vague ideals, and the aesthetic idealism of his own youth in a bitterly ironic outburst.

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“Gissing’s Hell,” says Mr. Goode, “is a world of individual biographies interacting upon one another not by developed personal relationships but by the fortuitous cruelty of the anarchic context in which the biographies are shaped.” It is too bad that this excellent formulation is obscured by an insistence that the novel also attempts an anatomy of society. The helplessness of people in the social crucible is, as we have noted, a reversal of the picture presented in the idealistic novels of the earlier Victorian period. Mr. Goode very interestingly suggests that this reversal is at the root of the kind of novel Gissing wrote. The inversions and parodies of conventional Victorian fiction that he points out in *The Nether World’s* treatment of its love affairs and other matters are a way of denying conventional social attitudes. It is a case in which social insights are expressed through literary and aesthetic effects.

Gissing enters the final essay of the volume, “The Art of Fiction: Walter Besant and Henry James,” as an instance useful for comparison both with Besant and James. But the first comparison is with Dickens, and in developing the point that Gissing took a somewhat more enlightened view of character than Dickens, and insisted on allowing for environmental influences, Mr. Goode is again bringing forward a valuable contrast between Gissing and his forerunners. Historical processes were felt to be operating, character seemed to count for less, and moral responsibility was less easily assessed.

In dealing with the question of why Gissing and Besant (who were compared with each other in their own time) should take so different a view of the chances of success in the struggle against poverty, Mr. Goode turns to the interesting subject of the novelist’s relation with his audience in the ’eighties, and the advantage sentimental optimism was bound to have over more austere novelists like Gissing and Hardy. Besant’s ideas about fiction, as they appear in his novels and his 1884 lecture, “The Art of Fiction,” are described as pragmatic, favoring didacticism and specific remedies for social reform, and opposed to self-conscious emphasis on

artistic form. More interestingly, Besant declared that the art of fiction was really a science, subject to determinable laws, and this assertion stimulated the famous reply by Henry James which is the chief subject of Mr. Goode's essay. His analysis of James' crucial statement will interest all students of fiction; Gissing is mentioned in it because he shared James' view that the artist needed some measure of independence from public taste, particularly from the prevailing Grundyism of the time.

In the discussion of *The Princess Casamassima*, which supports the comparison between James and Gissing made in the introduction to the volume, Mr. Goode prefers Gissing because he knew more about working-class life, and was free of the ignorance Mr. Goode sees in James' treatment of the revolutionary cause in *The Princess*. James thought working-class politics nothing but "anarchism," says Mr. Goode. In adopting the bourgeois view, "James is much more frankly admitting his incomplete grasp of the situation than, for example, Gissing, who establishes a working-class hero in order to graft on him the most acquisitive bourgeois values through the factitious device of making him suddenly become a man of property". (This hero is Mutimer, of *Demos*.) If Gissing knew more about the poor than James, it is doubly significant that his attitude toward working-class political efforts was at least as hostile as that of James. In a startling formulation, Mr. Goode suggests that "Culture and anarchy is the dialectic of *Demos*..." and the moral conclusions of this dialectic are similar to those of *The Princess*. To James, says Mr. Goode, "society is culture, poverty is anarchy." A better formulation of Gissing's view could hardly be desired.

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#### Gissing Scenes and People

Denise Le Mallier

In an unpublished letter to Clara Collet dated from Fourchambault, November 2, 1900, George Gissing wrote: "... Gabrielle sends her love. She is much enjoying her stay here among scenes and people she has known from childhood."

Nowhere else that we know of in his letters or his diary does Gissing speak of "scenes and people" he mentions here. The lines are laconic and do not betoken great interest or sympathy on his part for "Le Chasnay," the house where he was staying, or for Gabrielle's cousin, the Eustaches, who were his hosts.

A few months later, in June, 1901, his visit to Tazières, situated about a mile from Chasnay, seems to have made a better impression on him. That other cousin of Gabrielle's,

Marie Saglio, who owned Tazières, was an “odd woman” of the higher type. Intellectual, cultured and charming, she no doubt came nearer Gissing’s ideal. That he found her congenial is proved by the messages he sends her in letters to Gabrielle (from Arcachon) and the dedication “To my cousin Marie Saglio” on the first page of *By the Ionian Sea*.

Gissing had known Tazières in the summer time, when the weather and surroundings must have been at their best, but November is a chill and gloomy season to be at Le Chasnay and we know how sensitive he was to external conditions. More or less ailing in health and hampered by domestic and financial cares from England, he must have been all the more depressed by bad weather and the dullness of the sky.

I was not yet born then, so I am a bad judge; yet, I have often wondered how it was that the Eustaches, who were my parents, did not form stronger ties of friendship with George Gissing. My mother was English by birth, both she and my father spoke the language perfectly. He was a painter and also something of a poet. Both were lovers of Nature and of books. But, after their rather late marriage, they had come to live in the old country home and taken up farming. This no doubt absorbed much of their energies and thoughts, and the fiction they read in their leisure hours was of the lighter kind – stories with happy endings – fashionable then, but ... not Gissingian at all. Perhaps that accounts for the lack of real understanding between them and their rather retiring and mysterious guest. But I cannot help thinking that those friends at Le Chasnay would have opened their generous hearts and – who knows – become “Gissingites” as their daughter was to be in later years. My mother always told me that “cousin George” was a gentle, rather melancholy man, and that, once, coming upon him unawares, she found him with his head in his hands, murmuring: “Oh, my poor children!” So she suspected his troubles, but was too discreet to question him.

These reminiscences came into my mind this morning when waking in the old four-poster bed of an upper room of Chasnay, the same room that the Gissings occupied in November 1900, and which we call “the Gissing room.” My husband and I are fond of it for that reason and also because it commands the best view of the country around. From the west window and balcony, one can gaze at the meadows with the cattle grazing, and, further, at the river Loire gleaming between sand banks and willow trees. Further still, the dark woods of the Berry mark the

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horizon line. The house is many centuries old and so are some of the huge trees we see from the two north windows of this room. They make a pleasant screen between us and Fourchambault, a manufacturing town which might have furnished Gissing with material for literature, however repellent he may have found it.

Here Gabrielle came home to die in April, 1954. And, through her will, we now possess all the books by which we have learnt to know Gissing and the secrets of his life. They are now before my eyes, on the leather-bordered shelves of his own bookcase: first, some 50 volumes of his works, many of which are first editions; then the classics and contemporary novels he most loved; then travel and study books, most of them with his name penned on the front page. Last, there are modern books about him. And on the top of the bookcase stands a rustic amphora we bought on the Cosenza pot-market when we toured by the Ionian Sea.

A photograph of Gissing reading, dedicated to Gabrielle, is framed nearby. The drawing of him by Will Rothenstein adorns the writing table between a photo of George Meredith and one of Gabrielle in widow's weeds with the dog, "Bijou," in her arms. The furnishing of the room is the same as in 1900: the tall oak cupboard (where we keep our Gissing archives), the bed already mentioned, a large oil portrait of Gabrielle's great-grand-mother in a peaked bonnet hangs above the dressing table. From the window of the dressing-room looking south, the sun pours in.

It is April now. The rooks are nesting in the great elm and the chestnut trees are blooming. Birds of different kinds come to peck at seeds on the window sills. And that reminds me of an anecdote of Gissing's visit here. There was at the time an old servant who had previously worked in England and could speak a little English. One morning, when bringing in the Gissing breakfast tray, she was asked what the English word was for "merle." How proud she was to answer "Blackbird"! And Gissing must have had a certain pleasure in hearing repeated his pet name for Gabrielle.

Perhaps we may hope that, after all, Gissing retained a not unpleasant memory of Le Chasnay. Perhaps his spirit and Gabrielle's, peaceful at last, haunt this room from time to time. Perhaps that is why, on this April morning, a blackbird is singing so joyously in the lilac bush down below.

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### Publications

Recent, Forthcoming, In Progress, Proposed

Pierre Coustillas has been even more productive than usual. His volume of collected articles on Gissing is scheduled for publication by Cass in the spring of this year, and should be available soon. His article, "Collecting George Gissing," has appeared in the first number of the new periodical, *Book Collecting and Library Monthly*. Another article, "The Stormy Publication of Gissing's *Veranilda*," which promises to clarify the confused conditions surrounding the appearance and reception of Gissing's posthumous novel, is soon to appear in the *Bulletin of the*

*New York Public Library*. Still full of energy, he has agreed to edit a series of letters from Gissing to Edward Clodd for future publication.

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*Il Vittoriano Solitario in Calabria ed Altri Saggi*, (Mondo Letterario, Milan) contains three essays in Italian by Francesco Badolato. The title essay (as far as your non-Italian-reading editor can make out) is a discussion of *By the Ionian Sea* with information about Gissing's reading in connection with his trip to Calabria. The second, and by far the longest essay, is a study of *Coriolanus*. The last, entitled "Gissingiana," is a notice of the following recent Gissing items: Korg's *George Gissing*, Coustillas' edition of *The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*, Oswald Davis' *George Gissing: A Study in Literary Leanings*, and Coustillas' bilingual edition of the Ryecroft papers, *Les Carnets d'Henry Ryecroft*.

The Bodley Head *New Grub Street*, published in 1967 with an excellent introduction by John Gross (35 shillings) is soon to be followed by a Penguin edition of Gissing's most-reprinted novel. It is the only recent appearance of the novel in hard covers, though the Riverside Edition, normally distributed as a paperback, is also available in this form. Mr. Gross' introduction begins, "George Gissing is one of the permanent odd men out of literature," and, joining what seems to be becoming something of a fashion, characterizes *New Grub Street* as an anti-novel, saying, "it reads like a Victorian *contre-roman*, a fictional outburst against Fiction." A misprint in the "Biographical Note" (which says nothing whatever about Gabrielle Fleury) gives the publication date of *Workers in the Dawn* as 1888.

"Proud Pen-Pusher," a review of the Bodley Head edition of *New Grub Street*, by Anthony Curtis, appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* of May 21, 1967. Other notices of this reprint were "Middleman" by William Trevor in *The Listener* of September 14, 1967, and a notice listed under "Reprints" on page 650 of *British Book News*, August, 1967.

*Charles Booth's London*, ed. Albert Fried and Richard M. Elman (New York, 1968) is a selection of excerpts from the great factual report about the poor of London in Gissing's time. Booth recommended *Demos* as one of the few novels that told the truth about the conditions he investigated. The book is reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review*, February 4th, 1968. With the review appears an excellent picture, dated 1886, showing a crowd of the poor besieging a soup kitchen of the kind described in *The Nether World*.

### Notice

The *Newsletter* has entered into an agreement with AMS Press for the distribution of back numbers and bound sets. This agreement will make it possible to keep the whole of the run of the *Newsletter*, from Volume 1, number 1, up to the current number, in print. It will also make permanently bound sets available for Libraries. Libraries and others needing back numbers or wishing to order complete sets should apply to: AMS Press, 56 East 13th Street, New York, N.Y. 10003, USA.

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### Some Notes on the Titles of Gissing's Novels

P. F. Kropholler  
Paris

Gissing sometimes had difficulties with the titles of his novels. More than once he rejected an originally chosen title after or during the writing of a book. Five of his novels bear the name of the principal character (*Isabel Clarendon*, *Thyrza*, *Denzil Quarrier*, *Veranilda*, and *Will Warburton*). The number might have been greater, as *Born in Exile* was to be called *Godwin Peak* and *A Life's Morning* was to receive the title of *Emily*. *In the Year of Jubilee* was originally called *Miss Lord of Camberwell*. On the other hand, *The Radical Candidate* was renamed *Denzil Quarrier*.

An episode in Chapter XI of *New Grub Street* suggests that Gissing regarded this type of title as a kind of "testimonium paupertatis." When Reardon was completely exhausted after completing a novel, "after a few minutes' feeble search he simply took the name of the chief female character, Margaret Home. That must do for the book."

The most striking title he invented was undoubtedly *New Grub Street*. It admirably suggests poverty and literature in a modern setting. The title impressed Gissing's contemporary Walter Besant to such an extent that Besant used it for a literary column in *The Author*. Gissing complained to Bertz, however, that Besant had misunderstood the book.

Nine years afterwards the title was referred to in a book by the popular humorist, Jerome K. Jerome. In *Three Men on the Bummel* (published in 1900) he wrote:

Dickens and Ouida (for your folk who imagine that the literary world is bounded by the prejudices of New Grub Street, would be surprised

and grieved at the position occupied abroad by this at-home-sneered-at-lady) may have helped still further to popularize it. (Sc. a knowledge of the English language on the Continent.)

Jerome seems to use the expression here as equivalent of what we now call "high-brow literature." This would imply that he, too, was the victim of a misunderstanding.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### New Address

I will be visiting Professor at the University of Maryland next year, and the *Newsletter* will be published there until further notice. The new address is Department of English, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20740. A journal of possible interest to *Newsletter* readers is already on the scene at Maryland, and I am happy to reprint the following:

The Department of English at the University of Maryland announces the publication of CONRADIANA. Devoted to the study of every aspect and phase of the life and work of Joseph Conrad, CONRADIANA will appear three times a year. Critical articles, bibliographical studies, explications, reviews, appreciations, translations, reprints and similar materials will be published. The annual subscription price of \$3.00 per year should be addressed to CONRADIANA, Department of English, University of Maryland, etc. J. Korg

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