

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 VIII, Number 1
January, 1972

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The New Edition of *The Odd Women*

A review copy of the Norton paperback edition of *The Odd Women* (N610, \$1.95) reached the editor just in time to be mentioned in the October issue. This edition should be on the shelves of all Gissingites. The text which has been used is that of the Blond/Stein and Day edition of 1968, but it has been revised as a casual glance at page 214 will show. The few words which had been skipped by the printers of the former edition have duly been restored.

The book has a short biographical note which is correct in all respects but one—it states that Gissing was expelled from Owens College “as an indirect result of a disastrous marriage.” After reading on the back cover a very appropriate judgment of Walter Allen to the effect that “in *The Odd Women* [Gissing] achieved one of the very few novels in English that can be compared with those of the French naturalists who were his contemporaries,” the potential buyer is invited to

Editorial Board

Pierre Coustillas, Editor, University of Lille
Shigeru Koike, Tokyo Metropolitan University
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Editorial correspondence should be sent to the editor:
10, rue Gay-Lussac, 59-LA MADELEINE, France
and all other correspondence to: C. C. KOHLER,
141 High Street, Dorking, Surrey, England.

Subscriptions

Private Subscribers: 62½p per annum (\$1.50)

Libraries: £1.25 per annum (\$3.00)

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peruse this very fair description of the book:

Five odd women—women without husbands—are the subject of this powerful novel, graphically set in Victorian London, by a writer whose

perceptions about people, particularly women, would be remarkable in any age and are extraordinary in the 1890s. The story concerns the choices that five different women make or are forced to make, and what those choices imply about men's and women's place in society and relationship to each other.

Alice and Virginia Madden, suddenly left adrift by the death of their improvident father, must take grinding and humiliating "genteel" work. Pretty, vulnerable, and terrified of sharing their fate, their younger sister Monica accepts a proposal of marriage from a man who gives her financial security but drives her to reckless action by his insane jealousy.

Interwoven with their fortunes are Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn, who are dedicating their lives to training young women for independent and useful lives, for emotional as well as economic freedom. Feminine and spirited, they are seeking not to overthrow men but to free both sexes from everything that distorts or depletes their humanity—including, if necessary, marriage. Into their lives comes Mary's engaging and forceful cousin Everard Barfoot, and as he and Rhoda become locked in an increasingly significant and passionate struggle, Rhoda finds out through the refining fire what "love" sometimes means, and what it means to be true to herself.

Paperbacks as a rule are sparingly reviewed, but it is doubtless a good sign, as an American correspondent informs us, that the volume was prominently listed in the *Saturday Review* as one of the important new paperbacks, together with an approving one-sentence comment. In these days of Women's Liberation, the book is bound to reach a new class of readers, witness the article by Gillian Tindall in the *New Statesman* of June 25, mentioned in our July number. The following list of English and American editions reflects something of the fortune of the book:

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1893 (Lawrence & Bullen, Macmillan, and Heinemann's Colonial Library), 1894 (Lawrence & Bullen), 1901 (A. H. Bullen), 1905 (A. H. Bullen), 1907 (Nelson), 1911 (Sidgwick & Jackson), 1915 (Sidgwick & Jackson), 1968 (Blond, Stein & Day), 1969 (AMS Press), 1971 (Norton, George J. McLeod). – P.C.

Gissing in Sale-Rooms

P. Coustillas

A number of important Gissing items and items of Gissingiana were recently offered for sale in New York and in London. To all appearances none of the lots had hitherto reached a sale-room. The Catalogue of the Parke-Bernet Galleries for the public auction of November 23, 1971 describes the following pieces:

- 21 A.Ms., 4 pages folio, with a few corrections, of an essay on "Poetry," written while a student at Owens College in Manchester.

Other essays dating from the same period are held by the Berg Collection and the Yale University Library.

- 22 An early A. L.s., 3 pages 8vo, to his father Thomas Waller Gissing, Seascale, Jan. 5, 1869. Written at the age of 12, the letter described a vacation he is having on the West Coast of England.
Jan. is almost certainly a mistake for June. The same problem occurs with regard to a letter of the same year published in the *Letters to Members of His Family*.
- 23 2 A.L.s., 6 pages 8vo, to his son Walter; Epsom, Sept. 4 and 10, 1897; with one envelope. Gissing discusses a trip he is taking to Italy and mentions plans to visit his son.
The bulk of Gissing's letters to his elder son is at Yale. These two fill a gap shortly before he left his wife for good.
- 24 Gissing, Thomas Waller. Autograph commonplace book, initialled "TWG," 112 pages 8vo, containing quotations from his reading and also an original two-page sketch on Nature.

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Gissing, William W. A.Ms., 18 pages 8vo, of an account written out for George of a country ramble made by his brothers William and Algernon during the Easter holidays of 1877.

The material offered for sale at Sotheby's on December 14, 1971, which has been known to me for some years, came from one of Gabrielle Fleury's albums of autographs, which has become the property of M. Robert Le Mallier. Lot 695 consisted of 8 pages of the manuscript of *Veranilda*, including the last two pages as printed in the book, and six discarded pages, all of them showing many corrections. Sotheby's catalogue states that "according to Madame Gissing-Fleury (in pencil notes on the verso of two pages) the remainder of the draft was destroyed by Gissing. The two final pages were found by her in 1929 between sheets of blotting paper." This statement calls for two remarks: first, at least one other page of the draft is known to survive, and it was on show at the Gissing Exhibition last July; second, if the two final pages were found by Gabrielle in 1929 between sheets of blotting paper, the reason can only be that she had placed them there, after the book was printed, at some date between 1904 and 1929. The manuscript stops with the same words as the printed text and it was Gabrielle who sent the manuscript of *Veranilda* to be typed in England in January 1904.

Lot 696 was a collection of twelve autograph letters written by various contemporaries to Gissing and including: Ouida ("I opened the F. R. longing to meet Ryecroft again. Surely that pleasure will not be forever denied . . .," June 2, 1902); J. M. Barrie ("... You are so much wanted that the door will fly open to your step, and if you don't there seems no chance of our meeting above once in a decade....," November 21, 1896); H. Butler-Clarke (this is the letter I once published with some comments in the *Newsletter* for April 1966); A. C. Benson ("...the Ryecroft Papers, which I have been lately reading. I can only say they have appealed to me extraordinarily, not only from the beauty of the form and language, which are of a delicacy rare in English writing ...,"

February 22, 1903); John Morley, two letters dated September 4, 1880 (about the articles on Social Democracy that Gissing was writing for the *Pall Mall Gazette*; see my review, in the *Newsletter* for

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April 1970, of Jacob Korg's edition of the *Notes on Social Democracy*) and February 4, 1903 (an acknowledgement of a copy of the *Ryecroft Papers*); Frederic Harrison (a long letter, dated November 10, 1895, about literary and family matters); John Davidson (October 15, 1894, a pessimistic letter concerning Davidson's literary activities and containing an allusion to the mad poet John Barlas, whom Gissing seems to have got to know through H. H. Champion, the socialist and future editor of the Melbourne *Book Lover*); Edmund Gosse (two letters dated November 11, 1892 about Gissing's reaction to Gosse's article on Tennyson and the reading of poetry by the masses, and February 2, 1903, "So much of it recalls to me phases of my own youth, though I suffered neither so deeply nor so long as Ryecroft ... what on earth did Ryecroft want with an original edition of Gibbon *and a modern edition as well?* Ah! have I not found a crack in your realism there?"; in his reply Gissing showed that he had made no mistake); Anne Ritchie, i.e. Miss Thackeray (an undated letter of the late eighties).

Also included in this lot was an ALS from W. H. Hudson to Gabrielle of May 24, 1904 (not 1903 as stated in Sotheby's Catalogue), whereas the autograph draft of a letter in pencil by Gissing occurs on the verso of the integral blank of the 1903 letter from Gosse.

Item 697 was a fine six-page letter from Conrad to Gissing dated December 21, 1902. Conrad was deeply touched by a letter Gissing had written to Edward Clodd which the latter had forwarded to Conrad ("And also remember man—the man—this man. I—who had always had a very human affection for you—am no longer young enough to accept with proper self-confidence all that you may think right to give. After forty it is easier to spurn away blame than to embrace the fair form of praise. There is a talking spectre, a ghostly voice whispering incessantly in one's ear of the narrow circle circumscribing all effort, of the shortness of one's vision and of the poverty of one's thought...")

Items 698, 699, 700 and 701 were letters from Hardy, James, Meredith and Swinburne. The Hardy letter, dated November 5, 1899 is a short favourable comment on Gissing's anti-war article in *The Review of the Week*, "the right word at the right moment." The Henry James piece is incom-

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plete and undated, but it is clear that it was written in December 1902 or January 1903. The fragment is on note paper with the heading "Lamb House, Rye, Sussex," and it reads in part: "Don't doubt that you are secreting inspiration—hoarding in vaults. You are enviably young. May 1903 prove it as much as it will (inevitably) modify it!" About H. G. Wells, James remarks: "I regret a little that he is so launched in the paths of prophecy and of the reconstruction of society." And about Conrad, who had just called on James: "He is altogether so queer a *case* that I watch him with an interest that is almost painful ... and see him somewhat tragically inapt to *renew* his matter." Meredith in his four-page letter of November 21 (not 2, as printed in Sotheby's Catalogue), 1901, thanked Gissing for "the delightful book on the Ionian Sea," but he feared that no physical good had

been done by what his friend had to endure at Cotrone. Edward Clodd having given him Gissing's address, Meredith commented: "The title of your present abode indicates the open air cure. Let me know, if you can find time, how it affects you, and whether you are strengthened to work ... a clear way is open to you now, and only the fair state of health is wanted for you to take your place among our best..." Swinburne's letter is undated but it was written in the mid-eighties at the time Gissing contemplated publishing a volume of poems. "I read your letter with interest and sympathy, and will endeavour to give at least a candid if a rapid word of opinion on such verses as you may wish to forward to me."

Lot 702 consisted of two unpublished letters from H. G. Wells, the first that Wells wrote to Gissing in November 1896, after their meeting at the Omar Khayyám Club, and the other dated from Arnold House, Sandgate, in April 1900, at which time Gissing was travelling in England, gathering material later to be used in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* and *Will Warburton*. The first letter, written in the third person, presses upon Gissing an invitation for "tea, lemonade, or alcoholic fluids as he may prefer, and he will be conversed with in a genial but respectful tone. But as Mr. H. G. Wells rarely works, is commonly unshaven and dirty about the cuffs, it will be refined behaviour on the part of Mr. Geo. Gissing if he abstains from any aggressive neatness of costume

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... On Saturdays ... Mr. H. G. Wells is sometimes ... swept and garnished." The second letter refers to Davray, the *Mercure de France* critic and translator of Wells' works and expresses the pleasure which Gissing's visit had given Wells: "I do hope it may be the first of very many interceptions."

The last item, no. 703, was a copy, in Edward Clodd's hand, of the poem Gissing wrote to celebrate his Whitsun holiday at Aldeburgh in 1895. The poem is signed "G. G." and followed by the signatures of all the participants. Besides Gissing, they were L. F. Austin, the journalist, Grant Allen, whose *Woman Who Did* was just out, George Whale, the rationalist solicitor, C. K. Shorter, the editor of the *Illustrated London News*, the *English Illustrated Magazine* and the *Sketch*, Benjamin Richardson, the authority on hygiene, and Edward Clodd.

Book Review

Jacob Korg
University of Washington

P. J. Keating. *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*. London and New York, 1971.

However eager Gissing enthusiasts may be to see further discussion and exploration of their novelist, few of us can have expected that he would ever be the leading figure in a *general* book-length work on the English novel. A study of social novelists, even if it were limited to conservative ones, could not be centered on Gissing. Hypothetical books on pessimists or observers of middle-class follies would prefer other novelists as major figures. Even within the bounds of his own special subject, the young man of education but without money, who challenges the suppositions of society, Gissing is excelled by some of his forerunners and contemporaries. He has

few rivals perhaps, as a chronicler of the writer's problems, but for this very reason, there could not be a *book* on this subject for him to star in.

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Nevertheless, Mr. Keating has managed to write a study which places Gissing as the single most important novelist among many. His subject is the novel of working-class life which is distinguished by its sympathetic and objective view. This field, as Mr. Keating conceives it, is extremely limited. Few novels written before 1880 qualify by his standards, a notable exception being *The Princess Casamassima*, and that only by virtue of the portrayal of Millicent Henning.

The authors besides Gissing with whom Mr. Keating deals at some length are Walter Besant, Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Morrison, and Henry Nevinson. George Moore's *Esther Waters* is discussed in connection with the influence of naturalism, but is not, unaccountably, given any emphasis as a humane and perceptive treatment of the lives of the poor. Among Mr. Keating's major novelists, Kipling devoted only one book and one short story to the subject (though many of his poems are connected with it), and Somerset Maugham only his early novel, *Liza of Lambeth*. The other writers, whatever their sympathy and understanding of the poor—and it is, in some cases, not very firm—were distinctly minor figures who wrote only a book or two or some stories about the slums. Set in a grouping of this kind, Gissing easily moves to the front to achieve a prominence he cannot claim in other company.

Few will take issue with Mr. Keating's view that the great Victorian novelists, on the whole, failed to treat people of the working class with objectivity or fairness. Louis Cazamian's *Le roman social en Angleterre* which, it is shocking to realize, remains, though published in 1903, the best study of the field, explains some of the reasons for this. Such mid-Victorians as Dickens, Disraeli, Kingsley and Mrs. Gaskell took a paternalistic and idealistic view of social problems. Mr. Keating objects to them because they observed the working class from a bourgeois perspective which prevented them from appreciating the positive values in the lives of the poor, and because they regarded the poor as elements in dangerous social problems, instead of full-scale individuals. Though he puts Gissing in the forefront of the late-century novelists who arrived at a better understanding of the working people, Mr. Keating has no illusions about his limitations. His

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Gissing is thoroughly middle-class, shares the prejudices of his forerunners, and is strongly opposed to the notion that poverty is good for the soul. But he was able, nevertheless, to usher in a period of more tolerant, more perceptive working-class fiction.

Mr. Keating's analysis of Gissing's position about the working class is not sharply different from the one that has emerged in past criticism. He sees that Gissing was divided between social compassion and esthetic motives, that he gradually moved to an attitude of objectivity more appropriate to artistic detachment, and that this objectivity was often compromised by antagonism toward the people he was writing about. In spite of difficulties of temperament, his spirit of objective reportage persisted, and Mr. Keating lingers on Gissing's attempts to gather authentic materials by living in the neighbourhoods where *Thyrza* is set, visiting radical meetings, and

studying the speech and manners of the poor. It was this reportorial fidelity, rather than any great capacity for penetrating his subject that gave Gissing his strength:

His is an observed world and he has much greater success with descriptive and analytical passages than with working-class characterization. Yet it is his faith in the scientific observation of working-class life that sets him apart from earlier writers. The qualities he possessed were rare and valuable—an essential honesty, a refusal to compromise with publishers, reading public, critics or his own conscience, and most of all, an unshakable trust in Art.

This passage shows that Mr. Keating has a very good grasp of the spirit with which Gissing approached his work, and has felt on his pulses the distinguishing quality of his novels.

Of the five novels of poverty Mr. Keating examines, he considers the first the poorest and the last the best. The description of Whitecross Street and other slums in *Workers in the Dawn* is intended to shock, but in later novels Gissing described slum environments with some attempt to register their atmosphere dispassionately, and to capture the true contours of the people's problems, pastimes, aspirations and relationships. The treatment of the working-men's club in *Workers in the Dawn* is, Mr. Keating finds, little more than a tendentious reaction to Dickens' amusing treatment

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of the poor, an effort to expose the reality of such characters as Sam Weller and Mrs. Gamp. While the working-class people in *Demos* are presented far more objectively, they are also, Mr. Keating says, uninteresting; but his discussion of examples, particularly Mutimer's relatives, suggests that he would be ready to modify that verdict. Mr. Keating does not find any real sympathy for working people in *Demos*, but he does find something more important, the germ of the view that they must be judged in terms of the standards their living conditions and education make possible for them. He quotes Mr. Wyvern's comment about the life of the poor:

It is a mistake due to mere thoughtlessness, or ignorance, to imagine the labouring or even the destitute, population as ceaselessly groaning beneath the burden of their existence... A being of superior intelligence regarding humanity with an eye of perfect understanding would discover that life was enjoyed every bit as much in the slum as in the palace.

This steady way of looking at the subject made it possible for Gissing to achieve the depth and diversity of perception found in *Thyrza* and *The Nether World*. It had wider implications as well. "This realization," observes Mr. Keating, "signifies a crucial stage in the history of working-class fiction, and a turning point in Gissing's artistic development."

Gissing is therefore able to see, in *Thyrza* and *The Nether World*, that the life of poverty, instead of making people into clowns or barbarians, may encourage such virtues as determination, common sense, mutual compassion, self-respect and resignation. But it also produces John Hewett's despair, Bob Hewett's amorality, and the savagery of Clem Peckover, who fascinates Mr. Keating and occupies his attention for nearly two pages. There is a difference, too, Mr. Keating points out,

in Gissing's attitude towards culture. He now sees that to people trapped in the slums art and literature are not an opportunity for salvation at all, but symbols of unattainable heights, like the cultural exhibits in Stephen Spender's "Elementary Classroom in a Slum":

Shakespeare's head

Cloudless at dawn, civilized dome riding all cities.
Belled, flowery Tyrolese valley. Open-handed map
Awarding the world its world. And yet, for these
Children, these windows, not this world, are world....

Surely Shakespeare is wicked, the map a bad example
With ships and sun and love tempting them to steal....

Mr. Keating's discussion of Richard Mutimer is somewhat puzzling. Mutimer is introduced as Gissing's way of dealing with representative working-class people instead of the middle-class protagonists he had favored in his first novels. Mutimer is, of course, condemned because he is insensitive and unenlightened, but Mr. Keating seems to feel that Gissing is "apologizing" for his deficiencies; it seems clear that he is insisting on them as a means of discrediting the kind of social action Mutimer advocates. Mr. Keating accuses Gissing of overlooking the issues created by the fact that Mutimer's deficiencies are socially generated; this is true as far as it goes, for Gissing was far more interested in the palpable facts of social life than in theories explaining them. As Mr. Keating says, he did not follow the example of other novelists who drew a distinction between evil conditions and the traits of character they produce.

The approval of Gissing as a reporter on working-class life that emerges from this study is properly qualified. Mr. Keating perceptively observes that Gissing was not primarily interested in the poor, but used them as "pawns in a cultural war." He notes that Gissing continued to evade the issues as the earlier novelists did. While ostensibly writing about the poor, he nevertheless often chose middle-class characters, or characters with middle-class attitudes as his main figures, so that the problems are seen from a point of view foreign to the poor themselves. Arthur Golding, Walter Egremont and Osmond Waymark are described as "displaced intellectuals." Heroines like Ida Starr and Thyrsa Trent are similarly idealized. In the case of authentic proletarians, like Gilbert Grail, Julian Casti and Sidney Kirkwood, as well as numerous female characters, a distinct effect of distance intervenes to keep them at arms' length. One has the impression, as always with Gissing,

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that whatever he did to put the depiction of slum life on a more authentic footing in the novels of the time cost intense effort and years of struggle with strong, but unwelcome convictions.

Three Letters from Gissing to H. H. Champion

P. Coustillas

Although in the opinion of quite a few critics, Gissing led the life of a recluse, he was, especially in the nineties, in touch with a fairly large number of people. The names of all the persons with whom he exchanged letters, regularly or occasionally, would make up an unexpectedly long list. Doubtless many of his letters have been lost or destroyed, but the coming years will, I hope, see the recovery of a not insignificant proportion of those that have been preserved. At all events, research in recent months has been fruitful: unrecorded letters to A.H. Bullen, Allhusen, McIlvaine (Hardy's publisher), B. W. Matz, James Payn, Edward Clodd, Edmund Gosse and others have come to light.

One of the most pleasant discoveries I have made in this field of mislaid and forgotten correspondence concerns Gissing's relations with Henry Hyde Champion, the Socialist leader whose name is associated with the mass demonstrations which took place in London in the winter of 1885-86, while Gissing was writing *Demos*. Some time after the culmination of the Socialist agitation in the riotous proceedings of February 8, 1886, Champion had been put on trial for sedition, together with H. M. Hyndman, John Burns and J. E. Williams, but they had been acquitted, "though the jury," writes R. H. Gretton, the historian, had "allowed themselves the expression of a rider to the effect that Burns and Champion had used language inflammatory and greatly to be condemned." Champion was a friend of Morley Roberts, who was constantly talking about Gissing, and thus Champion came to read *The Unclassed* and, a few years later met its author. When, in 1892, he became the editor of a short-lived journal, *The Novel Review*, he invited Roberts to con-

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tribute an essay on Gissing's work (it will be included in the Critical Heritage volume scheduled for publication in 1972). On December 29 of the next year, his last night in England before emigrating to Australia, he sent a telegram to Gissing, who then lived at Brixton, and together with Roberts and W. A. Mackenzie (the author of *Rowton House Rhymes*), they dined at the New Travellers' Club, in Piccadilly.

Shortly after his arrival in Australia, Champion edited a newspaper, which would be worth identifying. Gissing recorded in his diary for January 7, 1896, the reception of a letter from Champion at Melbourne, enclosing a long laudatory epistle from a local solicitor named Joseph Woolf. The next day, Gissing replied to both Champion and Woolf and sent the latter a copy of *Sleeping Fires*.

At the turn of the century, Champion founded a literary monthly, *The Book Lover*, which lived into the nineteen-twenties, and Gissing's books, from *The Crown of Life* onwards, were prominently reviewed in it. (The criticism of *The Crown of Life* will also be included in the Critical Heritage volume, and an article on the rest of the Gissing material in *The Book Lover* will appear in a forthcoming number of the *Newsletter*). On two occasions, in February 1904 and February 1913, Champion quoted at length from the letters he received from Gissing. Here are the passages he printed:

8th January, 1896.

“Woolf’s letter is very gratifying. He has read some of my books with unusual attentiveness. I have hardly thought of a possible public on the other side of the world, for my readers here are few enough. However, they tell me that the books sell a little more than they used to ... After all, you know, it cannot be called ‘exile’; you are playing a part in the life of the English race. For my own part, I fear that there is a bad look-out for the mere literary man; he can so easily be dispensed with. I am sick of these imbecile wranglings. There won’t be much difference for hundreds of years to come.”

9th May, 1900.

“Of course, the newspaper I received from you some time ago was equivalent to a letter, and a remarkably pleasant letter. I feel very grateful to you for all those handsome things you printed

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about ‘The Crown of Life.’ As perhaps you know, the book was a complete failure; I don’t suppose the publishers sold 500 copies. In fact, they were afraid of it, and hardly advertised it at all, so that lots of my habitual readers do not know of the book’s existence. I believe there are one or two good things in it. Perhaps, as you have the courage to believe, it will some day have more attention? ... People have no leisure just now for anything but tales of slaughter ... I wonder whether you have any purpose of returning to England?—or of visiting the old land? If you come, I hope it may be my chance to meet you somewhere. My own travelling is over, I think. I shall never do more than trot between France and England, with a summer stay at some breathing place. Ten years of starvation and misery at the best time of life tell upon a man if he lives to be forty. I begin to feel rather old, and don’t like the prospect of annual novels for indefinite years to come. If one could take a year or two of rest! One can do little that one ought.”

11th January, 1902.

“Your voice comes to me ever and again from the other side of the world, and always with a pleasant sound. To tell you the truth, I could not name any periodical in English which treats of current literature so thoughtfully, moderately, genially, as does ‘The Book Lover’. What specially pleases me is its constant reference to a standard above that of our time; without touch of pedantry, there is almost always the note of scholarship in its columns. It addresses the average reader, but in such a way as to make him think other than average thoughts ... Doubtless it is an advantage to the paper that it stands remote from the personal clamour and contentions of literary England; one feels its easy, unaffected impartiality; it can praise this author without fear of the other’s jealousy, and can find fault without suspicion of personal motive. In short, I open ‘The Book Lover’ with a sort of interest quite different from that excited by our literary weeklies in London, in which, without exception, the uproar of the market is disagreeably audible. For heaven’s sake, continue to keep the eye of your reader on the great and good things of greater and better times than ours. You will be

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doing the State some service ... It is impossible for me now to winter in the north. With care, I

believe, I may keep myself going a few more years; without it I should soon be done for. Perhaps I shall live to see you and your wife in this hemisphere. Nothing would give me greater pleasure ... I read in the 'Daily News' the other day the startling rumour that Meredith is writing his autobiography! I had a letter from him not long ago, but I don't think I dare ask him if the rumour is founded.

Enough! The sun is shining warmly this afternoon upon our great pine forest, and from far away sound the Atlantic breakers. Strange to think how this letter will travel. Let it bear to you every good and cordial wish."

(Warm thanks are due to Mr. T. A. Kealy, Principal Librarian of the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, for doing research on my behalf in the file of the *Book Lover* in his institution, and for kindly sending me photocopies of the relevant material).

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Letter to the Editor

It is somewhat surprising that the article on "Arthur Morrison and Gissing" (*Newsletter*, Jan. 1970) did not provoke any comment, for it did contain this sentence by its author, P. Coustillas: "Yet it should be read as an example of a special type of realism." It may interest some of your readers that Robert Blatchford once put Morrison under his microscope, and that his conclusions are to be found in the last chapter of his delightful book, *My Favourite Books* (Clarion Press, 1900). The title is, "On Realism." After defining the Realist as "a literary witness who tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" about things "as they happen to him," he went on to ponder on how realist Morrison was, and in order to find an answer he examined *A Child of the Jago*. He admitted straightaway that the novel had been foolishly praised as well as foolishly condemned. Blatchford cannot be denied his contemporaneity with Morrison at the time he published his book, nor can he be declared ignorant of actual slum life. Furthermore, it can be accepted that when he

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said that Morrison's slums were not as loathsome as those in Glasgow, Dublin, Liverpool or Manchester, he was speaking after careful observation.

Blatchford forthrightly disapproved of those who insisted that Morrison was "a true literary explorer." He even went so far as to disagree with M. T. de Wyzewa when he hailed him as the founder of a new school of realism in the *Revue des deux Mondes*. What country did Morrison discover? he wanted to know, and just how did he come to be "a consummate master of realistic fiction" when *A Child of the Jago* has no more right to pose as the greatest piece of realistic fiction than Rudyard Kipling's *Seven Seas* have to be called the noblest poems since Milton. All of which does go to show that the novel did cause some stir when it was published.

To establish his point, Blatchford wanted to know if any of his readers had ever read *Oliver Twist*, *The Nether World*, *Ravenshoe* or "Herodsfoot," in that order. And "as to Morrison's founding a new school of fiction, what about Stephen Crane, Kipling and Gissing?" he demanded. Nor did he leave Gissing there, alone, in his pages, but went on to ask about Hugo's Gavroche, Gissing's

Pennyloaf Candy, before mentioning a host of Kipling's, and Crane's and Dickens' characters, then winding up with the crushing question: "What is there in Dicky Perrott, in Pigeony Poll, in Bill Ram, in Weech, to startle us by their novelty? Didn't critics read anything, or do they forget what they read?"

None of his contemporaries would have chosen to deny Robert Blatchford his knowledge of books, and few would have dared to impugn his criticisms. The chapter in his now forgotten book, is great criticism, on a par with his assessment of *Urn Burial* in the same volume. Towards the end of his chapter he laid a long quotation from *Ravenshoe*, just to show how Morrison was unable to describe a battle in the night. It is a long quotation. "This," he declared, "is as true a picture as any in the *Jago*, and more humorous." After pointing out that there was a similarity of the slum boy in *Ravenshoe* with Dick Perrott, he went on to declare that "Mr. George Gissing's pictures of London life and London poor are more comprehensive than Mr. Morrison's. I think they give a completer, though even more gloomy view of lower London than that in *A Child of the Jago*."

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For what it may be worth, Blatchford's summing up of the novel may be offered. "We search in vain for any such original types or original dialogue in the work of Mr. Morrison. *A Child of the Jago* is a good book, and well worth reading; but it has not one element of greatness nor one stroke of genius in its pages. The *Jago* people never surprise one, never delight one, never shock one, never make one laugh. There are smiles in the book, but no laughter, no tears ... By the way, I think the last words of Dicky Perrott ring false: 'Tell Mr. Beveridge there's another way out—better.' There speaks the artful author, striving for an effect, not the 'Jago rat' dying from a stab in the lung."

A man who could write like that was certainly a man who could be hushed into silence after watching Bob Hewett die.

Harold Heslop.

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Recent Publications

- *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel*, by Guinevere L. Griest. Published by Indiana University Press and by David & Charles in England. £3.30. This volume will be of capital interest to Gissing readers, and as indispensable as Royal A. Gettmann's *A Victorian Publisher, a Study of the Bentley Papers* (1960). Gissing is referred to a number of times by Miss Griest. The twelve illustrations help one to visualise the library and its founder, whereas the six-page bibliography lists many books and articles which throw light on this important subject. The publisher's blurb fairly introduces it: "When Charles Edward Mudie opened his Select Library in London in 1842, a new era in English literature began, a period dominated by the three-volume novel—the popular 'three-decker'—and by the tastes of the middle-class guinea-a-year subscribers to the circulating libraries. For half a century Mudie's was the single most important distributor of fiction in England, exerting such profound influence over

publishers, readers, and critics that its founder became a virtual dictator of the London literary

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world. The number of volumes for a book, its price, the date of issue, the size of the edition, the title, even the binding—all these Mudie actively helped to determine. This situation continued until 1894, when Mudie and his chief rival, the firm of W. H. Smith, united to abolish the three-decker and unintentionally destroyed the prosperity of the circulating libraries as well, bringing an eclipse to an institution which one critic had called ‘an abomination and a curse.’”

- Parlati, Sister Mary Aurelia, “A Critical, Sociological and technical Analysis of George Gissing’s Stories and Sketches,” *Dissertation Abstracts International*, April 1971, pp. 5371A-5372A. This is a 1970 Fordham University dissertation of 257 pages. Sister Parlati writes in the abstract of her dissertation that Gissing’s short stories and sketches may be divided into three groups of unequal merit: the group of stories written in Chicago in 1877; the stories of the years 1880-84 and those that appeared between 1890 and 1903. Sister Parlati refers to “Cain and Abel” and “My Clerical Rival” as being still in manuscript in the Berg Collection, which was perfectly true at the time she wrote, but she seems to have overlooked “My First Rehearsal” (which once appeared in *English Literature in Transition* before it was reprinted in the Enitharmon Series) as well as the various stories in the Pforzheimer Library now available in *George Gissing Essays and Fiction*. Of the second group (1880-84) she remarks: “Steeped in an aura of gloom and pessimism, those stories project Gissing’s own sense of hopelessness and dejection. They deal with poverty, dirt, crime and death. Everything is dark in this nether world where the ignorant, uncultured, lazy and boisterous masses wallow in a morass of filth and deprivations from which there is little hope of liberation. In dealing with the impoverished conditions of this dark world, Gissing was influenced by the French and Russian novelists of the time, especially Zola and Turgenev.”

Sister Parlati’s study of the mature tales is summed up by herself as follows: “For plots he utilized various experiences in his own life, and for characters, people from varied walks of life: clerks, petty tradesmen, struggling writers, bookworms, lodging-house keepers, governesses, old

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maids, degenerates, prostitutes, servants, and old folk. Gissing’s fame as a short story writer does not rest on his plots, which are consistently sketchy and undramatic, but on his ability to depict character. The personages in these better tales are drawn in firmer outlines; their outward appearance is rendered more concisely and sharply, the analysis of their inner thoughts is more deeply sensitive and penetrating, and the tone, more cheerful and hopeful. Indeed the pessimism which characterized his early works disappeared entirely from these maturer creations. Thus with each new story Gissing developed better structural techniques, restricted and compressed the materials of his plot, livened and activated the incidents in the story, created fuller characters, objectified his point of view, and utilized humor and irony more effectively and significantly.”

- Payne, Mervyn, “Portraits of the Poor,” *Eastern Daily Press*, September 27, 1971. A review of

P. J. Keating's *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* and *Working-Class Stories of the 1890s*.

- Butts, Dennis, "George Gissing: Neglected Novelist," *The Dalesman*, September 1971, pp. 477-78. With photographs of the writer's birthplace and of the commemorative plaque. This very good article was written some years ago, hence the title which is no longer quite adequate.
- Anon., "With the Literature Left Out," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 8, 1971, pp. 1205-06. A review of Malcolm Bradbury's *The Social Context of English Literature*, with allusions to Gissing.
- Langbridge, R. H., "From Rejection to Success," *Books and Bookmen*, October 1971, pp.46-47. Deals briefly with the rejections of Gissing's early novels.
- Anon., *Book Exchange*, October 1971. A notice of *The Rediscovery of George Gissing*.
- Anon., "The Reaction to Kipling," *Times Literary Supplement*, November 12, 1971, pp. 1405-06. This is a review of the volume on Kipling in the Critical Heritage Series. After commenting on Robert Buchanan's well-known but not too subtle attack on Kipling entitled "The Voice of the Hooligan," the *TLS* critic aptly remarks: "Someone in that feverish decade had to sound the alarm ... For a warning note which still compels respect, we must look beyond criticism proper

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to the mordant final chapter of Gissing's novel *The Whirlpool* (1897), where the hero harangues his friend on the significance of the exciting little book he has just been reading, *Barrack-Room Ballads*:

The brute savagery of it! The very lingo—how appropriate it is! ... He knows it; the man is a great artist; he smiles at the voice of his genius ... The average Englander has never grasped the fact that there was such a thing as the British Empire. He's beginning to learn it, and itches to kick somebody, to prove his Imperialism. The bully of the music-hall shouting "Jingo" had his special audience. Now comes a man of genius, and decent folk don't feel ashamed to listen this time.

It was precisely because he could recognize the force of Kipling's gifts that Gissing found him so disturbing, a portent of the dark times to come: "We may reasonably hope, old man, to see our boys blown into small bits by the explosive that hasn't got its name yet."

- Pike, E. Royston, "Books," *Humanist*, November 1971. A review of P. J. Keating's *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* and *Working-Class Stories of the 1890s*, with two paragraphs on Gissing.

- Plomer, William, "My Book of the Year," *Sunday Telegraph*, December 19, 1971, p. 16. The editor of this paper asked his critics and reviewers to choose their favourite books of 1971. Mr. Plomer, who wrote some pertinent articles on Gissing and two introductions to reprints of the novels in the latter 1940s, generously mentions *The Rediscovery of George Gissing*.

- Coustillas, P., "Letter," *Book-Collecting and Library Monthly*, December 1971, p. 248. A letter to the editor about May Sinclair and Gissing. Miss Sinclair sent Gissing a copy of her first novel, *Audrey Craven*, in July 1897. An unpublished letter contains his critical appreciation of the story.

- Fleishman, Avrom, *The English Historical Novel*, Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971. A long footnote on p. 176 discusses *Veranilda*. Mr. Fleishman quotes Jacob Korg and makes the mistaken suggestion that considering the working title of the story, "The Vanquished Roman," the novel could hardly end as has been hitherto stated, by Jacob Korg among others.

- Hutchison, B., "An Open Letter to British Booksellers: Why Antiquarian Books Are Too Cheap," *Book-Collecting and Library Monthly*, January 1972. Mentions the case of Gissing.