

THE GISSING JOURNAL

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

Volume XXVIII, Number 1

January, 1992

Contents

George Gissing and War: An Unpublished Essay by A. C. <i>Gissing, edited by Pierre Coustillas and Xavier Pétremand</i>	1
George Gissing and the “Triple-Headed Monster”: A <i>Summing-Up, by Robert Alan Shaddy</i>	16
Oh Lord, Save Me From New Grub Street, <i>by Robert Ward</i>	25
Eve Madeley in Denmark, <i>by Bouwe Postmus</i>	31
A Walk with Dash: A Poem by Ellen Gissing	34
Notes and News	35
Recent Publications	39

-- 1 --

George Gissing and War
 An Unpublished Essay by A. C. Gissing

Edited by
 Pierre Coustillas
 And Xavier Pétremand

It is widely acknowledged that a writer’s relatives are not as a rule the best interpreters of his life and work. Gissing himself concurred with this opinion in his letter of 6 November 1897 to Edward Clodd when the latter remarked of Tennyson’s *Life* by his son that “one wishes someone else could have written it.” Still few people would deny that a writer’s relatives are nonetheless in a privileged position—their easy access to the writer’s literary and other papers is to be envied, and they invariably see their subject from a vantage-point for which strangers can find no adequate substitute. Now Alfred Gissing, who could only have the dimmest recollections of his father since he last saw him in September 1898, is a rather special case in that for some forty years – until Ellen Gissing’s death in early 1938 – he benefited from whatever his uncle and aunts could tell him about their brother, who was frequently discussed in their respective homes. It was in the late 1920s that he was first led to express his own views in print. What he published at the time is easily available – his preface to the 1927 collection of letters was followed by one to *A Victim of Circumstances*, then by *Selections Autobiographical*

and *Imaginative* in 1929, and lastly by an introduction to *Stories and Sketches* in 1938. Two articles in the *National Review* complete the record – “George Gissing: Some Aspects of his Life and Work,” published in August 1929, and “Gissing’s Unfinished Romance” in January 1937. At this stops public knowledge of Alfred’s comment on his father’s work.

This is not, however, the sum total of his biographical and critical writings. Indeed in sheer bulk it is the smaller part. For one thing Alfred wrote a biography of his father, a

-- 2 --

typescript of some 600 pages, which has long been known to exist and which Herbert Van Thal, who had been offered it for publication, mentioned in his own autobiography, *The Tops of the Mulberry Trees* (1971). This *Life* would now be unpublishable, not only because it has aged considerably and is largely based on letters to members of the Gissing family that have become well-known, but because it consists in a *montage* of documents, some of them rediscovered independently and used years ago by the French co-editor of the present article, and avoids any candid approach to many aspects of the novelist’s life. Another, much shorter, unpublished contribution to Gissing studies has also been known to a very few scholars for decades, a piece entitled “Frederic Harrison and George Gissing” which Carl H. Pforzheimer requested the dutiful son to write on his father just before World War II. It makes pleasant reading but breaks no new ground. A copy of it is still to be found in Alfred’s papers. Lastly two more typescripts have recently emerged from oblivion, and it is the first of these, “George Gissing and War,” that we are now printing. It bears its author’s name and address, “A. C. Gissing | Barbon | Westmorland | Via Carnforth,” in his own handwriting and can thus safely be ascribed to the 1930s, when Alfred lived with his sole surviving aunt, Ellen, at Croft Cottage, a house (still standing) which he or she had bought and which he enlarged. To those years also belongs a thirteen-page essay on the “London Homes and Haunts of George Gissing,” based on close study of the novelist’s descriptions in his correspondence of the metropolitan homes which their occupant came to detest, as well as on visits to the same places – in which, with the exception of *The Emancipated*, all the early novels were written. Whether the three unpublished essays ever reached an editorial desk cannot be ascertained, but over sixteen years after Alfred Gissing’s death their survival in the home of his grandson gives us an opportunity to print the present one with a brief account of his life.

Born at Epsom on 20 January 1896, Alfred Charles Gissing was still a baby when his parents parted in the autumn of the next year and Edith went to live with him in Eliza Orme’s house at 118 Upper Tulse Hill, London, S.W., an event recorded in Gissing’s diary. This solution having proved unsatisfactory on account of Edith’s flights of temper, lodgings soon had to be found for mother and child, who settled at 90 Mansfield Road in the spring of 1898, at which time Gissing was in Rome. Nothing is known of Alfred’s early schooling until after his mother was committed to a lunatic asylum in early 1902. By then the last meeting between father, mother and son, which took place on 7 September 1898, dated back to over three years,

-- 3 --

and next to no documents are available to fill the gaps in Alfred’s progress – only occasional mentions of him and his mother in the correspondence. No letter from Gissing to his younger son is known to have survived – indeed is known to have been written, although some contact was maintained for financial among other reasons. A new turning-point in Alfred’s early life was reached when, simultaneously with his mother’s commitment to an asylum, he was sent to live with a farming family at Mabe, near Falmouth, Cornwall. Gissing heard about Alfred through Miss Orme and her sister, Mrs. Howard Fox, who had found this home for him. A photograph, possibly taken at a slightly later date, shows the members of the family with whom

Alfred was staying. Two affectionate letters from one of them, probably the farmer's wife, L. Smith, dated 1915 and 1916, establish that his foster parents lived at Treverva Farm, in the Budock or Penryn postal area, and the contents suggest that this is no other place than the farm where he spent about half a dozen years.

Very few references to him occur in the many letters exchanged by the Gissing family and their friends that have been preserved for the years immediately after Gissing's death. Clara Collet did not lose sight of Alfred any more than she did of Walter. Knowing George's opinions on the subject, she must have smiled wryly when she heard that Alfred was belatedly baptised on 5 August 1904. That she behaved generously to him as she did to his brother and parents is a fact of which some evidence has survived in her diary. A copy of it can be found in the Modern Records Centre at Coventry. In the entry for 1 March 1908 she recorded a visit she paid to Alfred two days before. The child was then at school at 20 St. Leonard's Road, Exeter, staying with one Mr. A. C. Walters and his wife, and she noted that "Alfred seemed a most lovable little boy." It was apparently in that same year 1908 that he began to attend that Exeter school where he stayed for two years only, for in 1910 we find him at Gresham School, Holt, Norfolk, which his brother Walter had attended in the previous decade. A certificate of school attendance dated 14 June 1920, signed "J. R. Eccles, M.A., Headmaster," testifies that Alfred was a pupil at Gresham's from January 1910 to July 1914 and a House Prefect by the time he left.

What his plans were just then is uncertain but a letter he wrote from Cambridge to his aunt Margaret on 25 June 1914 mentions two examinations that he was to take the next day and he gave the subjects as Geometry and Paley's evidences. Whether it was then that he had

-- 4 --

an opportunity of meeting Arthur C. Benson, who had been in touch with Gissing and commented upon his work on several occasions is doubtful, but a letter from Benson to "My dear Gissing" of 13 November 1923, testifies to a friendly relationship between the two men. Benson enclosed "a letter from Mr. Edward Warren, the architect, a brother of the President of Magdalen College, Oxford" and declared himself "very glad to hear that you think you will have the offer of a post in the Historic Bldgs Department."



Alfred Gissing in the 1930s

Alfred had by then gone through many experiences. The examinations passed at Cambridge were followed by no further period of schooling since a postcard to his aunt

Margaret with a postmark which reads "Tidworth, Pennings Camp, Andover, 31 July 1914," shows him on the picture side standing with six young soldiers in front of a tent. He was "to start for Cornwall next Thursday." According to some military documents, he became a second lieutenant on 16 December 1915 and a lieutenant on 7 July 1917. Although his movements during the first two years of the war are difficult to reconstruct, it is an undoubted fact that he was in India when the news reached him of his brother's death in the battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916. A photograph taken about that time shows him wearing a topee. A note in his hand

-- 5 --

says that it was "taken on the roof of our house. The cross is to mark the Taj Mahal and the Jumna." It is one of the many mementoes of him that are still in the hands of the Gissing family. On another – much better – photograph he appears in full uniform with a cap on his head. Details of his career in the army, which did not come to an end when the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, occur in various family papers which show that he was at one time in Irak. A map, the legend of which reads "TC 144/ Dated 12-10-17/ Baghdad-Karbala" carries a marginal inscription in his hand: "A. C. Gissing. Used in 1918. From Baghdad & Hillah (Babylon)," and a somewhat later aeroplane sketch map dated "4-3-18" of Najaf-Shinafiyah is similarly annotated by him "A. C. Gissing. Used in 1918 when based at Kufah." He had reached the rank of captain when he left the army in February 1920. A letter addressed from Constantinople by J. B. Thomson, Major A.M., British Delegate, Inter-Allied Press Censorship to "Captain A. C. Gissing | Pera" on the last day of that month, and beginning "Dear Gissing", makes solemn yet friendly reading: "On your leaving the Inter-Allied Censorship after close upon a year of unremitting work, I wish to place on record my appreciation of your services amongst us. Your good-fellowship with your French and Italian colleagues, your tact and understanding of the difficulties of our work and its far reaching responsibilities were most valuable. Please accept my sincere thanks and best wishes for your future." Alfred's employment on the Interallied Press Censorship Committee had begun on 20 May 1919 and the British High Commissioner, J. M. de Robeck, for his part, in turn expressed his "appreciation of the zeal and energy with which you carried out an arduous, difficult and thankless task." During those years spent in the army, Alfred Gissing used to give his "civil profession or occupation before the war" as "student of Classics."

The first letter from Alfred's pen about his father's works that we have so far discovered is dated 29 May 1920. It was addressed to James B. Pinker, the literary agent, from what had been Margaret and Ellen Gissing's home since the beginning of the previous decade, Fernleigh, St. Mark's Avenue, Leeds. This remained his address until 1923 or 1924, that is approximately the time when Gissing's posthumous interests passed from Algernon's hands into those of Alfred. Most of the manuscripts of the novels had by then been sold by Algernon, but the letters to the family had not yet been disposed of, nor had the vast amount of miscellaneous papers that were later to be sold either in auction rooms or to English booksellers or straight to private

-- 6 --

collectors. The many letters that Alfred wrote from the 1920s onwards to literary agents, publishers, editors, friends and strangers who enquired about this or that aspect of his father's career, help us to follow his movements. Until the summer of 1924, his correspondence with Pinker, then with Pinker's son and the Authors' Syndicate makes it clear that he still lived in Leeds. But on 28 August of that year he wrote from 76 Mount Ararat Road, Richmond, Surrey where he stayed until the spring of 1927. During those years, which saw the publication of *The Immortal Dickens* and intense efforts on Alfred's part to remove all the obstacles in the way of a collected edition of his father's works – an edition which Algernon had somehow done his best

to kill in the bud –, Alfred is often enough found living at temporary addresses, notably at Levisham, Yorkshire and Tring, Hertfordshire. His removal to Yore View, Aysgarth, Yorkshire in the late spring of 1927 practically coincided with the publication by Constable and Dutton of *A Victim of Circumstances*, a collection of short stories which contains some of Gissing's better work in that medium. Yore View was the home of Margaret and Ellen Gissing and it was there that Margaret died in the spring of 1930. Perhaps by then Croft Cottage, at Barbon, Westmorland, where he lived from early 1932, was already his property.

A diary he kept in 1929-1931 contains much valuable factual information about his activities. No occupation is attached to his name after his return to civilian life, and he travelled much. The many entries refer to Scotland, the Lake District (Grasmere, where his grandfather had married in 1857), London, where he visited George's former homes in Hanover Street, Oakley Crescent and Cornwall Residences as well as the British Museum, the National Gallery and many churches. He would usually travel with Ellen, more rarely with Margaret. After the latter's death he went to Italy with Ellen, via Lille. Two major literary projects took much of his time, the biography of his father, which was not completed until the late 1930s and his study of William Holman Hunt (1936), a widely reviewed volume many copies of which were to be accidentally destroyed at the publishers'. It would seem that the most part of his income in those days came from sales of manuscript material and valuable papers and books left by his father – documents that were no longer to be turned to account in "The Life of George Gissing." When he married Frances Muriel Smith, née Braham, a widow ten years his junior, in the parish church of Broadway on 26 July 1938, he declared himself to be a writer. The marriage certificate states that the bride, who resided at Barbon, was the daughter of Herbert William

-- 7 --

Hopkins Braham, a deceased electrical engineer. Arthur Bedford Williams, the son of his father's cousin Mary Bedford and Austin Williams, was one of the witnesses.

A bridegroom of forty-two, Alfred ceased writing on his father's work. His efforts to publish a collected edition and a biography had so far been unsuccessful and the outbreak of the Second World War dealt them a death blow. Not a single reprint of Gissing's works was issued during the war, even though Methuen announced a new edition of *The Crown of Life* in 1943. Three children were born of Alfred's marriage, Michael, Charles William (who died in infancy) and Jane, and just after the war the family settled at the Villa Javelle, Salvan, in the Swiss canton of Valais, where for a few years he ran a Unesco-subsidized school for displaced children. So it was from Switzerland that the last important sales of literary material were planned, and they were offered as the property of a Continental lady whose identity hardly matters, its owner being content to remain in the shade and largely invisible to those scholars, English, American or Continental, who would have been glad to obtain something more than a polite interview. In 1951 the Gissing family moved to Les Marécottes, and the Hotel with which Alfred's name was associated for nearly a quarter of a century was to be his last home. He died on 27 November 1975, and was buried in the Salvan cemetery.

That he had not parted with all the literary documents and private papers inherited from his father and his aunts, then from Gabrielle Fleury, has ceased to be a matter for conjecture. In publishing the present essay, which he had undoubtedly hoped to see in print in the 1930s, we are only fulfilling one of his earnest (and eventually forgotten) desires.

"George Gissing and War"

The effect of impressions made upon the mind of a child is often of lifelong duration, and in the case of a child whose mind was as alert and sensitive as was that of George Gissing such early impressions may constitute actual influences which never cease to exert their sway

subsequently throughout the whole of life. We do not wish here to lay excessive stress upon the force of early impressions, but as it is true that the one who exerted the greatest influence upon Gissing's unformed mind was his own father, so it is a fact that his first dread of war came into being in 1868, when, at the age of eleven, he saw his father enter the house one day in a high

-- 8 --

state of excitement, and heard him announce some news which had just reached him, – “Well, they're at it – killing each other!” The reference was to the beginning of Napier's advance southwards towards Magdala in Abyssinia,¹ and the impression of the words, uttered in a tone of disgust, filled him with a horror of warfare which rendered the occasion one of the most painful in his memory.

The whole temper and upbringing of the elder Gissing tended to establish in him (the father) a loathing of strife of any kind. Born in a quiet village in Suffolk he delighted above all things in early days to ramble through remote lanes and flowery pastures. His interests were those of the naturalist and the poet; to him the hurry and conflict of modern life were utterly foreign elements. Gissing inherited his father's peace-loving disposition in a high degree; he was indeed singularly devoid of those warlike instincts which are still so strong a legacy of past ages, and long before he could reason clearly on the subject he had fairly settled in his mind that war was only for savage peoples.

The excessive hatred expressed by him in his semi-autobiographical work, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, of the drill he was obliged to undergo at school is partly attributable to the egoist within him; anything which for a moment threatened eclipse to his sense of individuality was utterly intolerable; and thus it came about that the meaningless routine of dull exercises aroused in him a profound loathing – so great a loathing, indeed, that when the drill-sergeant designated him by his number he was ready to burst into open rage at the indignity. “When he addressed me as ‘Number Seven!’ I burned with shame and rage. I was no longer a human being; I had become part of a machine, and my name was ‘Number Seven.’”²

And yet such aversion as he here expresses for the useful exercise of drilling was not quite as unreasonable as his own words make it appear to be. At the bottom of it all lay the suggestion, in this weekly drill, of the soulless routine of the army and all that it stood for. “A lettered German, speaking to me once,” so he writes, “of his year of military service, told me that, had it lasted but a month or two longer, he must have sought release in suicide. I know very well that my own courage would not have borne me to the end of the twelvemonth; humiliation, resentment, loathing, would have goaded me to madness.”³

In Gissing's time the glamour of the army held all-powerful sway over the minds of average men and women; but, ahead of his age in most respects, he did not fail to see beyond

-- 9 --

the stupidity of popular sentiment, – a sentiment which Dickens expressed so admirably through the medium of Mr. Snodgrass: “It is indeed a noble and a brilliant sight...to see the gallant defenders of their country, drawn up in a brilliant array before its peaceful citizens: their faces beaming – not with warlike ferocity but with civilized gentleness: their eyes flashing – not with the rude fire of rapine and revenge, but with the soft light of humanity and intelligence.” So much for popular enthusiasm, but then follows a touch of gentle irony so characteristic of Dickens: “The soft light of intelligence burnt rather feebly in the eyes of the warriors, inasmuch as the command ‘eyes front’ had been given; and all the spectator saw before him was several thousand pairs of optics, staring straight forward, wholly divested of any expression whatever.”⁴

All this poetical raving was a mere empty show through which the vision of both Dickens and Gissing penetrated to the grim reality which it masked. The latter in certain frames of mind

even went so far as to believe that to suffer conquest was less of an evil than to submit to the domination of the warlike spirit.⁵ It is very difficult for us to concur with him in this passing opinion of his; but be that as it may, we in the present age of partial enlightenment know how just he was in his attitude towards the false glory of modern war, – an attitude which in those days was wholly at variance with the notions of the leading poets, who were then raising the battle cry with all their might.

Which recalls to mind that there exists in print a short, though little known, article of his entitled *Tyrtaeus*,⁶ in which his position is very clearly defined. He sets off by referring to the false charm exercised upon the people by the seductive notes of military music. This music “touches the primal instinct, wakes the racial memory, and he who to the core of his self-conscious being execrates the thought of war is surprised to find himself footing tramp-tramp, nodding a cadence to brass and drum.” Warlike poetry is equally seductive and misleading. “A minority, reading their daily paper, come one day upon verses by Mr. Swinburne, and, however little disposed to the mood heroic, cannot read to the close without feeling their bosoms swell. ‘Strike, England, and strike home!’”

He then goes on to point out that, despite the heroic note of the poet, there exist some people who, purely on literary and ethical grounds, “find a harsh incongruity between their conception of the poet’s calling and the thought of one who incites to warfare.” The question arises as to whether in this latter day the voice of the poet accords with that of human conscience. The old Greek poet Tyrtaeus made a noble figure in the age in which he lived, but

-- 10 --

now-a-days he is surely something worse than an anachronism. “The poet of our day who sounds the Tyrtaean note sets himself consciously against the supreme ideal of civilisation. Consciously. Every man of enough education to pen a rhyme knows that amid all conflicts of opinion, under all disguises of passion, the thought of the civilised world abhors brute strife and looks for the ascendancy of reason.” Such knowledge must assuredly be accredited to Mr. Kipling. Why then, was he, in that enlightened nineteenth century, using his art to incite people to cut each other’s throats and to explode each other’s heads off?

Then comes an important and interesting question which he answers by a suggestive phrase or two. What circumstances could arise in which there might possibly be some justification for a call to arms? What of the affair of the Turks in Armenia, and all the atrocities then being perpetrated by them on the defenceless populations? Here, now, was food for thought. And yet unhappily there was no denying the fact that the cause of the Armenians was not a popular one. True though it was that the poet Watson⁷ did actually find here a just cause for war, and that he wrote many sonnets on the subject which might have excited the warlike tempers of his countrymen, the plain fact still remained that they all fell upon deaf ears. Why, Milton himself would have failed to stir his country to action in such an unprofitable cause!

And Gissing goes on to assign a reason to this public apathy, – a reason which is certainly interesting: “A poet can but feed the flame of wrath which has been already kindled by much coarser hands.” Which implies that the poet who is able to incite to war is he who makes himself at one with popular instinct. The greatest poet ever known would be powerless to induce a nation to take up arms in a cause such as that of Armenia, for which of its own accord it cared nothing.

In conclusion he dons the prophetic mantle: “Wars will still be waged; men will slay each other by the book of arithmetic – by books of many a science yet undreamt of; but he to whom is entrusted the high cause of humanity, who speaks the noblest thoughts in the most fervent tongue, will stand aloof from all that tumult, waiting the return of calm.”

Such is his opinion of the poet’s relationship to modern war. Unlike Ruskin he makes no attempt to justify the conflicts of old on the ground that fairly matched warfare “determines *who*

is the best man; – who is the highest bred, the most self-denying, the most fearless, the coolest of nerve, the swiftest of eye and hand.” But in what follows this passage, Ruskin’s attitude

-- 11 --

accords well with his own: “You must not make it the question, which of the combatants has the largest gun, or which has got behind the biggest tree, or which has the wind in his face [he did not foresee the use of gas!], or which has gunpowder made by the best chemists, or iron smelted with the best coal, or the angriest mob at his back. Decide your battle, whether of nations or individuals, on *those* terms; – and you have only multiplied confusion, and added slaughter to iniquity.”⁸

Though he made no attempt to justify the wars of old, by a curious touch of perversity Gissing came very near to doing so when he allowed himself to be carried away by his enthusiasm for classical history. At the time in question he had contracted fever during some rambles in southern Italy. In describing several half-delirious dreams which he then experienced he gives us a strange glimpse in *By the Ionian Sea* of his “glorious” visions of the slaughter by Hannibal of a contingent of Italian mercenaries:

“I saw the strand by Croton; the promontory with its temple, not as I know the scene to-day, but as it must have looked to those eyes more than two thousand years ago. The soldiers of Hannibal doing massacre, the perishing mercenaries, supported my closest gaze, and left no curiosity unsatisfied. (Alas! could I but see it again, or remember clearly what was shown me!) ... The delight of these phantasms was well worth the ten days’ illness which paid for them.”⁹

This is an odd passage when we consider who it was that wrote it. But it is interesting, for it shows to what an extent a man so totally devoid of warlike instinct as Gissing could actually be blinded and rendered insensitive by the glamour of history. He must, of course, have known all along, that, had he himself lived in the bloody days so ardently admired by him in retrospect, they would have aroused in his mind no other feelings than those of pity and disgust. But here in the magic pages of history they bore for him the semblance of savage mountains seen through the tinted enchantment of a great distance and shorn of all their cruel pinnacles and boulders.

The fact, however, that he was biased by temperament and inheritance by no manner of means disqualifies him from pronouncing judgment upon international strife. Someone has thoughtlessly remarked that he failed to understand life as it was; but it is hardly necessary to say that throughout his writings there is abundant testimony to the contrary; it is impossible to read his words with care and not to realise that his judgment was both penetrating and shrewd. His theory of international relationships is closely connected with what he himself had observed

-- 12 --

as to the quarrelsomeness of individuals; and, indeed, in glancing back over the various ups and downs of his life we are struck by the curious fact that he, a man who never lost his temper or quarrelled, was perpetually finding himself within hearing of verbal warfare. Back in his early London days the angry voices of landladies afflicted his ears; some innocent sojourn in a country town would bring him once again within sound of verbal contention; no sooner was he settled at Exeter with fair hopes of tranquillity after a galling experience in London, than troubles would break out in connection with other members of the house of which he rented a part;¹⁰ in Paris he happened, by a strange perversity, to hit upon quarters that were within earshot of quarrelling neighbours; and readers of *By the Ionian Sea* need not be told how, even in his beloved Magna Græcia, the wrangling of his hotel servant with her mistress lashed pitilessly at his ears from dawn to sunset: – “Between her and her mistress went on an unceasing quarrel: they quarrelled in my room, in the corridor, and, as I knew by their shrill voices, in

places remote.”¹¹

What wonder, then, that domestic strife takes such a prominent place in his novels? What wonder that he should cause Ryecroft to speculate as to how many dwellings there exist in which no word of anger is ever heard, and to conclude that there must be very few indeed? – “It is so difficult for human beings to live together; nay, it is so difficult for them to associate, however transitorily, and even under the most favourable conditions, without some shadow of mutual offence. [...] Suppose yourself endowed with such power of hearing that all the talk going on at any moment beneath the domestic roofs of any town became clearly audible to you; the dominant note would be that of moods, tempers, opinions at jar. Who but the most amiable dreamer can doubt it? [...] In mansion as in hovel, the strain of life is perpetually felt – between the married, between parents and children, between relatives of every degree, between employers and employed. They debate, they dispute, they wrangle, they explode – then nerves are relieved and they are ready to begin over again.”¹²

And then, by a natural transition, he passes to the mutual relationships of nations. Gentle idealists are astonished at the continuance of war. But why this surprise? On the contrary, does it not pass the wit of man to explain how it is that nations are ever at peace? In days of old the difficulties of communication kept back many countries from flying at each other’s throats; but now conditions have changed; nations are within easy reach of each other; “by approximation, all countries have entered the sphere of natural quarrel. That they find plenty of things to quarrel

-- 13 --

about is no cause for astonishment.”¹³ In a hundred years’ time it may be possible to ascertain whether nations are likely to settle their disputes without resorting to bloodshed; but even a century is a very short time for such a change to have taken place.

And then what of the part played by the newspapers in fostering the spirit of war? “Persistent prophecy is a familiar way of assuring the event.”¹⁴ A certain type of journalist – one who is prone to scorn those who rebel against his theory that such and such a calamity must fall upon us – is himself one of the forces that go to bring about war. He takes a callous view of the situation; his phrases are often meaningless; fluent irresponsibility characterizes the part he plays; and, regardless of consequences, he is proud of his prognostications of evil. If some of the newspapers could be silenced, one at least of the causes of war would be removed.

Modern warfare is an affair of science, and at Gissing’s attitude towards science, therefore, we shall do well to take a rapid glance. That he was prejudiced from the very dawn of his intelligence against all branches of scientific knowledge cannot be denied. Unhappily he rejected both the good and the bad, – a narrowness of sympathy which resulted in a strong bias even against such studies as those of botany, astronomy and zoology. The fact of the matter was, he had an instinctive fear of all forms of investigation of the more hidden aspects of nature; he shivered at the thought of penetrating beneath the surface of things; enough for him was his vision of the world that lay open before his eyes. The study of astronomy, for instance, meant a flight of imagination the very idea of which froze the current of his thoughts; philosophical and religious speculation, though he sometimes indulged in them, made him tremble; despite all his lofty moral ideals, religion itself was a thing which disturbed his peace of mind; for, like the higher branches of science it demanded a flight aloft from this solid earth for one whose wings were not developed – a flight into what was for him a *terra incognita*. In conversation he would usually do his best to dismiss all these subjects as things that did not concern him. Not that he was rash enough to reject categorically all the results of investigation in these spheres; he simply feared to look at them; they agitated, they depressed him; some he regarded with actual terror. Doubtless it was all a matter of temperament, yet so deeply ingrained was the prejudice that he never really overcame it.

But descend to the lower branches of science – the chemical and the mechanical – and we

find him on a much surer footing. As a boy he used to regard all machinery with uneasiness, and

-- 14 --

at school he was in the habit of dismissing his science papers with the utmost contempt. Yet it was not till later in life that he found himself able to produce a logical explanation of his attitude; for until then the feeling was nothing more than an instinct, and though instinct unaided by reason may sometimes lead to narrowness, it as often as not hits the truth with unerring aim. Gradually in his maturing intellect he became conscious that there actually was a rational basis for his hatred of these sciences; he began to see whither civilization was tending; he began to foresee the use it was going to make of all its marvellous discoveries; and he sums up his position in that well known prophecy of his: "I hate and fear 'science' because of my conviction that, for long to come if not for ever, it will be the remorseless enemy of mankind. I see it destroying all simplicity and gentleness of life, all the beauty of the world; I see it restoring barbarism under a mask of civilization; I see it darkening men's minds and hardening their hearts; I see it bringing a time of vast conflicts, which will pale into insignificance 'the thousand wars of old,' and, as likely as not, will whelm all the laborious advances of mankind in blood-drenched chaos."¹⁵

Better were it, so he believed, had the scientist and the engineer never existed. The kind of use it is to be put to alone justified a discovery, and were it to become an instrument of destruction which was likely to threaten the collapse of civilization, then, despite any benefits which it might incidentally confer, it was in itself an evil. He felt a conviction that war would be the supreme end of scientific discovery, and upon this rational basis did he build his theories of the material sciences. Scientific progress bore resemblance to a headlong torrent, whose turbulent waters made no response to the vain shouts of him who stood upon its brink. To attempt to arrest its course by warnings as to what lay ahead of it was a mere waste of breath; had it not been so the voices of Carlyle, Ruskin and Tolstoy would already have brought it to a standstill. Gissing's attitude was therefore restrained and passive. To rail at the course of events he pronounced as useless; if the world was really bent upon seeking out destruction for itself, then it would insist upon having its own way, and it would of course be obliged to abide by the natural consequences of its doings. All he could hope was that those who loved the paths of gentleness and culture might some day begin to leaven the stupidity of the multitude.

In conclusion, one brief reference must be made to his strange power of discerning what

-- 15 --

lay ahead. He was haunted, towards the end of his life, by fears for the future of his elder son; and, though there seemed no immediate prospect of war, he was wont to debate within himself as to how he might best safeguard the boy's future. There was a time when he even thought of arranging for him to settle in a distant land, where he might have some reasonable prospect of escaping the slavery of military service. "I would greatly rather never see him again," he wrote, "than foresee him marching in ranks; butchering, or to be butchered."¹⁶ But fate eluded him, and thirteen years after his own death the son, for whose future he feared so greatly, fell in the battle of the Somme.¹⁷

The several prophecies of international conflict that lie scattered throughout his works have to us, in these days, an almost uncanny sound. One recalls the passage in *The Whirlpool*, written a few years before the outbreak of the South African War, in which the latter is clearly foretold, and the concluding words come vividly before one's mind, – "We shall fight like blazes in the twentieth century."¹⁸

¹This is a mistake. Alfred Gissing quotes from "Reminiscences of My Father," a

manuscript now in the Beinecke Library. Gissing wrote: "I was oil-painting in the little spare bedroom which I used as a studio (looking out into Thompson's Yard), one day in 1870, when father came in to tell me that the Franco-Prussian war had begun. 'Well,' he exclaimed, 'they're at it – killing each other,' or something to that effect. I remember it impressed me with a sense of horror." See Pierre Coustillas, "Gissing's Reminiscences of His Father: An Unpublished Manuscript," *English Literature in Transition*, Volume 32 (1989), no. 4, pp. 419-39. The next entry was about the Abyssinian war. Needless to say, Alfred Gissing's reasoning is not affected by this misreading of a document, the original of which was still in his possession when he wrote the article.

²*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (London: Constable, 1903), Spring XIX.

³*Ibid.*

⁴Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), Ch. IV.

⁵See *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Spring XIX.

⁶"Tyrtaeus," *The Review of the Week*, 4 November 1899, pp. 6-7.

⁷William Watson (1858-1935), the Yorkshire-born poet who made a name for himself with *Wordsworth's Grave and Other Poems* (1890) and *Lachrymae Musarum* (1892), verses on the death of Tennyson. The various allusions to him that Gissing made in his diary and elsewhere show that he was impressed neither by Watson's verse nor by his personality.

⁸John Ruskin, *The Crown of Wild Olive* (1866), lecture III, "War," Delivered at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, 1865, § 101.

⁹*By the Ionian Sea* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1901), Ch. IX.

-- 16 --

¹⁰A transparent allusion to the Rocketts, the people in whose house he lived at 24 Prospect Park, Exeter, and whom he pilloried in his *Commonplace Book* and in his diary.

¹¹Ch. X.

¹²*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Summer VI.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Summer VII.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, Winter XVIII.

¹⁶Letter to Morley Roberts of 10 February 1900. The omission of Walter's name and the punctuation show that Alfred Gissing was quoting from Ch. VII of *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (1912).

¹⁷At Gommecourt, in the department of Pas-de-Calais, on 1 July 1916.

¹⁸*The Whirlpool* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1897), Part I, Ch. II, p. 16.

* * * * *

George Gissing and the "Triple-Headed Monster":
A Summing-Up

Robert Alan Shaddy
Louisiana Tech University

George Gissing's private life has been the focus of much attention by scholars who have related its impact upon his career.¹ Besides the private pressures which shaped Gissing's novels, public pressures also influenced his writing and his art. This was true for all writers of the period who had to take into account, for example, their audience and their interests, needs and prejudices. The Victorian author did not write with only himself/herself in mind and had to deal with a galaxy of variables.

Gissing, like other novelists of the period, had to shape his art and his writings into a

format which had little to do directly with the public taste in literature. In order to sell his novels, particularly the early works, he had to fit them into what was then the conventional and prescribed format, the so-called Victorian triple-decker. Gissing believed this convention, which was maintained and perpetuated for seventy years by English publishers and circulating libraries (such as the House of Bentley and Mudie's Circulating Library, respectively) to be a "triple-headed monster sucking the blood of English novelists."² The Victorian three-volume

-- 17 --

novel (or triple-decker) was practically obliterated by 1894, before the end of Victoria's reign, and its fall was swift and sure. It was maintained by economic considerations and swiftly undone by those same considerations. To-day it is as extinct as the dinosaur although some look back upon the triple-decker romantically as many do upon the era in which it thrived. The triple-decker was profitable for the publishers, the circulating libraries and the well-established writers, but, in reality, it served to brake creativity and retarded the development of modern literature. The following pages will recapitulate the "triple-headed monster's" impact on one writer's art.³

In his most successful novel, *New Grub Street* (1891), George Gissing presents the novelist's point of view regarding this exploitative and stifling system. In a conversation between two writers, Reardon (the artistic idealist) and Milvain (the modern pragmatist), Gissing makes clear the tyrannical nature of the author's dependence on the library and publisher-supported three-decker.

"For anyone in my position," said Reardon, "how is it possible to abandon the three volumes? It is a question of payment. An author of moderate repute may live on a yearly three-volume novel – I mean the man who is obliged to sell his book out and out, and who gets from one to two hundred pounds for it. But he would have to produce four one-volume novels to obtain the same income; and I doubt whether he could get so many published within the twelve months. And here comes in the benefit of the libraries; from the commercial point of view the libraries are indispensable. Do you suppose the public would support the present number of novelists if each book had to be purchased? A sudden change to that system would throw three-fourths of the novelists out of work."

"But there's no reason why the libraries shouldn't circulate novels in one volume?"

"Profits would be less, I suppose. People would take the minimum subscription." (p. 236)

As the above exchange indicates, novelists of the era very rarely lived on copyright royalties. They had to sell outright their novels to the publishers. Of course, this was not fair to the author whose work sold very well after he sold the rights to it since he reaped little of the financial reward. However, for an author like Gissing, the system allowed one who was not altogether suitable for the mass reading public's taste to live as a professional novelist even if in a straitened fashion.

-- 18 --

Through the years of the nineteenth century, the physical dimensions of the triple-decker became increasingly defined and limiting. The standard rule of thumb required each volume to contain three hundred pages with a little more than twenty lines to a page. In 1883, the publisher,

George Bentley, told an author that a novel consisted of 920 pages with twenty-one and a half lines on each page. He even specified the “proper” number of words per line. The formula was not strictly adhered to, of course, but publishers aimed at these dimensions. Printers became expert at stretching and shaping short copy into the required length. The authors also knew how to accomplish the three volumes.⁴ Gissing’s Reardon

...wrote a very small hand; sixty written slips of the kind of paper he habitually used would represent – thanks to the astonishing system which prevails in such matters: large type, wide spacing, frequency of blank pages – a passable three-hundred-page volume. On an average he could write four such slips a day; so here we have fifteen days for the volume, and forty-five for the completed book. (p. 151)

Numerous entries in Gissing’s diary reveal he wrote this way also. Sometimes, it seems, the actual filling-up of the slips transcended the content of the work itself. For example, on 27 March 1897, he wrote in his diary, “Am trying to make my handwriting larger; ‘New Grub Street’ was microscopic. The difficulty is that I shan’t be able to calculate quantities so well.”⁵ Thus it has been observed that “many Victorian three-volume novels, including some of Gissing’s own, are all too clearly good ideas for one or at most two volumes, which had been stretched and padded to fill the statutory three.” Usually the middle volume turned out a “sad second” and sometimes the novel peaked too soon in the third.⁶ The great descriptive passages of Victorian novels which have been made much of by literary scholars were, in effect, fillers – techniques utilized by authors to desperately conform to the demands of the triple-decker “monster.” As Reardon struggled for artistic and even physical survival in *New Grub Street*, his “second volume ought to have been much easier work than the first; it proved harder. [...] The critics are wont to point out the weakness of second volumes; they are generally right, simply because a story which would have made a tolerable book (the common run of stories) refuses to fill three books” (p. 161).

Along with other novelists, Gissing had to “pad” his novels. For Reardon, descriptions “of

-- 19 --

locality, deliberate analysis of character or motive, demanded far too great an effort for his present [weakened] condition. He kept as much as possible to dialogue; the space is filled so much more quickly, and at a pinch one can make people talk about the paltriest incidents of life” (p. 154). In fact, *New Grub Street* itself is somewhat flawed by “thinly spun conversation.” A French translation of the work appeared in 1901-1902 with Gissing making radical cuts in the dialogue for the translator in 1898.⁷

It is clear that Gissing conformed only grudgingly to the triple-decker format. The format was quite “unnatural” and based completely upon conditions outside the inner motivations of Victorian writers who had their own sense of the art which they desired to produce. Fortunately, the end of this artificiality, once the support for it by the publishers and the circulating libraries was withdrawn, occurred quite rapidly as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Somewhat prematurely, Gissing wrote to his brother in the mid-1880’s that “the old three volume tradition is being broken through. One volume is becoming commonest of all.”⁸ Gissing’s Reardon reflects the author’s opposition (and other Victorian novelists’) when he

...saw that he must perforce plan another novel. But this time he was resolute not to undertake three volumes. The advertisements informed him that numbers of authors were abandoning the procrustean system. (p. 190)

By 1894, the system ceased to be profitable for the lending libraries and they withdrew their support. Publishers were informed that three-deckers would no longer be ordered. Arthur Mudie, who succeeded his father (Charles Edward Mudie) as head of the Select Library, wrote to George Bentley:

My own feeling [...] is directly against the three-volume novel. It serves no useful purpose whatever in our business and I shall be heartily glad and much relieved if the gods (i.e., the publishers) will give us the one volume from the first.⁹

The decreasing rate of illiteracy throughout England and the rising numbers of the middle-class resulted in a rising pool of readers who demanded cheaper volumes. The publishers recognized this and often followed a three-decker with a cheaper one-volume edition. This, ironically, undermined the three-deckers of the circulating libraries. A number of novelists chafed under their domination by the libraries and publishers and, by the 1890's, were writing

-- 20 --

one-volume novels in order to tap the new market and to more naturally express their artistic inclinations. Hall Caine's *The Manxman* (1894), a one-volume runaway best-seller, spelled the end of the triple-decker.¹⁰

Mudie, therefore, understood the new trend and withdrew his support for the monster. Thus, the triple-decker was wrecked – in 1894, 184 were published; in 1895, fifty-two; and by 1897, only four were issued. Novels became shorter and cheaper with their outright purchase by publishers giving way to the royalty system. The novel, according to Adrian Poole, took on a more modern demeanor, and abandoned the multitude of slowly developing plots common in Victorian novels, by “showing experience that is perceptible and controllable only in small quantities, glimpses and fragments.”¹¹

After 1894, none of George Gissing's novels were published in the three-decker form. Before 1894, all but two were issued in the dominant and inhibiting style. *Isabel Clarendon* (1886) was published in two volumes and *Denzil Quarrier* (1892) in one volume. Gillian Tindall, who characterized the author as a “born exile,” offers an interesting hypothesis speculating that Gissing was “at home” with the three-decker.

Indeed, though during the 1890's he published several deliberately brief one-volume novels, these tend to be skeletal or designedly “light”; he continued to write three-deckers or potential three-deckers, till the end of his life. *The Crown of Life* would have been long enough for the old pattern, also *The Whirlpool*, and *Veranilda* (never finished) was planned in volumes. It was as if, despite his protests and the pains which writing cost him, he felt at home with the form.¹²

A thorough psychological study might support the point fully. However, most readers feel that Edwin Reardon's struggles in *New Grub Street* mirror Gissing's difficulties in dealing with the “triple-headed monster.” The manuscript for *Born in Exile* (1892) was discovered to be too short and Gissing had to write an extra chapter in two days. This added chapter did not contribute to the intellectual or literary content of the book but, rather, gave the final volume enough pages.¹³ Gissing, in 1901, wrote to a French critic about *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile* expressing his belief that the three-decker was a principal cause of the defects of his writing.

Of course you are right about the superfluities to be found in both of them. The fault is partly due to their having been written when English fiction was subjected to the three volume system. [...] However, in the case

-- 21 --

of *New Grub Street*, the defect is remedied in the French translation; almost a third of the novel has been cut out. If ever I get the opportunity, I shall give all my books a vigorous revision, and cut them down.¹⁴

Other novels by Gissing were subsequently re-published in shorter, cheaper, streamlined and effective one-volume editions. *The Unclassed*, a three-decker first published in 1884, was revised in 1895 as was *The Emancipated* (1890) in 1893. He cut down *Thyrza* (1887) for a six-shilling reprint in 1891 and told Eduard Bertz, "I have greatly shortened, and I think, improved it." He partially revised his first novel *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) by eliminating what critics have assailed as the faults of the three-decker: excessive dialogue, description and authorial comment. When given the opportunity, Gissing did indeed "cut them down."¹⁵

George Gissing's earliest novels conformed to the conventional three volumes. As a beginning writer, he was in no position to combat the system. But, after publication of *The Unclassed*, he revealed his growing distaste for the triple-decker. In 1885, he wrote to his brother, "I shall stick to the plan of two volumes, it is speedier work. I believe it will come to one before long with most writers." Four days later he vowed to "finish the next two volumes (I don't think I shall ever again write three), before winter. It is high time to [...] face the publishers resolutely." Later in the month he added hopefully, that it was "fine to see how the old three volume tradition is being broken through. One volume is becoming commonest of all. It is the new school."¹⁶ Of course, this was wishful thinking.

The projected two-volume novel he anticipated and hoped for, *A Life's Morning* (1888), was ultimately published as a triple-decker despite Gissing's previous declarations. Two volumes were, he told his brother, Algernon, "against the publishers' predilection" and that writing the third volume was "terrific toil." *The Nether World* (1889), the first novel to appear after *A Life's Morning*, also emerged as a triple-decker. Guinevere Griest believes, "No one affords a better example than Gissing of the serious writer, dependent on his work for his living, forced to cast his material in a length and shape uncongenial to him."¹⁷

The content of Gissing's work was affected by the censorship of Mudie and his publishers just as the physical format of his novels was shaped. His earlier novels especially were challenged since his philosophy of realism conflicted with "accepted" standards. One character in his first novel declares, "I cannot tell how much or how little you know of my story, which

-- 22 --

really I may some day be tempted to present to you in the familiar three volumes. I think it might go down excellently with the patrons of Mudie's, especially if the character of the heroine were a trifle idealised..."¹⁸

Gissing's "Mrs. Grundy's Enemies" provides another example of publishing house censorship (albeit indirect, to be sure) which worked closely with that of the triple-decker format. Finished in 1882, the manuscript was offered to the firm of Smith, Elder for publication. They declined it saying, "It exhibits a great deal of dramatic power and is certainly not wanting in vigour, but in our judgment it is too painful to please the ordinary novel reader and treats of scenes that can never attract the subscribers to Mr. Mudie's Library." The novelist was not surprised by their reaction: "Of course I could have told them all that."¹⁹ The House of Bentley purchased the book for fifty guineas, but when the publisher saw the proofs of the first volume

he “became alarmed at the author’s plain speaking, and ended by never bringing out the book.”²⁰

In a series of letters, Gissing revealed Bentley’s fears and his own resolve:

He has been reading the proofs, and comes to the conclusion that he must really beg me to soften certain features in some of the description and dialogue. [...] I shall fight these prejudices to the end, cost what it may.

This book is addressed to those to whom Art is dear for its own sake. Also to those who, possessing their own Ideal of social and personal morality, find themselves able to allow the relativity of all Ideals whatsoever.²¹

Bentley, however, exercising the same type of power he and others used to keep the triple-decker novel institutionalized, ultimately refused to publish the manuscript.²² When Gissing offered his next novel, *The Unclassed*, the House of Bentley rejected it straightaway because one of the characters, a prostitute, is represented as good and noble. Bentley wrote to Gissing to explain their decision.

Though we know in this unfortunate class there are many with kindly instincts yet the nature of the life tends to deaden and in time destroy the good originally present. It does not appear to me wholesome, to hold up the idea that a life of vice can be lived without loss of purity and womanly nature. [...] The realistic treatment of such a subject works for evil as well as good [...] and it is not from want of talent that I feel obliged to decline your work, but the nature of the story itself.²³

-- 23 --

When Chapman and Hall published *The Unclassed* in 1884, Gissing revised it and an expurgated version was released in three volumes. In 1895, a one-volume edition with more revisions was published.²⁴ Despite all this, *The Unclassed* in its three-decker form was banned by Mudie’s library.²⁵ Regardless of Gissing’s noble aesthetic standards for his conception of Art, his realistic novels were challenged by the commercial reality of Victorian publishers allied with the circulating libraries. The individuals involved posed as guardians of public morality and values and were as dedicated to that role as they were in their dedication to the perpetuation of the triple-decker novel.

Gissing’s own attempt to overcome the sentimentalism of English fiction was checked. After *The Nether World* (1889), a novel populated only by types from the lower and working-class, he backed away from “gloomy realism.” Subsequent novels featured more middle-class types and themes and he experienced fewer difficulties with publishers. In his lifetime, he was neither extremely popular nor acclaimed by the reading public. But he did manage to sell enough of his work in order to live. James Keech noted:

The three decker was replaced by the one-volume novel of to-day. It had held a long reign, over seventy years, beginning with the highly profitable novels of Sir Walter Scott which had established the fixed format and price. It had created a concept of the novel as a thick panoramic entity, and it had agonized hundreds of novelists who had to fit their talents to a set mold. George Gissing was certainly one of them.²⁷

In 1902, a year away from his death, Gissing wrote to his old friend Eduard Bertz, and

characterized himself as one of the casualties of the triple-decker system which had been perpetuated by the libraries and publishers. While his reputation in England was steadily increasing and he was receiving belated recognition for his literary endeavors,

...the old contradiction is still in force – my fame brings me no money, my books have only the smallest sale. I suppose I am a notable victim of the circulating-library system. My books are read only from the libraries. And so, no doubt, it will be to the end.²⁷

George Gissing endured a life fraught with challenge, uncertainty, and public and private pressures which clearly affected his writing and his Art. Dying as he did in 1903 at the age of forty-six, he did not live to see the great stylistic and thematic changes which swept through the

-- 24 --

post-Victorian world of English letters. By the time of his death, a new generation of writers unshackled and unbound by the system which united triple-deckers, circulating libraries, and moralistic publishers was able to produce a body of modernist literature which a constrained Gissing could not realistically achieve. Those who visit rare book or special collections libraries and see or read the Victorian three-volume novels housed there should do so with the image of the “triple-headed monster” in mind and remember its terrible impact upon authors such as George Gissing.

¹A number of studies which treat Gissing’s life and the influence of his personal problems on his writings are available. See, for example, Gillian Tindall, *The Born Exile: George Gissing* (London: Temple Smith, 1974); Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963); John Halperin, *Gissing. A Life in Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Frank Swinnerton, *George Gissing: A Critical Study* (New York: George Doran Company, 1923); Joseph J. Wolff, *George Gissing: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings About Him* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974); and Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), referred to below as *Diary*.

²George Gissing, *New Grab Street* (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 235. Future references to this edition are included in the text.

³On the three-decker novel, Victorian publishers, and English circulating libraries, see Royal A. Gettmann, *A Victorian Publisher: A Study of the Bentley Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960); Tindall, pp. 269-271; Guinevere L. Griest, *Mudie’s Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970); Frank Arthur Mumby, *Publishing and Bookselling: A History From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954); and James M. Keech, “Gissing’s *New Grab Street* and ‘The Triple Headed Monster,’” in *George Gissing: Critical Essays*, ed. Jean-Pierre Michaux (London: Vision Press Limited, 1981).

⁴Bernard Bergonzi, “Introduction,” in *New Grub Street*, p. 24; Tindall, pp. 272-73.

⁵*Diary*, p. 242; see also, pp. 243-50.

⁶Tindall, p. 272; Griest, p. 106; Gettmann, p. 237.

⁷Keech, p. 160.

⁸Algernon and Ellen Gissing, eds., *Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), p. 166; hereafter referred to as *Letters*; other collections of Gissing’s correspondence can be found in Pierre Coustillas, ed., *Henry Hick’s Recollections of George Gissing, Together with Gissing’s Letters to Henry Hick* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1973) and *The Letters of George Gissing to Edward Clodd* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1973).

⁹Quoted in Gettmann, p. 259.

-- 25 --

¹⁰Keech, p. 159; Tindall, p. 269.

¹¹Bergonzi, pp. 25-26; Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), p. 24.

¹²Tindall, p. 273.

¹³Gettmann, p. 251; John D. Gordan, *George Gissing, 1857-1903: An Exhibition from the Berg Collection* (New York: the New York Public Library, 1954), p. 23.

¹⁴Quoted in Gettmann, p. 253.

¹⁵Keech, p. 160; Arthur C. Young, ed., *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, 1887-1903* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961), p. 120; Griest, p. 118.

¹⁶*Letters*, p. 164-66.

¹⁷Griest, p. 99.

¹⁸Quoted in Griest, p. 57.

¹⁹*Letters*, p. 119.

²⁰Quoted in Gettmann, p. 216.

²¹*Letters*, pp. 121-22.

²²Gettmann, pp. 217-20.

²³Quoted in Gettmann, p. 220.

²⁴Gettmann, pp. 221-22.

²⁵Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge, eds., *Gissing: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 13.

²⁶Keech, p. 159.

²⁷Arthur C. Young, ed., *Letters to Bertz*, p. 312.

Oh Lord, Save Me From New Grub Street

Robert Ward
Universal City, California

[This article was first published in the *Los Angeles Times* on 31 March 1991, pp. 3 and 9, and is reprinted here with the author's kind permission. Robert Ward's novel, *Red Baker*, won the PEN West Award as the best work of fiction for 1985. His new book, *The King of Cards*, will be published in 1992.]

I was living in my girlfriend's apartment in Washington, D.C., which was so small that it looked like the place in which the Swede waits to die in "The Killers," and I had some horrible irritable bowel syndrome that felt like a baby's hand squeezing my intestines (from drink, the Doc said, but what did *he* know? I was sick from defeat, poverty, exhaustion, mind-numbing rejection from publishers – 21 of them had just turned down my new novel. I drank to keep

-- 26 --

myself sane, as any righthinking man would!).

And I had no money except what I could score off old editor pals at GQ and Rolling Stone who might give me a profile to do of some actor, for which I had to act humble and grateful but deep down inside a little dying animal voice is screaming, "Oh God, not another one of those"; I had already written soooo many profiles. I had even once been, God help me, a

“hot” journalist, but that was three years and 10,000 hours of mind-numbing dull chitchat ago, and I couldn’t even bear to start another lead, “Cher is resplendent in pink!”

And so here I was with my rejected book, a book I knew was a killer, and yet, and yet 21 rejections. One editor even called me and said, “We love it, Bob, but we can’t buy it because it’s about working-class people and they don’t read books!” Oh Lord, this was a bad, bad time. I would stare down at my manuscript, all 400 pages of it, and think there has to be some way out of this, there has to be some escape, but what could it be?

After all, I was writing a book in 1983 about broken-down blue-collar guys from my old stomping grounds in Baltimore; what happens to them when the steel mill closes, and how their whole way of life – the life I knew in my past – was wiped out. Oh, nothing mattered to me as much as this book, and yet it seemed hopeless. This was the mid-’80s and Jayboy MacInerney was the King of the World with his sweet little wisp of a book about getting coked out in New York, and more power to him, he wasn’t even a bad guy for a Yupster. But I knew that I was doomed, like Algren or somebody, to this death in life, no money, no home, unless I could write a script or something, get out of D.C., ’cause God knows I didn’t have any fiction left in me just then. Man, I was beat. Flat. Dolorsville.

So in the mornings my girlfriend went off to work at National Public Radio and I lay in bed drinking cheap wine and smoking cigarettes and tried to make calls to my old editor pals but was too defeated to even dial the phone most of the time and by 11, I would fall into a melancholic stupor and I thought this was it, this was the end. Maybe, what the hell, I’d turn on the gas, like in the old Depression movies. (“He’s all blue, Sarge!” “Get the lawn bag, Riley!”)

Instead, I dragged my ass to the typewriter and kept retooling my dying novel, and when I got too depressed to do even that, I started reading. Reading had saved my life before. Once in Haight-Ashbury when I was thinking about putting a gun to my head, I read “The Moviegoer”

-- 27 --

in the downtown library readingroom and managed to pull through.

Yes, I needed to read. That was essential. Reading was purification, everything else diversion from the facts. It was diversion that was killing us. I was sure of that. So I started reading. I’d read all day, anything handy. I mean I was too wasted to go through the books to one I wanted. I’d just reach in and grab one off the shelf and open it. That’s how I read all of “Fathers and Sons” by Turgenev, which brought tears to my eyes, and how I discovered the book that saved my life, more or less, “New Grub Street” by George Gissing.

I don’t know why the book was in my library. I didn’t remember buying it and I don’t think it was my girlfriend’s either. All I knew was that I started reading and I couldn’t stop. It was as if God had pointed me to it. This had happened a few times in my life and it’s why I believe in God, if you care to know, why I think he’s watching us. though maybe not all the time, and maybe we break his heart too often. But I started reading and I couldn’t stop.

The time is 1880. The place, London. Edwin Reardon is a serious writer in his 30s who’s managed to produce a couple of artistic novels. One of them, “On Neutral Ground,” has been somewhat of a small success, and for that brief time, Reardon is feted and meets a charming middle-class girl named Amy Yule. He knows he shouldn’t marry her; she’s young and thinks he is sensitive and talented, which he is, but he is also too sensitive, too brittle, headed for a lifetime of poverty. But she is in love and hopeful and he so needs hope that he marries her anyway, dooming them both to a poverty-stricken existence unless he can find some way out.

I would lie there in my unmade bed on those rainy Washington mornings and I would feel the creeping horrors come over me. It was as though Reardon was my fictional doppelganger. I read with a kind of ghoulish delight, and yet, yet also a sense of something else.

I didn’t understand what it was at first, but it wasn’t all horror; no, there was something – Christ – liberating about it. Because the book was done without sentimentality. Reardon was

drawn sympathetically but his less “serious” friends also were fully realized characters.

There was Jasper Milvain, his dandyish publisher-editor knockabout in the world of the three-decker novel in London. Milvain is always coming around to Reardon’s miserable digs, encouraging him to “write for the market,” and poor, pathetic, ridiculous and noble Reardon is always saying, “Yes, yes indeed, but how do I do it?” And Milvain is always telling him to do

-- 28 --

something Gothic such as “The Weird Sisters,” and Reardon is dying to keep his middle-class wife who is too weak for this kind of existence for very long, and he wants to sell out. Oh God yes, let him sell out.

And he tries, he tries to write a novel about evil twins, “The Weird Sisters,” and I am sitting on the bed, with spilled ashes on the cigarette tray and my girlfriend is calling and asking me how I’m doing and I’m lying and saying, “Oh, great, great, darlin’, everything is great now... Yes yes yes... I know they’ll see the value of my book soon, and meanwhile I’m going to write something commercial and it’s going to hit big, so big we are going to be like Scrooge McDuck taking baths in cartoon Grecian pools filled with gold coins. Don’t you worry.”

But in actuality, I’m going back to this horrifying book and Reardon is getting sick, and the other characters are these penny-ante journalists just like my old pals in New York, and they are fighting over who gets to do a book review for 20 pence, and hating, yes, *hating* and *despising* each other because some other wretch got the gig, and it’s so damned...God Help Me, funny.

Yes, I’m having this attack of screaming panic laughter, thinking, “It was always this way. No one has ever wanted literature. In those days they wanted music-hall guys and bloomer gals, and in these days they want Madonna and rappers who trill out doggerel to some cretin’s beat.”

This should make me more depressed, ready to go fully whacked out nuts, but it doesn’t and I don’t know why. So I put the book down and try writing something about it, and I think this: Knowing that George Gissing wrote this and suffered it, and died at 46 but his book still lives and tells the truth, this is what’s saving me. Why, it was like the blues ... you see that? It was like *reading* the blues and my pain suddenly lifted off my back by this totally honest novel.

OK.OK.OK. I don’t *really* know how these things work. That would take a pince-nez-wearing scientist with Ed Reimer eyes and eerie electrodes that measured galvanic skin response. I only know that it did work, you see? Because somehow as Reardon sank – and got sick and of course could not write “The Weird Sisters” because only true high-passion hacks can write true hack work – and as Jasper Milvain rose higher and higher by inventing a magazine called Chit Chat¹ with short little articles, and pictures of celebrities going to and coming from the theater and clubs (which sounds, of course, exactly like People Magazine; “Grub” was written in 1891, so Gissing foretold our whole culture of celebrity and moronic illiteracy a hundred years ago), I began to have something of a religious experience. I knew that

-- 29 --

I would survive my 21 dead publishers. I knew that I wouldn’t drink myself to death, and I would make some kind of stand. The truth does that to me; it’s phony lying cynical optimism that kills.

I went back to work, and cut some of the b.s. out of my own book. You see, my book was grim, with touches of black humor. And what was wrong with it at first was that I was trying to pull my punches. I was trying not to go all the way to the dark. And after reading “New Grub Street,” I went back and instead, gleefully, doggedly made it darker still, until it shone like some polished piece of coal.

And two weeks later Joyce Johnson, herself a great writer, bought “Red Baker” for Dial

Press. The book came out, and got great reviews, and though I never made any money on it, I ended getting a tryout writing for “Hill Street Blues” because of it. That worked, and I am no longer poor, and I no longer drink as much, and I even just a few weeks ago finished a new book of stories, and a novella...

I don't want to make any outsized claims. “New Grub Street” didn't save my life all alone. But it helped. All I know is that it's a great novel. It's about art being trounced by the wagons of commerce, and it's also grimly funny, and it's how most real writers live their whole lives, even those sequestered in the comfy academies – maybe them most of all – desperate, afraid of the light going out without ever having written anything noble or true.

They say that in his own life Gissing was unable to accept success, that his marriages all were disasters and that he sabotaged himself whenever he was on the threshold of respectability. Maybe so, but in “New Grub Street,” he got it dead right: There's no special pleading, no whining, and no quarter given. Which is how it has to be with real art.

“New Grub Street” is a great and true book. I owe you one, George, and we'll have a drink one day together, when we're all farthingless in heaven.

¹Actually *Chit Chat* is founded by Whelpdale. (Ed.)

-- 30 --

English Literature in Transition
1880-1920

Volume 35, 1992

Picturing Dorian Gray: Resistant Readings in Wilde's Novel
MICHAEL PATRICK GILLESPIE

Arnoldian Culture in Transition: An Early Socialist Reading
BILL BELL

Aesthetic Memory's Cul-de-sac: The Art of Ernest Dowson
CHRIS SNODGRASS

Pastoral Patterns in the Early Poetry of I. Sturge Moore
GROSVENOR POWELL

Ella D'Arcy: An Annotated Secondary Bibliography
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN FISHER IV

Marie Corelli and *Fin de Siècle* Feminism
JANET GALLIGANI CASEY

100 Books Reviewed Annually
U.S. \$16.00 Foreign \$20

ELT Press

Oscar Wilde: New Materials
on Methods of Research
IAN SMALL

1992 0-944318-07-X \$30.00 250 pp.



Selected Prose of John Gray

JERUSHA HULL MCCORMACK, ed.

1992 0-944318-06-8 \$30.00 300 pp.

Pater in the 1990s

LAUREL BRAKE & IAN SMALL, eds.

1991 0-944318-05-3 \$30.00 300 pp.

Rediscovering Herbert Horne

IAN FLETCHER

1990 0-944318-02-9 \$25.00 220 pp.

Arthur Symons: A Bibliography

KARL BECKSON, et. al,

1990 0-944318-04-5 \$30.00 344 pp.

Books Distributed in Europe by Colin Smythe Ltd.
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, GREENSBORO 27412-500

-- 31 --

Eve Madeley in Denmark

Bouwe Postmus
University of Amsterdam

That *Eve's Ransom* found favour with readers in countries as far apart as Russia and the Netherlands has been a long established fact, to which the translations of the novel into Dutch and Russian testify. Until recently it was thought that Gissing's novel was only available in its original edition to Danish readers. Now, with the discovery of a Danish translation of *Eve's Ransom* we are in a position to adjust our views about Gissing's popularity in Denmark (and Norway¹) around the turn of the century.

Under the title *Eva Madeley* the novel was published as a serial in the Copenhagen daily *Samfundet* ("Society"). It came out in 48 instalments, the first appearing on Tuesday, 2 January 1900 and the final one on Sunday, 18 February 1900. *Samfundet*² was a new daily (including Sunday) on the Danish market – its first issue had, in fact, appeared only one day before the Danish readers were treated to their first dose of Gissing. Apparently, the paper was quite successful in carving out a niche for itself, for by the middle of March 1900 its circulation reached 20,000, falling to about 15,000 in July 1901.

As for the selection of serials – which were to remain a permanent feature of the paper – the editor, probably as a direct consequence of his great familiarity with and love of English and American literature, showed a marked preference for prose fiction in the English language. In the paper's first year, five out of the six novels that were serialized were works of English origin. After Gissing's *Eve's Ransom*,³ the Danish readers were offered the following titles: Olive Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*,⁴ J. M. Barrie's *The Little Minister*,⁵ Fergus W. Hume's *Palazzo Morone*,⁶ and Stanley J. Weyman's *Sophia*.⁷

An edition of *Eva Madeley* was published from the same plates that were used for the serialization. The book's format is 8vo (14.8 x 9.9 cm), its boards are in black and white marbled paper, and it has 303 pages. The full title page reads: *Eva Madeley*, af J. Gissing, Føljeton til "Samfundet." Köbenhavn. Trykt hos O. C. Olsen & Co. 1900. The two copies that I have seen are in Det Kongelige Bibliothek (The Royal Library), pressmark: 58-85, and in the Universitets Bibliothek (Fiolstraede), pressmark: Germ. 67525. It has proved to be difficult,

however, to find out more about the history of this edition. It is not mentioned in the *Dansk*

-- 32 --

Bogfortegnelse (Danish National Bibliography) and this puzzling absence is confirmed by the entry in Erland Munch-Petersen's inventory of Danish translations of English and French prose fiction in the 19th century.⁸

Munch-Petersen also notes the absence of the translator's name. When I approached him about this, he could merely suggest that it "might be the badly paid work of a woman." On reflection there seem to be two possible candidates for the Danish translation of *Eve's Ransom*. The first is the editor-in-chief himself of the newly established *Samfundet*, Alfred Ipsen (1852-1922), whose early years read like something straight from a Gissing novel. He was born the son of a glovemaker and baptized Peter Alfred Buntzen. His parents died in the disastrous cholera epidemic that hit Denmark in 1853 and the young boy was adopted by a childless village priest and his wife, by the name of Ipsen. In 1864 he changed his name to that of his adoptive parents and thenceforth called himself Alfred Ipsen. He studied theology at Copenhagen University, with a view to becoming a priest, but he came under the influence of the radical Danish reformer and freethinker, Georg Brandes, and turned to the study of English language and literature. In 1879 he stayed for a while in London and on his return he settled in Odense as a teacher of English. In the early eighties he moved to Copenhagen, where he published his first volume of poetry. He became a prominent man of letters, poet, journalist and editor and towards the end of his life he served the National Society of Authors as President (1910-1919). Besides these manifold activities he found time for a fair number of translations from English, e.g. Byron's *Manfred* and *Beppo*, Matthew Arnold's *Balder Dead*, Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills*, and John Stuart Mill's *The Emancipation of Women*. In addition, he published a study of Dickens, to commemorate the centenary of his birth, *Charles Dickens. Hans Liv og Gerning* (1912) [His Life and Work]. In the bibliography of this book he acknowledged Gissing's important study of Dickens.

After his early radical phase Ipsen increasingly gravitated towards more conservative political circles, breaking entirely with the radical mentor of his earlier years, Brandes. It is certainly within the realm of possibility that Ipsen, the editor of the conservative *Samfundet*, was the same person as the anonymous translator of Gissing's novel. In view of the absence of any authorized permission to translate *Eve's Ransom* into Danish, we must conclude that the translation was pirated, so as, perhaps, not to unduly burden the budget of the newborn daily.

-- 33 --

The other possible candidate is Peter Jerndorff-Jessen (1853-1942), an inspector of schools, who must have been one of the most prolific Danish translators from English/American in the last twenty years of the 19th century. In the period 1887-1902 alone, he translated over 50 titles,⁹ ranging from the adventure novels of H. Rider Haggard, and Robert Ballantyne's stories for boys, to Arthur Conan Doyle's detective novels and Captain Marryat's sea stories. In the first year of *Samfundet's* existence he contributed two serials in translation: Barrie's *Den lille Praest* and Weyman's *Sophia*. Although Gissing's subject matter in *Eve's Ransom* is perhaps less suited to the adventurous translating pen of Jerndorff-Jessen, it may just have been possible that his friend, Alfred Ipsen,¹⁰ had persuaded him to join the staff of *Samfundet* as translator/editor of serialized fiction from the start.

In the final analysis, one feels, though, that Ipsen's character, his experience and his achievement may have had a slight edge on Jerndorff-Jessen, in making him the most suitable and likely (anonymous) translator of *Eve's Ransom*.

¹Authorization to translate was in most cases granted specifically for both Denmark and Norway, because Norwegian readers could (and still can) read Danish without any difficulty.

²*Samfundet*, “eneste uafhaengige konservative Dagblad i Köbenhavn,” (1900-1905), that is, independent conservative daily paper. Editor: January-October 1900, Alfred Ipsen. Published by O. C. Olsen, Linnésgade 22, Copenhagen.

³J. [sic] Gissing, “Eva Madeley,” in: *Samfundet*, January 2-February 18, 1900.

⁴Oline [sic] Schreiner, “Menig Peter Halket of Mashonaland,” Fortaelling fra Sydafrika, oversat af Marie Monrad, in: *Samfundet*, 20 February-16 March 1900.

⁵J. M. Barrie, “Den lille Praest,” Oversat fra Engelsk af P. Jerndorff-Jessen, in *Samfundet*, 16 March-19 July 1900.

⁶Fergus W. Hume, “Palazzo Morone,” Autoriseret Oversaettelse ved Reginald G. Koefoed, in: *Samfundet*, 20 July-26 August 1900.

⁷Stanley J. Weyman, “Sophia” (Roman), oversat af P. Jerndorff-Jessen, in: *Samfundet*, part one, 15 September-9 November 1900; part two, 9 November 1900-12 January 1901.

⁸Erland Munch-Petersen, *Bibliografi over oversaettelse til dansk 1800-1900 af prosafiktion fra de germanske og romanske sprog* (Köbenhavn: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1976), p. 94.

⁹Cp. Erland Munch-Petersen, *Bibliografi etc.* (Köbenhavn, 1976).

¹⁰Peter Jerndorff-Jessen and Alfred Ipsen collaborated on the translation of H. Rider Haggard and Andrew Lang’s *The World’s Desire* (“Verdens Laengsel”), 1891.

-- 34 --

A Walk with Dash
A Poem by Ellen Gissing

[Readers of Volume II of *The Collected Letters of George Gissing* (Ohio University Press, 1991) will remember occasional mentions of a dog whom Gissing first referred to obliquely in a letter of 12 July 1882 to his sister Margaret as “the canine addition to your household.” This was Dash, probably a young dog since, on hearing of the animal’s death, he lamented in a letter to Algernon of 9 August 1885 that it was “wretchedly premature.” Some scholars have also been aware that Algernon commemorated Dash in his third novel, *A Village Hampden* (1890), where the dog appears as the lively companion of the heroine, the young schoolmistress, Ruth Sulby, but apparently no commentator on Algernon’s novels – there have been very few – has ever pointed out this autobiographical detail. Now a further celebration of Dash’s doings, in verse this time and by Ellen Gissing, has been discovered among the Gissing family papers. Of the two handwritten copies of “A Walk with Dash” extant, one, dated 1884, is a rough draft, three pages long, written in pencil on note paper of “Eastrington Lodge, Bridlington Quay,” the home of Ellen’s friends, the Carters; the other, two pages long, is an undated fair copy in ink. Both manuscripts are signed “Scedge”, while the copy in ink also bears Ellen’s initials “E. S.,” that is Ellen Sophia. Obviously George’s younger sister was more literary-minded than Margaret. This modest dabbling in verse is not her only attempt at versification in the 1880s. We may print another (earlier and shorter) poem in the near future. “A Walk with Dash” is published with the kind permission of Xavier Pétremand. – P.C.]

I start each night with whip in hand,
As sun descends from off the land.
The object which I have in view
Alas! is one I often rue.

It is to take my dog a run.
To him – but not to me great fun,

For out upon the Heath he tears,
And eagerly scents out the hares.

As up the green, I gently tread,
I see him running far ahead,
And when at last he meets my view,
You won't believe it, but 'tis true,

The sheep he's scattering far and wide,
The cocks and hens fly fast to hide.

-- 35 --

But lo! he spies a cottage door –
And in he flies – is seen no more.

In vain I shriek, and loudly call,
I hear a crash and then a fall.
Out rushes Dash, eyes wildly gleaming,
And after him the children streaming.

No sooner has my heart subsided
Than into a cornfield he has glided.
The cruel blades have cut his eyes.
Alas! my dog will ne'er be wise.

One moment more and him I've seized.
At that you'd think I should be pleased.
But no, his efforts are so strong,
That but with pain, I hold him long.

And when at last, I reach my gate,
I really feel in such a state,
I loose the chain and seek a chair,
And vow with me such walks be rare.

Scedge

Notes and News

Who, one wonders, has ever heard of a dramatization of *New Grub Street*? Gissing was once asked to collaborate on the production of an adaptation of his novel for the stage but the project was stillborn. One also remembers a series of programmes on the BBC in the early 1970s – Reardon and Biffen, Milvain and Whelpdale could be heard on the air – but no printed version of these readings is known to have been published. So the recent discovery in Ian McKelvie's Catalogue 72 of *Decline and Rise*, "a play in three acts, based on George Gissing's famous novel 'New Grub Street,'" and published in Geneva in 1973, was startling news. The author, Richard Morris, has been well-known to the public for years. A six-page leaflet devoted to his career describes him as an actor, producer, director, lecturer, verse reader and composer.

Abundant details are given which are partly repeated in *Who's Who in the World*, *The Authors' and Writers' Who's Who* and similar publications. He began his career in his native city, Dublin, where he broadcast in one of the first programmes of Radio 2RN and he then appeared in the Theatre Royal in such plays as *The Skin Game* by John Galsworthy and *Easy Virtue* by Noel Coward. He has appeared in over thirty theatres and lectured to and recorded for many organizations, mainly in Great Britain and Switzerland, where he lives. Xavier Pétremand, who met him recently, reports that Mr. Morris is a widely travelled man who has visited all European countries except Albania, and many countries throughout the world. It took its author two years to write *Decline and Rise*, which has never been performed. The book, issued in white card covers, is 124 pages long. The play follows the text of the novel very closely; it is divided into thirty-three scenes.

Another, equally unexpected, celebration of *New Grub Street* was the article which appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* on 13 October 1991. George Packer's warm assessment of the novel, entitled "The Struggling Writer: Gissing Had It Right," begins as a warning to "the millions of Americans trying to launch or advance a literary career," quoting the diary entries for 20 to 22 November 1890, when Gissing was completing *New Grub Street*. Packer vivaciously stresses the relevance of Gissing's views to our *fin de siècle*: "Few books inspire me as much as this one, though there should be nothing very inspiring about a novel that says 'Fail or sell out!', and that leaves me feeling I've done both. [...] Because Gissing's nose for corruption and personal deterioration is so strong, 'New Grub Street' acts as a mirror that distorts and simultaneously reveals, at a time when there may be no one able or willing to do it, the features of a writer—of anyone—struggling to maintain integrity in our own age." Two letters to the editor of the *Book Review* were printed on 10 November. That from Jacob Korg focused on the many books that have been and are being devoted to Gissing—biographies, critical studies, collections of letters, translations, including those of *New Grub Street*. The letter from Lewis Beale expressed his admiration: "As a journalist who has made his living as a freelance writer on and off for the past 15 years, I was thrilled to see George Packer's essay on George Gissing and his florid masterpiece [...] When I first read the book about seven years ago, I was astonished at its immediacy [...] 'New Grub Street' spoke to me of universal attitudes and

frustrations. Like Mr. Packer, I began recommending it to other writers as the ultimate cautionary tale." At least one more letter reached the editor, which was just as good as the other two; it is a pity it was not published.

The Edwin Mellen Press will be publishing several studies devoted to Gissing in 1992. The first to appear will be *An English Novelist's Exile and His Lost Tales from America*, by Robert L. Selig. Besides a substantial introduction mainly concerned with the Chicago period (March-July 1877), the book will contain all the stories – five signed, seven assigned – that are not included in *The Sins of the Fathers* (1924) and *Brownie* (1931). Dr. Bouwe Postmus's edition of Gissing's American notebook, virtually all the entries of which are now elucidated, will appear under the same imprint. Two other Gissing titles are also in preparation for publication by the same firm.

The three letters and the postcard to William Gissing Stannard which were sold at auction in London last June – letters from Florence, Venice and Naples, all written in 1889 – have now

reached the Beinecke Library. They will appear in Volume IV of the *Collected Letters of George Gissing* which is soon to be printed, even before Volume III is published. The letter of 1 September 1875 to Robert Foulsham Gissing which was sold at Bonham's on the same occasion together with an unknown portrait of Algernon, not George, dated in his hand 1882, has been acquired by a Gissing collector. It will be published in Volume IX, in a supplement devoted to letters that became known too late for publication in their proper place. The end of Gissing's letter of 12 August 1884 to his brother has just been discovered. It, too, will appear in the final volume of the *Collected Letters*.

Dr. Badolato has forwarded four excellent photographs of an Italian house with Gissing associations, the Villa Cozzolino, which ever since the publication by Arthur Young of the letters to Bertz, exactly thirty years ago, has been known as the home of John Wood Shortridge and his Italian family. The house, no. 13, Via Partenope, at Massa Lubrense, has been identified by Dr. Badolato and the Mayor of Massa, Mr. Tommaso Staiano, who are both to be thanked. We shall find an opportunity to publish the photograph of the entrance to the Villa before long. Gradually the Shortridge family is yielding its secrets, largely thanks to Francesco Badolato and to various Italian officials, but the editors of the *Collected Letters* now need assistance from

-- 38 --

New Zealand, where Shortridge and several of his children migrated in 1903.

The year 1991 saw the 150th anniversary of W. H. Hudson's birth in Argentina. The Embassy of the Argentine Republic in England has issued a pamphlet listing the various events which marked the commemoration, and among them was the unveiling of a plaque at 40 St. Luke's Road, Hudson's London residence. It was mainly from that place that Hudson wrote to Gissing. Lieutenant-Colonel Dennis Shrubsall, who is well-known for his work on Hudson, assisted by Anna Shrubsall, gave an illustrated lecture at Canning House on 8 October 1991. Five days earlier there was a ceremony at the Hudson Memorial in Hyde Park.

Adeline Tintner who, like Dennis Shrubsall, has contributed to this journal on several occasions, has just published a new book, *The Cosmopolitan World of Henry James* (Louisiana University Press). Although Gissing does not appear in it, it will be useful to Gissing students, as it contains detailed studies of a number of French novels which were read by both James and Gissing, mainly titles that appear in his correspondence with Gabrielle Fleury.

Dr. Mauro Francesco Minervino has sent pageproofs of his forthcoming book, *La Vita desiderata: George R Gissing, un vittoriano al Sud*, which is dedicated to Gissing himself as the critic is "proseguendo il viaggio."

The 1990 volume of the *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature*, which covers the year 1986, lists among other materials five unpublished doctoral dissertations, entirely or partly devoted to Gissing:

- W. P. Greenslade, "The Concept of Degeneration, 1880-1910, with particular reference to the work of Thomas Hardy, George Gissing and H. G. Wells." University of Warwick, 1982.
- G. W. Hull, "The Concept of the Artist in the Work of George Gissing." University of Wales, Bangor, 1984.
- John Sloan, "Culture and Circumstance: a Study of George Gissing's fiction in its ideological context." University of Oxford, 1983.
- J. Stepputat, "Introversion and Extroversion in certain late Victorian writers."

University of St. Andrews, 1985.

-- 39 --

- L. G. Turton, "Turgenev and the context of English literature, 1850-1900." University of Warwick, 1984.

Eichborn Verlag, who have succeeded Franz Greno as publishers of "Die andere Bibliothek," have published a splendid calendar for 1992 which includes a full page (31 x 34 cm) on Gissing and the revised German translation of *New Grub Street*, entitled *Zeilengeld* (1986). "Ja, das ist eben die unverzeihliche Sünde, aus der Kunst ein Gewerbe zu machen!" Gissing is made to exclaim. One of the best portraits we have of him – first used, it would seem, by Robert Shafer in his excellent edition of *Workers in the Dawn* – has been reproduced above a brief account of his career with a quotation from the Diary for 22 July 1897: "Lee told me of an oldish literary hack, who one day came to him in great discouragement, and said he should abandon literature. It turned out that he had been reading 'New Grub Street.'" Two quotations occupy the right-hand half of the page – one from Virginia Woolf on Gissing's belief in the power of the mind and his capacity to make his characters think, and one from *New Grub Street* itself about the struggle for life among books. For the presence of Gissing in this calendar, which is likely to become a collector's item, we are indebted to Wulfhard Stahl, who collaborated on the revision of Adele Berger's translation. Anyone wishing to procure a copy for DM 36.00 should write to BDK Bücherdienst, Kölner Strasse 248, Postfach 90 01 20, 5000 Köln 90, Germany. *Zeilengeld* remains available from Taunus-Buchversand, Hornauerstr. 26, 6233 Kelkheim, Germany at DM 44, or DM 128 in leather binding.

Recent Publications

Volume

Annette Federico, *Masculine Identity in Hardy and Gissing*, Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991. \$29.50.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Jacob Korg, "Reviews," *Nineteenth Century Prose*, Vol. 18, no. 1, Winter 1990-91, pp. 85-87. Review of the *Collected Letters*, Volume 1.

-- 40 --

Tony Brown (ed.), *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism*, London: Frank Cass, 1990. Contains an essay by Scott McCracken, "Writing the Body: Edward Carpenter, George Gissing and Late Nineteenth-Century Realism," pp. 178-200.

George Packer, "The Struggling Writer: Gissing Had It Right," *New York Times Book Review*, 13 October 1991, pp. 1, 27, 28, 29, and 30. On the centenary of *New Grub Street*.

Francesco Badolato, "Una carriera conclusa prima che fosse iniziata: Il romanziere George B. Shaw," *Il Corriere di Roma*, 30 October 1991, pp. 6 and 8. Review of the Italian translation by Francesco Marroni of Shaw's novel *An Unsocial Socialist* (Lucarini).

Mention is made of *The Odd Women*.

Jacob Korg and Lewis Beale, "Letters: Gissing Remembered," *New York Times Book Review*, 10 November 1991, p. 67. Letters to the editor about George Packer's article on *New Grub Street*.

D. J. Taylor, "Favourite Books of the Year," *The Independent* (Weekend), 23 November 1991, p. 33. Contains an appreciative mention of Volume 1 of the *Collected Letters*.

George Sims (compiler), *A Darkened Being: An Anthology*. Privately printed, 1991. Contains two extracts from *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, p. 29.

Laurel Brake *et al*, *The Year's Work in English Studies*, Vol. 69 (1988), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. Gissing studies are briefly discussed on pp. 449-50.

Claire Larrière (ed.), *Nouvelles victoriennes/ Victorian Short Stories* (Collection Les Langues Modernes), Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1991. Contains the English version and a French translation of "The Tout of Yarmouth Bridge," a sketch collected in *Human Odds and Ends*.

John Kimmey, *Henry James and London: The City in his Fiction*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1991. Occasional mentions of *New Grub Street*.

Subscriptions

The Gissing Journal is published four times a year, in January, April, July and October. Subscriptions are normally on a two-year basis and begin with the January number.

Rates per annum are as follows:

Private subscribers: £8.00

Libraries: £12.00

Single copies can be supplied as well as sets for back years. Complete runs from January 1965 are available.

Payment should be made in sterling to *The Gissing Journal*, by cheque or international money order sent to:

The Gissing Journal
7 Town Lane, Idle, Bradford BD10 8PR, England.

Information for Contributors

The Gissing Journal publishes essays and notes on Gissing and his circle. Contributions may deal with biographical, critical, bibliographical and topographical subjects. They should be addressed to the editor, Pierre Coustillas, 10 rue Gay-Lussac, 59110 La Madeleine, France.

This journal is indexed in the *MLA Annual Bibliography*, in the Summer number of

Victorian Studies and The Year's Work in English Studies.

Editorial Board

Pierre Coustillas, University of Lille
Shigeru Koike, Tokyo Christian Woman's University
Jacob Korg, University of Washington, Seattle