

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

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Contents

Riches in a Little Room: Ethel Wheeler’s Appreciation of Gissing, <i>by Bouwe Postmus</i>	1
Walter Leonard Gissing (1891-1916): An Anniversary, <i>by Pierre Coustillas</i>	13
Eduard Bertz and <i>Sie radeln wie ein Mann, Madame</i> , <i>by Markus Neacey</i>	23
Book Reviews, <i>by William Greenslade and Pierre Coustillas</i>	26
Notes and News	36
Recent Publications	39

-- 1 --

Riches in a Little Room: Ethel Wheeler’s Appreciation of Gissing

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That Gissing never took a great interest in the critical opinions of his contemporaries has long been an established fact.¹ He so much deplored the incompetence and imbecility of the average reviewer, that after the publication of *Demos* in 1886 he stipulated that his publishers should stop sending him press clippings about his work, which meant that by and large he saw very little of the criticism (or what passed for it) of his novels that found its way into the daily and weekly papers of the time.

In the summer of 1896 when he took his wife and two sons for a seaside holiday at Mablethorpe, Gissing’s interest in matters literary and critical was perhaps at its lowest. The resulting interruption of his work on *The Whirlpool*, upon which he had been engaged since April, meant that he had to face squarely the steadily deteriorating state of his marriage since the birth of his second son Alfred in January of that year. Gissing must have been assailed by an ever growing sense of guilt which he was only ready to acknowledge in the privacy of his diary. It is at Mablethorpe that we find him writing in his diary for Sunday, August 9, 1896: “What a terrible lesson is the existence of this child [Walter], born of a loveless and utterly unsuitable marriage.”² The realization and admission that he had foolishly failed in his parental responsibilities by becoming a father yet again was so painful that in a later note on the inside of

the back-cover of the Diary he reminded himself that the self-incriminating entry had better be deleted. One week earlier he had written to Clara Collet: "Of my work I simply don't think. I suppose the book must some day be finished. All literary matters are disagreeable to me just now. I have dropped all newspapers."³

-- 2 --

His disenchantment with the demands and rewards of literature appears to be in direct proportion to his drastically reduced output. The year 1895 had been an amazingly productive one: no fewer than 35 short stories were written. Compared with this *annus mirabilis*, 1896 was abysmal, Gissing only completing four stories. And despite the publication of *The Paying Guest* in January and as many as 17 short stories through the year, 1896 was to remain the leanest of years, as all of these works had been finished in the previous year, with the sole exception of one story ("A Yorkshire Lass").

In view of his profound domestic and existential anxieties, it does not come as a surprise at all that Gissing missed the sympathetic and highly commendatory critical survey of his novels that appeared in the periodical *London* on August 6, 1896 (pp. 748-49). It was the third in a series⁴ entitled "The London of the Novelists" and signed by Ethel Wheeler. The article, 3,000 words long, was illustrated with the portrait of Gissing (in profile) taken by Alfred Ellis in September 1893. The length of the article alone entitles it to more than a passing glance: with the exception of Eduard Bertz in Germany, and, more recently, Kate Woodbridge Michaelis in America, perhaps no other critic had written about Gissing as extensively as Miss Wheeler.

Miss Ethel (Rolt) Wheeler⁵ – sometimes styling herself Ethel Rolt-Wheeler – was born in a Catholic family from Queenstown (Cobh), Ireland. She may have owed her literary talent to her maternal grand-father, William Cooke-Taylor (1800-1849), who was born in Youghal and went to London in 1829. He wrote poems and other contributions for *Bentley's Miscellany* and the *Athenæum*. His granddaughter followed in his footsteps, coming to London in the mid-nineties, where before long she became one of the most prolific journalists of the day. She was a committee member of the recently established (1892) London Irish Literary Society and joined the weekly journal, the *Academy*, as a staff member. Her services, however, were appreciated by many other editors and she contributed to many of the leading reviews, writing on the Celtic Renaissance for, e.g. *East and West*, and the *Theosophical Review*.

In 1896 the wealthy American patent-drug merchant, John Morgan Richards, bought the *Academy*, appointing Charles Lewis Hind editor, who turned the periodical into one of the liveliest literary papers in England. Hind had become friendly with the daughter of John Morgan Richards, Mrs. Pearl Craigie, who entered the Roman Catholic Church in 1892. An ardent convert, she encouraged a coterie of distinguished Catholic writers (Lionel Johnson, Francis

-- 3 --

Thompson, Alice and Wilfrid Meynell) to become regular contributors to the *Academy*. This then was the milieu to which Ethel Wheeler belonged. Possibly through her links with W. B. Yeats, who was one of the founding members of the Irish Literary Society, she was asked to submit some of her poems to Ernest Oldmeadow, the editor of the *Dome* (1897-1900), a short-lived but influential quarterly containing examples of all the arts. Without doubt Yeats was the leading contributor to the review. Oldmeadow, too, was attracted to Catholicism and, under the guidance of the Meynells, moved along the path of conversion.

In addition to her journalistic work, Ethel Wheeler (fl. 1895-1910) published four volumes of verse⁶, a book of short stories,⁷ a study of famous 18th century bluestockings⁸ (Mrs Montagu, Mrs Delany, Mrs Thrale, Mrs Vesey, Fanny Burney, Elizabeth Carter and Hannah More), and a book of saints' lives.⁹

Her poetry is characterized by a spirit of mysticism expressed through a lyrical music of great intensity. The haunting radiance of a moment in time, yet out of it, is caught in this poem at once comforting and disturbing in its love of the beauty of this world.

Spring in Ireland

A sea of mist, with curling combs
And green-lit glooms;
A soundless sea that breaks and foams
In leaves and blooms:

On heart and soul grave deep and fast
This flash sublime,
That memoried radiance may outlast
The doom of time;

And through eternities unseen
For light suffice –
Because there may not be this green
In Paradise.

And in another representative poem we find this lyrical evocation of her Irish childhood:

Response

Across the years – a boundless wild
With wastes of sea –

-- 4 --

The Child is calling to that child
Who once was me.

Far voices on far silence break –
Old echoes float
Up long-forgotten paths, and wake
A life remote.

I see in vision, dim, distinct,
The Past reborn –
A flash of pinions interlinked
With hues of morn.

Luxurious clover, thick with dew,
A crystal spell –
And tawny woods to wrestle through
Where wizards dwell.

I walk the mountains fresh and wild –
I snap my bonds –

And when you call, O little Child,
A child responds.

Turning now to Ethel Wheeler's *London* article, we are at once impressed by the extent of her knowledge of Gissing's works. There are references, explicit or implicit, to no fewer than eight novels (*The Unclassed*, *Demos*, *Thyrza*, *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, and *The Paying Guest*), the selection of which has obviously been dictated by the fact that they are all set in London. For that is where Wheeler's focus is: on the portrayal of the capital in Gissing's art. There is praise for the books as "just and careful studies" and she rightly emphasises his relying on the mere marshalling of facts all drawn from his intimate familiarity with the London that he got to know so well after his return from America in 1877, until he moved to Exeter in 1891. Wheeler had no way of knowing how absolutely true was her definition of Gissing's novels as "a collection of facts" from which more may be learned about "the lives of London workers than from many a learned treatise on industrialism and economics." So many of these facts and statistics had indeed been meticulously gathered and were deposited in his huge loose-leaved Scrapbook. Information ranging from e.g. details about house-rents, jerry-building, and adulteration of disinfectants, to workers' wages and working hours, was used as a prime ingredient of the kind of novel that

-- 5 --

prided itself on its sociological accuracy. This was a quality of Gissing's London novels recognized and generously praised by the father of English sociology, Charles Booth.¹⁰ How sad that Gissing should have missed this perceptive review, echoing the scholarly and dispassionate praise of Booth.

Gissing's London, Miss Wheeler writes, "is a November London – dark and grimy." But in the same paragraph she disabuses her readers from the frequently made claim that Gissing was a pessimist. The prevalence of gloom must not be equated with unalleviated pessimism, as even in his "most painful books there is the contrast of light and shade; there is the beauty of quiet endurance and heroic endeavour side by side with the suffering and the shame and the ignoble toil." When a disciple in his/her own writing resorts to a phrase as naturally as Wheeler to her master's "ignoble toil" in this context, we feel that her ear alone qualifies her for the demanding task of giving a fair and just assessment of the books under review. An assessment based upon a genuine appreciation of the essences of Gissing's art: the immediacy of its appeal to all the human senses and the mostly silent appeal to man's ability for compassion. Wheeler's article abounds in passages from the novels, aptly chosen and illustrating persuasively Gissing's unique vision, communicated through an inimitable style.

Finally, in contrasting Besant's and Gissing's response to the realities of London – an exercise that had become the stock-in-trade of the literary journalist ever since Edith Sichel's pioneering article¹¹ in 1888 – Wheeler leaves her readers in no doubt at all about her preference. Gissing's terrible earnestness wins the day against Besant's easy placidity. Gissing would have agreed and rejoiced: in his letters he variously referred to Besant as: "a very owl," "a little insignificant man," "a respectable tradesman," and "the most commonplace of celebrities."

One hundred years on the readers of the *Gissing Journal* will surely find as much discernment and empathy in Ethel Wheeler's article as the readers of *London* in 1896. It fully deserves a belated place of honour among the general surveys of Gissing's art listed in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*.

¹Cp. *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 1-3.

²Cp. *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George*

Gissing, Novelist, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1978), p. 418.

-- 6 --

³George Gissing, "To Clara Collet," 2 Aug. 1896, *Collected Letters of George Gissing*, eds. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, Pierre Coustillas, vol. 6 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1995), pp. 157-58.

⁴The series in *London*, running from May to December 1896, consisted of seven articles, all written by Miss Wheeler. The articles that had appeared before the one on Gissing's London dealt with (Sir) Walter Besant (May 28) and George Meredith (June 25), and the four remaining articles were on the London of Mrs. Humphry Ward (August 27), George Moore (Oct. 15), Charles Dickens (Dec. 10) and, finally, William Makepeace Thackeray (Dec. 31).

⁵Cp. David James O'Donoghue, *The Poets of Ireland: A biographical and bibliographical dictionary of Irish writers of English verse* (Dublin: Hodges Figgis & Co., 1912).

⁶Ethel Wheeler, *Verses* (London: R. Brimley Johnson, 1903); *The Year's Horoscope* [sonnets] (The Brochure Series, 1905). Ethel Rolt Wheeler, *Ireland's Veils, and Other Poems* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1913). *Richards' Shilling Selections from Modern Poets: Ethel Rolt-Wheeler*, ed. John Gawsworth (London, 1937).

⁷Ethel Rolt Wheeler, *Behind the Veil* [Tales] (London: David Nutt, 1906).

⁸Ethel Rolt Wheeler, *Famous Blue-Stockings* (London: Methuen, 1910).

⁹Ethel Rolt Wheeler, *Women of the Cell and Cloister* (London: Methuen, 1913).

¹⁰Cp. Charles Booth, *The Life and Labour of the People in London*, 2nd edition (London: Williams & Norgate) I, 157. Also Gissing's letter to Eduard Bertz of 20 July 1891: "Have you seen notices of the book by Charles Booth, on the economical state of the London working-classes?...I find that in his first volume he spoke of "Demos" as one of the few works of fiction which would be of any use to a man wishing to study London work-folk. This is gratifying." (*Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 4, 1993, p. 307).

¹¹Cp. Edith Sichel, "Two Philanthropic Novelists: Mr Walter Besant and Mr George Gissing," *Murray's Magazine*, III (April 1888), pp. 506-18. Rpt. in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 114-26.

The London of the Novelists.

III.- George Gissing.

"London is only a huge shop with a hotel on the upper storeys." – *New Grub Street*.

George Gissing is terribly in earnest. His London is a London laid bare of all its outer trappings and revealed in hideous nakedness. He does not skim lightly over the surface of things, like Besant, nor, like him, sweeten his descriptions of misery with pretty conventionalities; his London does not shine with a glamor of imagination, nor flash with wit, like Meredith's; it is a city of fog and rain and gloom and dreadful night, but a very real place whereof we have all

-- 7 --

skirted the outlying parts and can recognise the absolute truth of the portrayal.

This absolute realism, combined with a grim fancy, impresses one with the same power and huge gruesomeness that we feel in looking at Holbein's "Dance of Death," or in reading one of Webster's dramas. The voice of humanity does not reach Gissing's ears as a "still sad

whisper”; his pages ring with the sounds of the awful tragedy of existence, and send up a bitter cry through unanswering space. They are full of strong vague horror and haunting pathos: –

“Earth cries out from all her graves.
Frail, on frail rafts, across wide-wallowing-waves
Shapes here and there of child and mother pass.”

The East-end of London, which Besant sums up in almost guide-book fashion as “a city of the people, a city of the industrious poor, a city of the ignorant,” is to Gissing “a city of the damned, such as thought never conceived before this age of ours.” This is how he describes the working-people’s dwellings (Farringdon-road-buildings): –

“Vast sheer walls, unbroken by even an attempt at ornament; row above row of windows in the mud-colored surface, upwards, upwards, lifeless eyes, murky openings that tell of bareness, disorder, comfortlessness within [...] millions of tons of brute brick and mortar crushing the spirit as you gaze.” –
The Nether World.

As an example of the intensity and concentration of his mental vision, the following terrible passage may be quoted: – “The familiar streets of pale, damp brick were spreading here and there – continuing London – much like the spreading of a disease.” And it would be hard to match the wide hopelessness of this short extract from *Demos* descriptive of an East-end cemetery: –

“Here lie those who were born for toil; who, when toil has worn them to the uttermost, have but to yield their useless breath, and pass into oblivion. For them is no day, only the brief twilight of a winter sky between the former and the latter night.”

Books that treat of the tragic and the hopeless in life with this concentrated strength are sure to repel such readers as shut their eyes to all that is painful, and wall themselves in with comfortable theories that everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. Gissing is uncompromising; he will not pander to the vitiated taste that demands happy endings at the

-- 8 --

sacrifice of justice and probability; his law of consequences works as unfailingly as George Eliot’s; and, like her, he would have us learn “to do without opium.” Therefore his books are as full a record of disappointment and failure as life itself; his London is a November London – dark and grimy; his Londoners are frustrated on every hand by heritage, by circumstance, by reckless marriage. But they live, and we may meet them day after day in any London street or omnibus. No one will deny that there are many phases of London life terrible and gloomy, just as there are phases that are fair and joyous. Gissing treats of the terrible and gloomy, but he is not therefore tainted with pessimism, which comes of unwholesome brooding over horrors and the inability to see more than one side. In Gissing’s most painful books there is the contrast of light and shade; there is the beauty of quiet endurance and heroic endeavor side by side with the suffering and the shame and the ignoble toil. *The Nether World* itself produces such noble souls as Sidney Kirkwood and Jane Snowdon. Thus Gissing fulfils the conditions imposed in the motto from Renan that he has affixed to this same novel: -- “La peinture d’un fumier peut être justifiée pourvu qu’il y pousse une belle fleur; sans cela, le fumier n’est que repoussant” – and the flower is never wanting in his picture.

Gissing is a thinker and a student. Where Besant, the novelist, rests content in easy placidity with his People's Palace scheme, and his Tract scheme, and paints ideal workrooms without too severe a regard for probability or political economy, Gissing probes the same questions of labor and recreation for the people to their depths, and rejects all such proposed reforms as are but sops and palliatives to the conscience of the reformer. His books are most of them just and careful studies of the great problems of London: a collection of facts and evidence from which he leaves the reader to draw what conclusion he will. *Demos* treats of London Socialism and Socialists, and traces the filtration of theory through the various layers of character to the plane of material considerations. In *Thyrza*, the attempt to awaken intellectual tastes in Lambeth working-men, and to found a library there, is frustrated by ignorance of the needs of the people and by human passion; a desire for over-rapid refinement nearly ruins the soup-kitchen enterprise at Clerkenwell in *The Nether World*. We have the problem of slum-holdings stated in *The Unclassed*. Even the less serious works set one thinking over various anomalies of our age – jerry-building, adulteration, paying guests, the advertisement craze. King's-cross Metropolitan Station exhibits, we read, “all the produce and refuse of

-- 9 --

civilisation announced in staring letters, in daubed effigies, base, paltry, grotesque.” – *In the Year of Jubilee*.

Gissing does not suggest solutions to his problems. He merely marshals his facts and sets forth the case in all its various aspects. His evidence is drawn from the London of the unclassified, the London of *Demos*, the London of *New Grub Street*, the London of *The Nether World*, “the unmapped haunts of the semi-human.” From his novels we may learn more of the lives of the London workers than from many a learned treatise on industrialism and economics. Many of his Londoners live on the borderland of starvation. Almost all suffer from poverty and overwork. Monica, in *The Odd Women*, works at a drapery establishment in the Walworth-road 13½ hours every work-day, and an average of 16 hours on Saturday. Reardon, a writer of *New Grub Street*, lives near Tottenham-court-road in a garret rented at 3s. 6d. a week, and spends 1s. a week on food, while £5 yearly covers clothing and unavoidable expenses. His friend Biffen starves that he may write his novel of the decently ignoble, “Mr. Bailey, Grocer,” and thinks himself lucky if he can sup off bread and dripping, flavored with salt and pepper, and eaten with knife and fork to make it seem more substantial. The suffering in *The Nether World* is still more sordid. Read this pathetic account of poor Pennyloaf Hewett's food:--

“You should have seen the kind of diet on which she habitually lived. Like all the women of her class, utterly ignorant and helpless in the matter of preparing food, she abandoned the attempt to cook anything, and expended her few pence daily on whatever happened to tempt her in a shop when meal time came round. In the present state of her health she often suffered from a morbid appetite, and fed on things of incredible unwholesomeness. Thus, there was a kind of cake exposed in a window in Rosoman-street (Clerkenwell), two layers of pastry with half an inch of something like very coarse mince-meat between. It cost a halfpenny a square, and not seldom she ate four, or even six, of these squares, making this her dinner.”

Such are the facts, Gissing seems to say; now, draw your conclusions.

Again and again his books teach us, with gruesome force, the degrading effects of ignoble toil. One quotation must suffice. It is a description of the Caledonian-road: –

“It is doubtful whether London can show any thoroughfare of importance

more offensive to ear and eye and nostril....Every house-front is marked with meanness and inveterate grime; every shop seems breaking forth with mould and dry-rot; the people who walk here appear one and all to be employed in

-- 10 --

labor that soils body and spirit...You look into narrow side channels where unconscious degradation has made its inexpugnable home, and sits veiled with refuse....All this northward-bearing track, between Camden-town on the one hand and Islington on the other, is the valley of the shadow of the vilest servitude." – *Thyrza*.

Gissing has the faculty of specialising localities. Camberwell, "where each house seems to remind its neighbor with all the complacency expressible in buff brick that in this locality lodgings are not to let"; Sutton, "a most respectable little portion of the great town, set in a purer atmosphere"; Hoxton, with its passages "leading into pestilential gloom"; Islington, the abode of "mean and spirit-broken leisure" – these, and many other districts, are laid bare in a fierce light that unmercifully reveals all their scars. He will not veil or extenuate. The scene of *The Nether World* is laid in Clerkenwell. The events of the story are so grouped round the salient features of the place that we cannot imagine them happening anywhere else. We have St. John's Arch, with its early associations of the Priory of St. John of Jerusalem, and later associations of Cave and Dr. Johnson; Clerkenwell-green, with its fervent if ungrammatical oratory, its agnostic lectures, prayer-meetings, temperance speeches; Clerkenwell-close and Prison: "The line of the high black wall was relieved in colorless gloom against a sky of sheer night. Opposite, the shapes of poverty-eaten houses and grimy work-shops stood huddled in the obscurity. From near at hand came shrill voices of children chasing each other about – children playing at midnight between slum and gaol"; and, finally, a Clerkenwell slum, Shooter's-gardens, the home of the Candy family: "The slum was like any other slum; filth, rottenness, evil odors possessed these dens of superfluous mankind, and made them gruesome to the peering imagination."

New Grub-street is an undefined locality in London, tenanted by unsuccessful writers of the present time. The name, of course, is adopted from the Grub-street of the 18th century, defined by Dr. Johnson in his dictionary thus: – "The name of a street in London, much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries, and temporary poems; whence any mean production is called Grub-street." In another place the Doctor says, quoting Ascham, that the writers there "lived, men knew not how, and died obscure men marked not when." Gissing does not fix the position of his Grub-street – it is a figurative term – his writers live indifferently in Camden-town, in Islington, in Marylebone; but their lives are sufficiently like those of the struggling authors of Old Grub-street to justify the comparison.

-- 11 --

Both Old and New Grub-street are unmistakably outgrowths of London literary life; the thoughts and ways of their inhabitants are peculiar to London; in both we find the same talents wasted in an ignoble struggle for daily subsistence, the same petty squabbles, the same bitter failure, the same sordid misery. Dr. Johnson had to write "Rasselas" in the evenings of the week that he might obtain money to bury his mother; Goldsmith's financial difficulties are proverbial; and so, though the age of patronage has long passed away, and there is now a large reading public, yet Reardon, of New Grub-street, is reduced to the last stages of poverty, Yule dies in embittered middle age, and Biffen's suicide may be paralleled with the tragic death of Chatterton at 4, Brook-street, Holborn, in 1769. Differences there are: we may well doubt whether there was in Old Grub-street that enthusiasm for things beautiful, that sense of

aspiration whereof there is abundant trace in New Grub-street, and Gissing himself points out that London is no longer the one centre of intellectual life as it was in the time of Chatterton – that there are libraries everywhere, and papers and magazines reach the north of Scotland as soon as they reach Brompton. This explains Reardon’s lament over the emigration to London. “It’s a huge misfortune,” he says, “this will o’-the-wisp attraction exercised by London over young men of brains. They come to be degraded, or to perish, when their true sphere is a life of peaceful remoteness. The type of man capable of success in London is more or less callous or cynical.” Of such a type Gissing gives us an admirable presentment in the pushing and practical Jasper Milvain, who cultivates useful people, seeks for ideas “that are convertible into the current coin of the realm, my boy,” and writes articles on such subjects as “Typical Readers of Daily and Weekly Papers.” A capital idea: it sets one wondering what the typical reader of *London* is like.

The Reading-room at the British Museum is the centre round which the characters in *New Grub Street* converge. Here Jasper first notices Marian; here Marian spends day after day of utter weariness induced by uncongenial toil in the Valley of the Shadow of Books: –

“The fog grew thicker....Then her eye discerned an official walking along the upper gallery, and in pursuance of her grotesque humor she likened him to a black lost soul doomed to wander in an eternity of vain research along endless shelves. Or, again, the readers who sat here at these radiating lines of desks, what were they but hapless flies caught in a huge web, its nucleus the great circle of the catalogue?”

-- 12 --

Here, too, Reardon worked before his marriage; “it was his true home; its warmth enwrapped him kindly; the peculiar odor of its atmosphere – at first the cause of headache – grew dear and delightful to him.” After obtaining a small clerkship Reardon abandoned the study of books for the writing of fiction. This was fortunate for him, as his opportunities for study were practically cut off by his obtaining employment. Then, as now, the amazing rule prevailed that the Reading-room should close its doors at 7 p.m. in summer – a fatal bar to all those obliged to work for their living: merchants, teachers, secretaries, clerks, people who have no leisure time but the evening for study and research. The Guildhall Library challenges favorable comparison, since it remains open till 9 p.m., but its collection of books is tantalisingly imperfect.

Happily all Gissing’s novels do not deal with the sufferings of struggling Londoners. Here is a cheerful picture “of the sole out-of-door amusement regularly at hand for London working people – the only one, in truth, for which they show any real capacity.” It is a description of a Lambeth market: –

“Lambeth-walk is a long narrow street, and at this hour was so thronged with people that an occasional vehicle with difficulty made slow passage. On the outer edge of the pavement in front of the busy shops were rows of booths, stalls, and barrows, whereon meat, vegetables, fish, and household requirements of indescribable variety were exposed for sale. The vendors vied with each other in uproarious advertisement of their goods. In vociferation the butchers doubtless excelled; their ‘Lovely, lovely, lovely!’ and their reiterated ‘Buy, buy, buy!’ rang clangorous above the hoarse roaring of costermongers and the din of those that clattered pots and pans. Everywhere was laughter and interchange of good fellowship. The hot air reeked with odors. From stalls where whelks were sold rose the pungency of

vinegar; decaying vegetables trodden underfoot blended their putridness with the musty smell of second-hand garments. Above all was distinguished the acrid exhalation from the shops where fried fish and potatoes hissed in boiling grease.” – *Thyrza*.

How such a scene recalls London before the Great Fire of 1666, with its stalls projecting into the streets, and the same cries of “Buy, buy, buy!” I never walk along any of the streets where the Saturday night markets are held – in Dalston, Kentish-town, or Clapham Junction – without feeling myself transported back into the picturesque atmosphere of the Middle Ages. But for the mere outer trappings of costume, and the vanished beauty of gable, we have here almost an exact reproduction of that time. The same throng of people in narrow ways, and

-- 13 --

concentration of fierce life in small space; the same incessant cries that made the noise of ancient London penetrate to the remote Surrey hills; the same mud and garbage filling the air with the same mediæval smell; almost, one would say, the same quaint and grotesque faces caught for a moment in the glare of candle or torch. Is not the very same spirit alive in these lines of the 15th century poet, Lydgate: --

“Then I hyed me into Est Chepe:
One cryes rybbs of befe and many a pye:
Pewter pottes they clattered on a heape;
There was harpe, pype, and minstralsye.
Yea, by cock! nay, by cock! some began crye,
Some songe of Jenken and Julyan for their mede;
But for lack of money I might not spede.”

This worthy monk anticipated the condition of most of Gissing’s characters – for lack of money they may not speed.

But it is as the architect of Darker and Darkest London that Gissing excels. We must go to others if we would read of the glory and greatness of London, of her delicate beauty and subtle charm. We must look elsewhere than in his pages if we would see “London in monstrous health.” London is myriad-faced, and Gissing shows us one of her aspects only, but with such concentrated force that we are apt to ignore for the moment the existence of all her other sides. This is an injustice – to the author who emphasises by his titles the benighted spheres of his studies, and to London, which is as wonderful and various as Dante’s Divine Dream.

Ethel Wheeler

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Walter Leonard Gissing (1891-1916)
An Anniversary

Pierre Coustillas

Since the publication by his uncle Algernon and his aunt Ellen of *The Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family* in early 1927, it has been known that Walter Gissing was killed in the battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916 – eighty years ago. Little by little information on him has become available in widely scattered documents – in some letters from his pen, in

letters of his relatives, in his father's diary, in a book about his employer, Ernest Gimson, in Clara Collet's papers, and in a privately printed volume of recollections by Norman Jewson, *By Chance I Did Rove* (1973). But no effort has yet been attempted to piece together these elements and some others and to compile even a rough sketch of his short life. The eightieth anniversary of his death offers an opportunity to do so.

A detailed reconstruction of his early years, from his birth at no. 1 St. Leonard's Terrace, Exeter on 10 December 1891 to his father's death on 28 December 1903 must necessarily rest for the most part on the letters he received from his parents (they are all to be found in the *Collected Letters of George Gissing*) as well as on his father's diary and letters to his family and to Clara Collet. Until April 1896, except during those months of his babyhood when he was nursed by a farmer's wife, Mrs. Phillips, at Brampton Speke, a few miles from Exeter, he lived at home with his parents: Exeter, Brixton from June 1893, St. Leonards on Sea then Eastbourne from February to April 1894, Brixton again for a month, Clevedon from June to early September 1894, when the family at long last settled at Eversley, Worples Road, Epsom, a house in which his father is still remembered. A number of anecdotes about Walter's infancy are on record, as well as testimonies about his father's and mother's attitudes towards him. Gissing watched his son grow with great affection and much apprehension, increasingly aware that the atmosphere in the family home was not of a kind that could be beneficial to a hot-tempered child. The disfiguring mole on the forehead (later removed), which Gissing mournfully mentioned in his diary at the child's birth, was doubtless something that worried both parents and accounted in some way for the tension between them. September 1895, when he was not quite four, marked the beginning of a new phase in Walter's life, for on the 9th he was taken for the first time to school. "Went off like a Trojan," his father observed, "and was perfectly good." Miss Sarah Taylor, apparently a disciplinarian who was hard of hearing, was Walter's schoolmistress for about six months – until his father took him to Wakefield, determined to leave him with his grandmother and aunts, where the boy would be at a safe distance from the effects of his mother's brutal behaviour and intemperate language. Only in the summers of 1896 at Mablethorpe and of 1897 at Castle Bolton was Walter to spend some time with his mother again. The keynote of their relationship in the mid-nineties is suggested by the few words she added to Gissing's letter to him of 10 July 1897, shortly before their holiday in the Yorkshire

dales. "At first," she promised, "it will be all loving kisses," which accords well with the send-off of her letter of 11 September 1896: "With much love and many kisses and no beatings."

Walter's arrival in Wakefield practically coincided with the opening by his aunts of a preparatory school in which he was to be a pupil for about five years. His work was but moderately satisfactory and the family correspondence echoes a number of difficulties. Walter was making progress, but his father's letters to him show that he was occasionally troublesome both at school and at home. Reconstructing the atmosphere in which young Walter lived at the time is a task that no biographer acquainted with the family correspondence, Gissing's diary and the recollections which H. B. Webster and John Horsfall contributed to the *Gissing Newsletter* in January 1976 would find a daunting one. Two photographs of Margaret and Ellen with their pupils in the garden behind 9 Wentworth Terrace, Wakefield would help the commentator to supply sartorial details which the passing of time has made obsolete. Gissing bravely tried from afar to develop Walter's better qualities, to rouse in him an interest in reading, drawing and botany; he did his best to convince him that he owed much to his aunts and grandmother, but for whose kindness he would have had no home, but one feels that the paternal exhortations,

however tactfully expressed, did not much affect the child's behaviour, which was not to change appreciably until he was in his teens, that is not until after his father could no longer try to influence him for the better.

The latent crisis came to a head in April 1901 when Margaret asked Gissing whether he could at once relieve them of the burden of Walter's presence and education and send him to some boarding school. As the solution she suggested – a very expensive school at Bakewell, the fees amounting to twenty guineas a term – was deemed unsuitable, a compromise had to be found, and Walter, after spending his summer holidays with a clergyman's family as he had done the year before, was sent to a cheaper place kept by one Miss Rickards at Ilkley, Yorkshire, a small town his father had much liked (and written about) in his own childhood. There Walter stayed until the autumn term of 1902 when yet another school, more suitable to his age (he was by then nearly eleven) had to be found. To Holt Grammar School, in Norfolk, an old establishment also known as Gresham's School, from its founder's name, he went and remained until the summer term of 1908. Gissing hoped his son might get a scholarship, but this was not to be, at least during the first year. Walter's reply to Bertz's letter of sympathy of c. 10 February

-- 16 --

1904 (soon to be available in the final volume of the *Collected Letters*) shows him as a boarder in a school where he was not unhappy, studying under the supervision of Mr. Eccles, his house master, whom Clara Collet was later to meet. Her incomplete diary throws some light on her contacts with Walter at this time. Thus the entry for 14 July 1907 records that she received a letter from Algernon Gissing the day before saying that according to the headmaster, it would be against the rules for Walter to be away for the night, but that he could go over on the 20th to one Miss Sewell's to see her. In the same letter, Algernon told her that Mr. Eccles' cousin, an architect in Liverpool, had offered to keep a place open in his office for Walter when he left the following summer. Walter's house master seems to have been a good influence on him and Clara Collet had come by then to think Walter a lovable boy. On 8 September 1907, she noted that Walter's report that term was excellent, a fact which would have rejoiced and relieved his father.

On leaving school, Walter was intended to spend a few months with an old friend of hers, Ernest Gimson,¹ an architect and furniture designer, before being articled to someone else, but it seems that he in fact stayed on with Gimson for about a year. Whether he was after all articled at any time to his former house master's cousin, T. Edgar Eccles, of the firm of Woolfall and Eccles, 3 Bank Buildings, 60 Castle Street, Liverpool W., is doubtful, the sources available being unclear.

In her book *Gimson and the Barnsleys: Wonderful Furniture of a Commonplace Kind* (Evans Brothers, 1980), Mary Comino places Walter's training under Ernest Gimson within a professional context: "Gimson employed three architectural assistants while working at Sapperton [near Cirencester, Gloucestershire]. The first and most important was Norman Jewson, who was taken on as an 'improver' [i.e. an unpaid assistant] in 1907, and spent the rest of his career at Sapperton, working for Gimson and Ernest Barnsley as well as on his own account. The two other assistants, G. Basil Young and Walter Gissing, son of the novelist, George Gissing, were taken on for a short time in 1910. These assistants would often superintend building work on site for Gimson; for example, according to Jewson, in 1914 Walter Gissing was responsible for supervising the construction of the cottages designed by Gimson for May Morris at Kelmscott. Gimson's assistants were also often involved in projects initiated by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings" (p. 141).

This account tallies with information supplied by Clara Collet's diary and by Alfred Gissing, who told the present writer on 3 September 1968 in his home at Les Marécottes,

Switzerland, that his brother had worked for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, founded by William Morris. Miss Collet felt very much concerned with the future of Gissing's children, and there is abundant evidence that, as an executrix, she was often at odds with Algernon and his sisters. Her practical sense, her useful social contacts, her broadmindedness offer a pleasant contrast with Algernon's impracticality and the crippling spiritual prejudices of Margaret and Ellen, which manifested themselves even in the choice of a prospective employer for Walter.² Examples of her kindness to the two boys are not lacking. Thus shortly after a visit to Alfred at his school in Exeter in the early spring of 1908, she wrote to Algernon suggesting that the brothers, who scarcely knew each other, should spend their holidays together on Exmoor with Alfred's teachers, Mr. and Mrs. Walters, and noted with obvious pleasure on 17 May that the project had materialized the previous month. In the same entry we read that Walter is to come and stay with her in mid-June for his preliminary architect's examination. At the time Algernon the procrastinator had not yet responded to the kind offer made by Ernest Gimson the year before to take Walter for a few months, but he intended to do so.

Eventually the question of finding some permanent employment for Walter was solved satisfactorily, the various stages being analysed by Clara Collet in terms which unobtrusively testify to the admirable role she played throughout. She was in the habit of writing up her diary every few weeks or months, and it is in the long entry she compiled from her account book on 20 February 1910 that we find the relevant information. Seven months had elapsed since the last entry and she despaired of producing a decent abstract of all that had passed in her very busy life since July 1909. She relates how she went to Switzerland on holiday on the 18th of that month and under what circumstances she met Gabrielle Fleury at Martigny, that is near the mountain villages of Salvan and Les Marécottes, where Alfred was to spend the last thirty years of his life. It was during her holiday that the problem of Walter's immediate future required urgent attention. Correspondence on the subject between the various parties concerned had been going on for a while, and Ellen having failed to find any architect for Walter, she (Miss Collet) had asked her solicitor, Mr. Townsend, whose name appears in Gissing's posthumous affairs at the time of the stormy publication of *Veranilda*, to take steps. Townsend had got a cousin of his in a firm who did much work in Northern London to promise to take Walter. No country architect, it was thought, would offer more attractive conditions, and the premium to be paid for

the boy's apprenticeship was quite low. The Gissing family accepted the offer and it was left to Miss Collet to settle things with Ernest Gimson, whom neither Algernon nor his sister had troubled to advise. Now Gimson, who had requested no payment for the training already given to Walter, expressed his great disappointment, which was confirmed by Walter. The youth had worked very creditably all along, he had shown good ability and good will, and it was Gimson's opinion that he should not be forced into routine office work. Indeed he had hoped to keep the boy with him. But Ellen Gissing would not hear of this. Typically she objected to Walter's staying on with Ernest Gimson on account that he was (like his father) a secularist. And an enlightened one he certainly proved to be when he suggested that a certain Mr. Weir, who did church restoring, would probably take on Walter. Mr. Weir, that is Robert Weir Schultz, was an old friend of Gimson's, and a member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, who often co-operated with him, and most of his work was done in the country. It was probably the idea that Walter, if working under this capable man's authority, would participate in the restoration of old churches that won Ellen over to the project. Walter was very keen on the idea of working for Mr. Weir, thus avoiding the prospect of life in London, which he dreaded. As Mr. Weir would not hear of taking a premium and promised to pay Walter (very modest) wages in

the near future, all the parties concerned were satisfied. The solution would have pleased Gissing, who had hoped that his children would find some useful occupation in rural surroundings, far from the largely dehumanizing atmosphere of London and its suburbs.

Very little is known of Walter's activities other than professional until the outbreak of the Great War, but his brother remembered over fifty years later that at the time he enlisted Walter was engaged to be married – his fiancée had remained single and a niece of hers had visited Alfred in the fifties or sixties. Letters in Walter's hand have been preserved by the family. Among the earliest is one of 1904 in which it appears that his aunts had given him a camera. It was written shortly after the reply to Bertz's letter of sympathy mentioned above. A five-page letter to Margaret of 5 April 1908 from Woodlands, Holt, Norfolk dates from his last term at Gresham's School. Then an undated one to Ellen, four pages long and written in pencil, is of special interest in that it was sent from Clara Collet's private London address, 4 Vernon Chambers, Theobald Road, W. C. It seems to have been written in November 1914, and shows that contact with her was maintained at least until he left for France, very likely in May 1915. A

-- 19 --

chronology of his movements can be established from the next items of correspondence: a letter from Winchester to Ellen of 24 April 1915, a postcard to her (at her current address, Fernleigh, St. Mark's Avenue, Leeds) with a Southampton postmark for 2 May 1915, probably just before his battalion, the First Battalion of the Queen's Westminsters, crossed over to France, where we find him shortly afterwards in Rouen, giving some undated news to Ellen. The letter of the same length he sent her from 20 Barfield Road, Kingston-on-Thames on February 16, 1916 must have corresponded to a short leave, much like an earlier one of 4 November 1915 from Rockhampton, Richmond Park. Various other mementoes have survived, in particular a notebook with his regimental number 4620, after his name, in which he drew four very good sketches of buildings he had seen about him in the Somme. They were made from 18 June to 29 June 1916, two days before his death. An earlier message, perhaps the only letter from the elder to the younger brother that has been preserved, is undated, though the Winchester address clearly indicates that it was written in early 1915. The handwriting in blue ink is very neat and indicative of artistic leanings that could not be detected in the letter to Bertz of early 1904. One or two points in it will be readily connected with opinions expressed by his father.

4620 A Coy/Q. W. R.

Hazeley Down Camp/Winchester

My dear Alfred,

Excuse me for not writing earlier, letter-writing does seem such a contract in the army there seldom seems any quiet opportunity & I find it impossible to write anything worthy unless things are silent. I was very glad to have your letter. Of course I am still waiting for a commission or the front. Some think the Draft will not go out now till after Easter, owing to an epidemic of measles in camp, but we have no official confirmation at present: at all events I want some change, being very fed up with this life; not a quiet moment to think or write any sense!! I hope you find your job more congenial. It certainly sounds more interesting & I think you have not the same inveterate hatred of the army discipline that I have.

I have cut my thumb, hence this scribble!!

One gigantic "lapsus plumae."

I was very glad to see Uncle A. at Leeds & had a very interesting time with him there.

Well, the best of luck to you old man. Take care of yourself.

Yours v. sincerely.

Walter L. Gissing.



The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme



Gommecourt British Cemetery No. 2

Of his artistic leanings, still in the bud when his father died, Walter had begun to give evidence while at the Holt Grammar School, and even a short account of his truncated existence must take into account a few minor achievements that are not known ever to have been mentioned in print. The first is a score printed by Henderson and Spalding, the title page of which reads: "Dedicated to Mr. A. H. Gibbons, and the Members of Cirencester Parish Church Choir. 1912./The Evening Service/Set to Music in the key of C minor/ By Walter L. Gissing. Price fourpence net/ Copies may be had from the Author: St Mark's Avenue, Leeds." The second is a conventional piece of verse, "A Sonnet," published in *The Gresham*, the magazine of

Gresham's School, Holt (Vol. IV, no. 7, 21 October 1911, p. 82),³ very likely composed at a time when he was doing church restoration work:

Hail mighty edifice, wherein enshrined
Lies many a mortal frame to dust returned,
Built, stone on stone, by ancient craftsmen learned
In arts, too soon to baser sort consigned.
Honour to those who were the first to find
In wood and stone the immortal light that burned,
Softly at first, since softly man discerned
The flame that grew so brilliant and declined.
Honour to those who rocky marble dressed,
And of it formed, godlike, the form of man.
To those who to their Maker gave the best
Of all their mind and soul, His House to plan.
Wake! ye that sleep; arise! with greater zest,
Take up the labour that your sires began.

All these mementoes remained first in the hands of Margaret and Ellen Gissing, then passed into those of the novelist's younger son who, in his unpublished biography of his father, quoted what was perhaps the last letter that Walter wrote from the trenches. Describing the impression on his mind of German artillery he ended with these words: "Another clap of thunder in the distance, followed by a sullen growl of disappointment, gradually dying to a ghoulis wail, as the whirling shreds of iron-casing spend their energy in search of prey... And this is the *highly* enlightened civilized twentieth century!"

The deluge of shells that fell on the British troops at Gommecourt on 1 July 1916 left him no chance. Like so many other soldiers there on that particular day, he was killed with such extreme violence that his body could not be identified, but he is known to have been buried

-- 22 --

in one of the four local cemeteries later converted into one, Gommecourt British Cemetery no. 2. Walter's name will not be found in the book which can be consulted in the little niche on the left side of the entrance. The soldiers who were killed on that day and whose bodies, like his, could not be identified are buried in graves with a headstone that reads:

A Soldier
Of the Great War
1st July 1916



Known Unto God

In cases where it was possible to identify at least the regiment to which a dead soldier belonged, its name was engraved between "A Soldier of the Great War" and the date. Only one headstone in the cemetery has both the date 1st July 1916 and "Queen's Westminsters" engraved on it. It may or may not be Walter Gissing's.

The small village of Gommecourt will be found on any small scale map of northern France, about 20 km south-west of Arras. The cemetery can easily be reached from either

Bucquoy or Puisieux on the N 319 road; it may be seen from half a mile around amidst fields where in any season rarely can a human being be despoiled. Walter is commemorated on the huge British memorial to the Missing of the Somme at Thiepval, some 10 to 12 km south-east of Gommecourt, in the département of the Somme. In one of the volumes which can be consulted on the spot, an entry reads: "Gissing, Rfm. Walter L., 4620 1st Bn Queen's Westminsters, 1st July 1916. Age 24. Son of the late George and Edith Gissing." The reference is p. 927 of a volume entitled Memorial Register 21, Part XVII (Garland-Gordon), Thiepval Memorial, France, compiled and published by order of the Imperial War Graves Commission, London, 1929. The Memorial bears the names of 73,357 officers and men of the land forces of the United Kingdom and South Africa who fell in the Somme between July 1915 and 20 March 1918, and who have no known grave.

As one stands there or in the Gommecourt Cemetery where Walter's remains lie, one cannot help thinking of some deservedly but sadly famous passages in *The Whirlpool* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, and of the fate of father and son, buried far apart at opposite ends of France.⁴

-- 23 --

¹Encouraged by William Morris, Ernest Gimson (1864-1919) left his native Leicester and went to London to train under one of the great Victorian church architects, John Sedding. In London Gimson came to know a small group of young Arts and Crafts architects, who made names for themselves, and like most of them became a member of the Art Workers' Guild and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. See the entry on him in Missing Persons, the 1993 supplement to the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

²There is a very significant passage in the letter from Clara Collet to Gabrielle Fleury of 16 May 1909, held by Xavier Pétremand, in which she relates a visit from Ellen a fortnight before: "When she was staying with Walter in the autumn she went to see the clergyman at the church at Cirencester. She evidently told him her anxiety about Walter's spiritual dangers and a Miss Martin invited Walter to spend Sunday whenever he liked from breakfast to supper, at her house. Apparently he likes her very much and bicycles there every Sunday and plays on the piano there all the afternoon."

³By then Alfred had succeeded Walter at Gresham's School, as his name in an article on "Speech Day" [29 July 1911] testifies. He was in the Lower Fourth Form and had won a prize in French. He was a pupil there from January 1910 to July 1914.

⁴An obituary of Walter appeared in the *Yorkshire Post* for 21 July 1916, p. 6e, under the title "A Son of George Gissing Killed." It reads: "Rifleman Walter Leonard Gissing, Queen's Westminster Rifles, who was killed on July 1, was the elder son of the late George Gissing, the novelist, and a nephew of the Misses Gissing, of Fernleigh, St. Mark's Avenue, Leeds. He was educated at the Gresham School, Holt, Norfolk, and afterwards became an architect, fulfilling several commissions for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. He was 24, and single."

* * *

Eduard Bertz and *Sie radeln wie ein Mann, Madame*

Markus Neacey

Sie radeln wie ein Mann, Madame (You cycle like a man, Madam) belongs to a series of recently published books about the rise and development of the women's movement. These books mainly describe the extraordinary and innovative role the first emancipated women

played in various areas of public life in Germany during the late Victorian era. In relation to this theme, the authors of *Sie radeln wie ein Mann, Madame*, Gudrun Maierhof and Katinka Schröder, have extracted more than ten sizeable quotations from Eduard Bertz's *Philosophie des Fahrrads*.

-- 24 --

In brief, Maierhof's and Schröder's book relates from a feminist point of view, in six thematically linked chapters, the origins at the turn of this century of the fashion among emancipated women for cycling. The authors also explain how these early female cyclists compelled the bicycle industry to develop a bicycle specially for women, and how, as a by-product of this innovation, cycling served to promote the women's movement. Hence the chapters describe successively: the historical origins of the bicycle; the physical and healthful aspects of cycling for women; the changes brought about by cycling in women's fashion; the organisation of women's cycling groups; the involvement of women in cycling as a sport; and the emancipation of women through cycling.

This is a well researched book in which the female authors make fair use of their quotations from Bertz, if one can disregard the facile comment appended to their last quotation from him. One discerns from the substance of these quotations that Bertz's views on women would not look out of place alongside those of Gissing's. Indeed, they reflect Gissing's influence, even if Bertz at times gives expression to some curious ideas about the sexual impulses of women in connection with cycling. On the whole, these quotations make fascinating reading in their historical context, and suggest that *Philosophie des Fahrrads* still has something to offer to the contemporary reader. Thus, in *Sie radeln wie ein Mann, Madame*, it is good to see Bertz being remembered in these modern times in his own right, and not just because of his importance in Gissing studies.

Note: As an aid to understanding the authors' use of Bertz's quotations in *Sie radeln wie ein Mann, Madame: Als die Frauen das Rad eroberten* (Dortmund: eFeF Verlag, 1992), I have tried to give the thematic context where appropriate. Maierhof and Schröder have taken all quotations from the first edition of *Philosophie des Fahrrads* (Dresden/Leipzig: Carl Reissner, 1900). They have provided page references for all quotations, except those which they have used as an epigraph to a chapter or to a section of a chapter. My aim has been to provide the page number of Maierhof's and Schröder's book where Bertz is quoted, as well as the page number of Bertz's volume from which the quote has been extracted. Since many have been used as run-on quotations, which often makes it difficult to distinguish between the authors' and Bertz's words, I have put all quotations from Bertz in bold type.

-- 25 --

References

p. 53. The first quotation from Bertz occurs at the end of Chapter Two. Here Maierhof and Schröder explain how towards the end of the last century cycling came to be seen as healthful to women. As Bertz states: "**In a physical respect the bicycle came as a bringer of health to the female sex**" (p. 142).

p. 57. This next quotation is given at the head of Chapter Three, in which the story is told of the changes cycling necessitated in the female cyclist's mode of dress. On this theme Bertz writes: "**The female dress is a means of protection to female chastity**" (p. 165).

p. 62. Referring to Bertz's amusing term *Folterinstrument* (i.e., instrument of torture) for the corset which women wore in the early years of cycling, the authors write: "A fierce

opponent even demanded the raising of a tax of at least 100M on **‘the instrument of torture’**” (p. 145).

p. 68. This striking quotation from Bertz stands at the head of section two of Chapter Three, and is related to the theme of the female cyclist’s fashion sense: **“Good sense and fashion were always enemy sisters, and it would be the wonder of wonders if they were suddenly reconciled”** (p. 143). Following this epigraph Maierhof and Schröder also write with great effect: “The wonder of wonders happened.”

p. 87. Bertz is used again in the middle of Chapter Four in a run-on quotation. The context here is the coming of the new woman in defiance of convention: “... in the course of the emancipation of the middle-class female more and more women refused **‘to make the empty, dilly-dallying phantom existence of “a lady” their profession in life’**” (p. 149).

p. 105. Near the beginning of Chapter Five Bertz is quoted several times in the space of a few lines. The subject of this chapter is cycling as a competitive sport for women: **“the opponents of racing scented emancipation, ‘the ambition to match men in every way, or where possible to surpass them.’** Even Eduard Bertz, who in his *Philosophie des Fahrrads* spoke up emphatically for equal rights, suspected behind such an **‘extreme ambition’** the **‘expression of sexual perversion,’** in short: **‘there are sick people who themselves need direction’**” (pp. 148-49).

p. 105. This longer quotation comes in the next paragraph, in which Maierhof and Schröder refer to the feminine allure of the graceful and healthy female cyclist or sportswoman: “Once again Bertz: **‘Feminine is first of all only that which makes the female most suitable to fulfil the profession of her sex, hence her profession of mother. Feminine is for this reason also every moderately active game; feminine is, above all, the moderately enterprising sport of cycling, which promises us healthier women, healthier mothers, and more refined descendants’**” (p. 160).

p. 123. This quotation is used as the epigraph to Chapter Six, which is titled “Free Travel for Free Women or Emancipation on the Bicycle.” This chapter looks at the conventional male attitude towards women in the last century, and through the example of cycling tries to account

-- 26 --

for the emergence of the emancipated woman. Thus Bertz: **“It was indeed plant-like passivity which was more and more valued in women, and also through this valuation more and more cultivated; that she is a being defined by nature to be capable of independent movement has completely fallen into oblivion”** (p. 136).

p. 126. This is another run-on quotation, and the context is the social and moral condemnation which female cyclists faced when participating in public cycling events: “Female cyclists took up an inevitable position, after all they were always conscious **‘that they contravened widespread prejudices in both sexes and overstepped the boundaries of what until recently was regarded as convention. This must convince them of the arbitrariness and worthlessness of conventional rules, to which the majority of the female world in slavish obedience are usually subjected. And if they once grasp this, it must also awaken their personality, their feeling of independence, and lead their way out to freedom; to that point where dogma is no longer valid, but only one’s own judgment, the voice of one’s own conscience.’** What Eduard Bertz formulated in 1900 in *Philosophie des Fahrrads* had three years earlier already become clear to a female cyclist...” (p. 152).

p. 130. The last few extracts from Bertz’s *Philosophie des Fahrrads* come in one paragraph towards the end of the last chapter. Here Maierhof and Schröder summarise the significance of the bicycle and cycling to the emancipation of women in turn of the century Germany: “Cycling as a **‘sponsor of spiritual and moral qualities’** was regarded by many contemporary intellectuals as an **‘emancipator’**: **‘It has brought the solution to the question of**

women's rights nearer, when it might have required long decades of untiring agitation,' thought the bicycle philosopher, Bertz, in 1900. Progressive as was the good man's thought, he remained a child of his times. At the last should 'attentiveness, judiciousness, cool-headedness, resolution, courage and willpower' be channelled in a friendly way towards men: 'they will contribute to the higher development of the female character and be an invaluable tool for the wife as a helpmate to her husband, for the mother as the educator of her sons and daughters, for the housewife at the head of her household'" (p. 6, p. 135 and p. 151).

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Book Reviews

Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (eds.), *The Collected Letters of George Gissing. Volume Seven 1897-1899*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995.

"*I am getting old*. I want a permanent home, – a place where I can comfortably be ill," George Gissing writes ruefully to Clara Collet from Italy, where he had fled in September 1897

-- 27 --

in search of better health and peace of mind. The opening letter of Volume Seven of the *Collected Letters* reveals a Gissing, alone in Cotrone, Italy severely ill with fever. It would appear to confirm the all too familiar spectacle of his hopes of release, from his oppressive domestic and professional life, being at every turn confounded. "Could it be given out that I am *dead*," he writes to H. G. Wells in June, as, with a taste for Wellsian satiric hyperbole, he reports on the result of the latest examination of his chronic emphysema.

But it is a revealing comment in a less expected way, for the letter continues: "then, with comfort of half a dozen intimates, I might work steadily for a year or two, preparing posthumous books." These "intimates" can be plausibly interpreted as those of his friends and relations to whom he had confided the true state of his affairs. The previous month, now back in England, he asks Morley Roberts to lay a false trail to his whereabouts, so keen is he to prevent his wife Edith from tracking him down: "will you, on every opportunity, industriously circulate the news that I am going to live henceforth in Worcestershire? It is not strictly true – but a very great deal depends on my real abode being protected from invasion. If you *could* inspire a newspaper paragraph – !"

The spectacle of Gissing sponsoring news-management of this kind is delightful, but the reality for Gissing was quite otherwise. His life had now turned into a simulacrum of an existence; we experience him as a spectral figure, moving stealthily among those few whom he can trust not to deliver him back to his abject life with Edith. He seems all but used-up, and his letters, in this context, provide for him a crucial function, of presenting himself to the world as a kind of fiction.

This quality of unreality which his life assumes at this time, and to which the early letters in this volume bear witness, has been anticipated in the previous volumes of the *Collected Letters*. Volume Six recorded the breakdown of Gissing and Edith's married life together, the permanent removal of the five-year-old Walter to his aunts and grandmother in Wakefield in April 1896, Gissing's flight from Edith in February 1897, his period in Budleigh Salterton through to the spring of that year, the break-up of the family home with Edith taking the younger son to lodgings in September and the start of Gissing's period in Italy in the same month.

But a quarter way into this volume, eight months after his wryly melancholic acceptance

of illness as a more or less permanent condition of his life, Gissing is writing that “I am going to reach the age of 80, & to be as young of heart then as I am now.” The recipient of this letter was

-- 28 --

Gabrielle Fleury who had written to Gissing asking him whether she might translate *New Grub Street* into French. Comparison with that earlier letter to Clara Collet may seem arbitrary, yet some such juxtaposition is needed to convey, what can never fail to take even the most seasoned of Gissing observers by surprise, the astonishing upsurge of intense feeling induced by a truly sexual passion.

The onset of his romantic feelings for Gabrielle was forceful by any standards. To experience the excess of his romantic rhetoric – it reads, at times, like a transcription of Goethe’s *Werther* – without the benefit of her letters to him is to fear at times for the consequences to him should he be misjudging her feelings. But from the limited evidence available the editors rightly observe that Gabrielle was not at this crucial time embarrassed. We also need to remember the extent of Gabrielle’s willingness to assume the role of romantic heroine which Gissing (so insistently) constructed for her. (The editors deal well with her “philosophy of cancellation” which led her, a decade after Gissing’s death, to delete the more intimate passages from the letters printed here.)

Their relationship developed rapidly. After Gabrielle’s initial inquiry, a first meeting took place at the Wells’s house on 6 July. A letter of 12 July suggests that friendly intimacy will be reciprocated: “I shall have a great deal to tell you, & I hope the weather will allow us to sit & talk under the blue sky,” and a letter of 27 July, following a day spent together at Gissing’s Dorking home on the 26th, is a formal, decorous, but ardent love letter: “I hear your voice every moment. Perhaps it is well that I cannot see you again just now. Your character is too sympathetic, & I should wish to have you near me always.”

Gissing’s love-making seems to involve, what will be insistently sounded through the correspondence in this volume, a humbling of himself before her and a throwing of himself on her judgment of him: “How often I shall hear your musical voice, urging me to do the best I can! How often I shall see your beautiful hazel eyes (you know they are what we call *hazel*) looking at me with kindness, with indulgence for my morbid weaknesses & all my wearisome peculiarities.”

Merely to quote such passages is to recall just how infrequently Gissing had been able to indulge such feelings in his own personal life. For the first time in his correspondence he writes as one of his own romantically-driven protagonists. From July 1898 his emotional life was transformed, as it were, overnight. The outpouring of letters which followed animate the volume to a pitch of feeling beyond anything which previous volumes reach.

-- 29 --

Against the backdrop of these passionate and joyous encounters, the earlier phase, referred to above, now becomes an episode in the narrative which Gissing is compelled to recreate for Gabrielle over the course of the 66 letters printed here; the story of his own life.

To read these letters, as the relationship develops through the autumn to the spring of 1899, when he joins Gabrielle, permanently, in France, is to be struck by how crucial it was for Gissing to be confessional; indeed it seems that the confessional mode acts to authenticate the reality of his feelings of love for her. These narratives, which allow for the formal redemption of his suffering, are written with all the intensity of a justified sinner.

The early letters see Gissing rarely at ease in Italy; not only does he have recurring illness but he is continually preoccupied by the practical problems posed by the need to settle the living arrangements of Edith and his little son Alfred. He is unable to settle to his work as news of

Edith's distress and disorderly conduct is mailed to him from London. Then there are the anxieties about the disposal of the household furniture. "I am beset by maddening worries," he writes to his brother Algernon. Nevertheless, he deposes his brother to supervise the removal to new unfurnished rooms, for Edith's use, of part of their warehoused furniture with impressive attention to the detail of the necessary practicalities.

Throughout this period Edith's domestic arrangements were supervised by the heroic Eliza Orme. She emerges as one of a group of women (including Clara Collet and Gissing's sisters Ellen and Margaret) who worked to salvage what they could of Gissing's disastrous domestic affairs, particularly to safeguard the interest of each of the boys. The activity of these women who understood Gissing's position as a major writer, but who looked in horror at what the Gissing ménage actually amounted to, supplies evidence (too easily taken for granted in post-welfare state days) of the crucial place that such support systems played before state agencies became fully developed. While his sisters Ellen and Margaret responded uncomplainingly out of a very Victorian sense of moral duty, one wonders how far, as single women active in social affairs, Clara Collet and Eliza Orme might have been prompted to generalise from their experience – to look forward to a more effective machinery for dealing with the breakdown of families emerging in the new century.

Questions inevitably arise about the propriety of Gissing's removal to Italy and his estrangement from Walter, whom Edith had agreed should be removed to Wakefield (she

-- 30 --

retained the toddler Alfred for whom she had a genuine love). Wells, in particular, has reservations, believing that Edith had been hard done by and that Gissing too easily had deserted the matrimonial home. Stung by such criticism from a newly-won friend, Gissing is forced to reply in a letter of 22 August 1898 (not 27 August as the Introduction has it, p. xlix) that he stayed the course as long as he did "for the children's sake."

Yet Gissing had endured extraordinary restrictions at Edith's behest for four years; his patience was, understandably, exhausted. The growth of his reputation as a writer, with its concomitant public demands, had made it more difficult to survive writing at the kitchen table at Epsom, even though some of his greatest work had been produced in this period. For the artist to survive it was perhaps inevitable that he show himself to be ruthless, and so, uncaring.

The consequences are manifested in his letters to his son Walter (six years old at the opening of this volume). Gissing's feelings of guilt are both expressed in and assuaged by solicitous comments on his boy's youthful efforts to master languages and drawing and by the effort to share with him his experience of places, buildings and sights. There is his touching Wordsworthian encouragement of his son to appreciate the natural environment of his new Wakefield home and to experience a pleasure in rootedness. Yet the boy is all the while estranged from his parents, by the actions of a father who seems doomed to perpetual rootlessness. Gissing appears to be wholly unaware of the contradiction.

Running through the correspondence is Gissing's understandable bafflement about his inability to sell more copies of his novels. The critical success and decent sales of *The Whirlpool* (1897) prompted him to expect a better response than he was to get during the period covered by these letters. There was little doubting the high critical esteem in which he was held. His study of Charles Dickens (1898) is almost universally praised and his agent finds no difficulty in placing the eight short stories produced in this two-year period. In his overoptimistic proposal to the young publisher Grant Richards, to whom he suggested a deal which would give Richards sole rights over a guaranteed regular output in return for £1000 per year (over twice his average yearly earnings), Gissing shows a (necessary) determination to capitalise on his now considerable critical reputation. But as Richards had to acknowledge, the public would not support such entrepreneurial ambition. "There is something in my books which English people

really *dislike*,” he tells Gabrielle in April 1899; but in the same letter he speaks revealingly of

-- 31 --

“this growing reputation of mine” (he was encouraged by the attention he was receiving in France and Germany). In a letter to Clara Collet that October, he writes of his irritation at the “absurd contrast between the reputation I have among literary people...& the paltry sale of my books.” He points out that editors are keen to publish his articles; one offers him “exceptional terms,” while “my books continue to have no sale at all.” This paradox has been an abiding question for critics of late-nineteenth century literary history; here we have both informed commentary and a case in point.

The major novel from this period was *The Crown of Life* and, as is well-known, it has its origins partly in his new-found discovery of the power of love for Gabrielle. It would be madness to anticipate his “crown of life,” he writes to her early in their romance (5 August 1898). But its failure to sell well is clearly deeply depressing to Gissing; he believes himself to be the victim of peculiar circumstances, and rank bad luck. In his old friend Eduard Bertz he finds the perfect recipient for his feelings of disappointment: “the book is exciting no attention whatever,” he writes to him in December 1899, “it has [been] very coldly reviewed, & will evidently soon cease to be spoken of at all. This is worse luck than has befallen any book of mine for several years. Of course the moment of publication was most unfortunate.” For *The Crown of Life*, Gissing’s most explicitly anti-imperialist fiction, appeared on the eve of the outbreak of the Boer War.

Of all Gissing’s friends, Bertz most lamented the narrow jingoism and spirit of nationalistic reaction that was dominating international politics at the turn of the century. On 31 December 1899 Gissing writes to him, totemically, of the “grievous retrogression” which England’s “war-fever” represents. The tradition of pan-European tolerance and political libertarianism which Bertz had always embodied for Gissing, and which finds expression in the figure of Jerome Otway in *The Crown of Life*, now seems to belong to quite another age.

But encouraged by Thomas Hardy’s support for his anti-jingo essay, “Tyrtæus,” in the *Review of the Week*, Gissing petitions his new agent Pinker in November 1899 to urge on his publisher Methuen a more aggressive advertisement of his novel “which, with a little effort, might become the subject of a good deal of discussion – for there is an anti-war party in England, & this book should appeal to such people very strongly.” The claim was no doubt justified in theory, but despite some attention to the novel in an anti-Kipling polemic by Robert Buchanan, “the Voice of the Hooligan,” this was not, of itself, enough to generate a movement of resistance to the prevailing war-spirit of the times. Methuen presumably knew that in these

-- 32 --

conditions there was no such radical constituency, to generate enthusiasm amongst a reading public neurotic about the continuing military reverses in the early months of the war.

Both the Introduction and the editorial matter for this volume are exemplary, maintaining the high standards set by previous volumes. The Introduction is judicious and extremely skilful at setting out necessary background material – it is especially interesting on the importance to Gissing of his Italian sojourn and on the formation of the *mentalité* of Gabrielle Fleury. The editors are, as one has come to expect, highly astute at examining motives from any number of angles. Technically, there is a small instance of misplaced editorial matter: details of Hall Caine (p. 68) could have been supplied to an earlier letter where he makes a more prominent appearance in a letter from Wells.

But the editors have treated Gissing handsomely in this, as in other volumes. And they have performed a fine service in allowing us to experience the full variety of Gissing’s own

emotional life, as its depths and its answering heights are often movingly sounded in this compelling sequence of his correspondence.

William Greenslade
University of the West of England, Bristol.

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, Wordsworth Classics, Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth Editions, 1996.

This marvellously inexpensive edition of the novel which is commonly regarded as Gissing's masterpiece is most welcome. All his admirers who in the last twenty-five years occasionally deplored that some new editions of his works were too expensive should be pleased to see that in the present case, not only is the price (£0.99) no longer an obstacle in the way of some potential purchasers, but that it is almost irresistibly attractive. For the general reader who will not much care to have this or that literary allusion or quotation identified, such an edition is about the ideal thing. The three-page introduction and the brief, crisp and entirely acceptable presentation of the narrative on the back cover are exactly what the new Gissing reader needs.

Anyone with a minimum of intellectual curiosity and eyes to see the world about him should be tempted to read on after such words as these: "Admired by authors such as H. G. Wells, John Middleton Murry, George Orwell and Virginia Woolf, his work, and particularly

-- 33 --

New Grub Street, has enjoyed revived prestige since the 1960s when it was realised that his sombre vision of the effects of commercialised culture on civilisation as a whole had been prophetic." In the present-day world, with its numberless depressing aspects, Gissing's so-called pessimism no longer seems to deserve that name. His scepticism about human affairs is now proved to have been all too justified, and his lucidity has a better chance than ever of being largely recognized.

This Wordsworth Classics edition of *New Grub Street* is pleasantly got up. The cover illustration is a detail from "Pierre Joseph Proudhon and his Children" by Gustave Courbet, the original of which is in the Musée du Petit Palais, Paris. The text has been reset in attractive type which compares favourably with that of the other editions currently available. It is to be hoped that the book will sell well enough for the publishers to be tempted to reprint other Gissing titles. Is it not extraordinary that a book like *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* should be out of print and that, of Gissing's five working-class novels, only *The Nether World* (World's Classics) can be bought new? — Pierre Coustillas

John Sloan, *John Davidson, First of the Moderns: A Literary Biography*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

In proportion as knowledge of Gissing is becoming deeper, the need for more detailed knowledge of his friends and acquaintances, whether literary or not, is being more strongly felt. With the publication of this literary biography by Dr. John Sloan, one of the bigger gaps has been filled in a very satisfactory way. Davidson's previous biographers seemed to be aware of his relationship with Gissing, but none of them had made any effort to document it. Thanks to Dr. Sloan, an acknowledged specialist of both writers, this deficiency has been remedied, and it is doubtful whether, on either side, further material likely to extend our present knowledge of their friendship will ever become available.

With Davidson far more than with Gissing we feel we are in the midst of late Victorian and Edwardian Grub Street. The poet's earnings analysed in this book make it clear that at no

time was he more prosperous than the novelist. Struggle with poverty, taut rapport with publishers and critics darkened his outlook, and the story of his life, related in very quiet tones by Dr. Sloan, makes sad reading. Misery, poverty, frustration and, in the later years, paranoia

-- 34 --

and incipient madness, are the key words. One eventually comes to think that some of his friends and well-wishers, notably Grant Richards, were very patient with him. His attitude towards publishers occasionally reminds one of Conrad's towards his agent, who was also Gissing's agent, James B. Pinker. If publishers have often exploited authors shamelessly, the lives of some of these reveal attempts to use equally objectionable methods. Davidson was obviously a difficult character, whose moody propensities were exacerbated by adversity.

In many places where the biographer only has Davidson in mind the reader will be reminded of situations commonly associated with Gissing. Being contemporaries they sometimes had dealings or relationships with the same men and women (C. K. Shorter, Morley Roberts, A. P. Watt), and they had one little known common admirer, the journalist J. Cuthbert Hadden, of the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*. Neither man cared much for what he read about his own books in the *Athenæum*; both were worried by the so-called servant question and seriously preoccupied by the education of their children; both viewed social life as something of a plague and declined invitations from wealthy people freely. But on the question of the Empire, Davidson found a readier listener in Morley Roberts, who like him was a staunch, articulate imperialist and, incidentally, praised in verse Sunlight Soap while Davidson puffed Peach's! Especially interesting is the suggestion that one of Gissing's sources for *The Whirlpool* was Davidson's mode of life in the mid-nineties and the conversations they had together on political matters. (See John Sloan's article in the *Gissing Newsletter* for October 1990.) Also an essay, entitled "A Rare Character," which Davidson published in the *Spectator* for 5 October 1889 and which Gissing may or may not have read before sailing for Greece, irresistibly brings to mind the famous passage of *New Grub Street* in which Marian Yule gloomily ponders on her own activities in the Reading Room of the British Museum.

Of course *John Davidson, First of the Moderns* must essentially be read for its own sake, but it is a book which students of Gissing's life will not like to overlook. It is a well-researched biography which reads very pleasantly and is likely to be considered for a good many years as the authoritative Life of the poet. The highly laudatory reviews which appeared in the *London Review of Books* and the *Times Literary Supplement* six months ago expressed a similar opinion. A selection of Davidson's verse, edited by Dr. Sloan, was published simultaneously by the Clarendon Press as a companion volume. — Pierre Coustillas

-- 35 --

Robert L. Selig, *George Gissing, Revised Edition*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.

Anyone with this new edition and the first placed side by side in front of him will realize at once that the words "Revised Edition," prominently printed on the jacket of the book, on the spine and on the title page are fully justified. Because of the smaller number of pages (156 as against 177 pages), the second edition may seem shorter than the first, but the type being smaller and the pages taller the reverse is probably true. The preface reads in part: "This updated edition of my 1983 study includes significant and extensive changes. Most importantly, I have added much new material. The opening biographical chapter now contains many facts about Gissing's life unearthed over the last 10 years or so, especially about his 12-month American exile, most of which I myself have uncovered. In the rest of the book, I have here and

there added fresh nuances of interpretation, sometimes in response to recent critical work by others. The final chapter expands its survey of Gissing scholarship and criticism with many books and essays that appeared after my first edition. These new sources also augment the footnotes, at times quite extensively. In addition, I have gone over every sentence in my original book and have revised almost half of them in order to add to their clarity and grace. I have altered any words that I would not have written now. If my basic judgments about Gissing's works have not changed greatly, I have often changed my way of expressing them." A short review might end with this long quotation, as no important aspect of the revision is omitted from it. Indeed the notes and references as well as the Select Bibliography have been considerably enlarged, and they will be very useful in particular to readers who wish to know about the contents of this or that recent article. As a rule, the critic is very generous to his predecessors, perhaps too generous in a few cases, and he wisely concentrates on post-war criticism.

Inevitably not all value judgments will be shared by fellow critics or the general reader; they are not by the present writer, for instance, as far as *The Odd Women* and *Veranilda* are concerned. Perhaps also Professor Selig's attitude towards one or two of Gissing's characters is likely to seem strangely personal – his detestation of Everard Barfoot is a case in point. Surely, if that kind of individual may get on one's nerves in actual life, he can hardly spark off quite the same reaction if he is only an abstraction between the covers of a book. An occasional factual correction may still be necessary – for instance, Thomas Waller Gissing did not die suddenly;

-- 36 --

all contemporary reports agree he did not. However, these are very minor blemishes, and the strong points of the book come out even more sharply than thirteen years ago when the volume was new in Twayne's English Authors Series. Let us hope that the publishers will make it easily available in England as well as in America. It is attractively produced and should catch the eye of the prospective buyer on both sides of the Atlantic. He will find in it enough material to send him back to Gissing's novels and short stories for a fresh appraisal or to tempt him to begin with the narratives to which Professor Selig gives the highest marks. — Pierre Coustillas

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Notes and News

The leading article of the present number owes its existence to the kindness of Dr. G. Krishnamurti, the Honorary Secretary of the Eighteen Nineties Society, who, having discovered Ethel Wheeler's piece in the little-known weekly *London*, shared his knowledge with the editor of the *Journal*, who in turn passed on the reference to Bouwe Postmus as he was preparing for a new research campaign across the Channel. Ethel Wheeler's assessment of the picture of London offered by Gissing's work might otherwise have awaited exhumation for considerably more than a hundred years – it was on 6 August 1896 that it achieved publication – seeing that 1896 is not a year that invites one to look for forgotten articles on Gissing in the English press.

Pickering & Chatto Publishers (21 Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 2TH) will be publishing *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells*, edited by David C. Smith, in four volumes, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the writer's death. The leaflet circulated by the publishers informs us that the edition "contains over 2,000 letters, less than a hundred of which have previously been published. Letters currently available in other scholarly editions (such as those to George Bernard Shaw and Arnold Bennett) have been deliberately excluded, except where their inclusion seemed essential. A few of the letters are business letters – to publishers,

agents and secretaries, but the majority are much more personal. [...] Interspersed chronologically with Wells's letters is a small selection of about 40 letters to Wells, where letters from him are not extant." The four-page leaflet also informs us that the editorial apparatus

-- 37 --

includes the editor's preface, a general introduction, footnotes, a full guide to principles of transcription and editorial policy, full provenance details, a biographical glossary, a bibliography, a comprehensive list of all letters, and an index. Volume I will cover the period 1878-1900, Volume II 1901-1913, Volume III 1913-1930, Volume IV 1930-1946. The selective list of about 220 correspondents includes, besides Gissing, such names as the following which in some way or other are all relevant to Gissing studies: St. John Adcock, Grant Allen, Arnold Bennett, Edward Clodd, W. M. Colles, Joseph Conrad, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, Frederic Harrison, Henry Hick, J. B. Pinker, Thomas Seccombe, C. K. Shorter, Frank Swinnerton, and Israel Zangwill. Sets ordered before 29 November will cost £250 or \$375, £275 and \$410 thereafter. Publication is scheduled for December.

Two echoes of the awarding to the *Collected Letters of George Gissing* of the Morton N. Cohen Award for a Distinguished Edition of Letters will be found in the *MLA Newsletter* ("Winners of the MLA Prizes Announced at Convention," Spring 1996, p. 8) and in the French quarterly *Bulletin de la Société des anglicistes de l'enseignement supérieur* ("Distinction pour la recherche scientifique," March 1996, no. 37, pp. 12-13).

On May 29, Pierre Coustillas gave a lecture on Gissing and his Publishers before the Eighteen Nineties Society. It will be published in the *Journal* of the Society.

David J. Holmes, the Philadelphia autographs dealer, whose Catalogue 59 contained an interesting collection of material concerning *The Paying Guest*, *Charles Dickens* and *The Town Traveller* priced at \$4,500, has issued a new catalogue (no. 60), in which letters of some of Gissing's friends and correspondents are listed, for instance letters from Frederic Harrison to Knowles and Browning, and from Charles Norris Williamson, who visited Gissing in Arcachon, to C. F. Keary. Jarndyce's latest Dickens illustrated Catalogue, about 180 pages long, contains 1766 items and can be purchased for £5. It will be of interest to collectors who concentrate on Gissing's work on Dickens. The scarce Rochester Edition (11 volumes with introductions by Gissing and notes by Kitton, 1899-1901) is available for £200. Four editions of *Charles Dickens, a Critical Study* (1898, 1902, 1903 and 1926) as well as *The Immortal Dickens* and the present writer's *Gissing's Writings* on Dickens are also listed.

-- 38 --

The home of Dr. Henry Hick and his family in New Romney has been shrouded in mystery for years. Correspondence with the local librarian proved useless. Only an enquiry conducted on the spot could – hopefully – produce some positive results. True, no one seems to remember the Hicks locally, but an old photograph of The Priory (Hick's address, written by Gissing himself on postcards to his friend) in the possession of his grandson Godfrey Hick proved a very useful aid when human assistance failed altogether. The Priory has now been identified as a red brick building next to the genuine remains of a thirteenth-century priory in Ashford Road. A photograph of the two buildings can be seen in Edward Carpenter's *Old Romney Marsh in Camera* (Geerings of Ashford Ltd, 1984), ISBN 1-873953-04-6. Hick's home stands at the corner of the High Street and Ashford Road. A photograph of the High Street, New Romney, c. 1910, procurable separately, gives the atmosphere of the village as Gissing knew it.

A book of major interest to anyone who wishes to know more about the family background of Gabrielle Fleury was published by the Editions Royer (8, rue Victor Letalle, 75020 Paris) last year. In *Des fers de Loire à l'acier Martin: Maîtres de forges en Berry et Nivernais*, Annie Laurant, who teaches physics in the *lycée technique* Pierre-Emile Martin in Bourges, has much to tell us about the genealogy and professional activities of families, some members of which Gissing came to know – the Crawshays, the Dufauds, the Martins, the Saglios and others. It is a book to be placed on the same shelf as Denise Le Mallier's *Le Roman des Dufaud* and *The Crawshays of Cyfarthfa Castle* by Margaret Stewart Taylor. The three volumes deal with regional and family history among nineteenth-century ironmasters, French and Welsh. They are complementary, all three are illustrated, but Mme Laurant's volume more copiously so, and her genealogical inquiry is made readily understandable by sixteen family trees.

It is becoming ever clearer that if Dutch translations of Gissing's works are very few – only translations of *Eve's Ransom* (1904) and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1920 and 1989) are on record – the main reason for this is not lack of interest, but the fact that in the Netherlands a fair proportion of the population can read him in the original. Hence allusions to his works in Dutch novels. Bouwe Postmus reports his latest discovery as follows: "The other day I came across an interesting reference to Gissing in a once quite famous Dutch novel by

-- 39 --

Mrs. Ina Boudier-Bakker, *De Klop op de Deur* [The Knock on the Door] (Amsterdam: P. N. van Kampen & Zoon N.V., 1930), Part Three, p. 371: 'Maar denk in Engeland aan Gissing, die in *Demos* de invloed schildert van het socialisme op de arbeidersbevolking. En dat roerend verhaal *The old* [sic] *Women*, de droeve historie van drie zusters, die na de dood van hun vader in fatsoenlijke armoede achterblijven en langzaam wegzakken in doffe misère.' This translates: 'But in England think of Gissing, who in *Demos* has pictured the influence of socialism on the working-class. And that moving tale, *The Odd Women*, the sad story of three sisters, reduced to genteel poverty after the death of their father and sinking slowly in dull misery.' The book's theme and structure are clearly modelled on Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* and it chronicles the affairs of an upper-middle class Amsterdam family, by the name of Craets, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the end of the first World War."

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Recent Publications

Volume

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1996. £0.99. ISBN 1-85326-292-7.

Articles, reviews, etc.

D. J. Taylor, *After the War: The Novel and England since 1945*, London: Flamingo, 1994. Contains allusions to Gissing's novels in general, and passages about *Born in Exile*.

Rishona Elena Zimring, "Literature, Comparative," *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Vol. 55, no. 2, August 1994, pp. 273A-274A. Abstract of a Yale Ph.D. dissertation (1993)

entitled "Genealogies of the modern metropolis: Gender and urban space in Zola, Gissing, James, and Conrad."

Emanuela Ettore, "Recensioni," *Merope*, Vol. 7, no. 14, January 1995, pp. 159-62. Review of the Italian translation of *By the Ionian Sea, Sulle rive dello Ionio: Un vittoriano al Sud* (1993).

-- 40 --

Sally Ledger, "Gissing, the Shopgirl and the New Woman," *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 6, no. 3, Winter 1995, pp. 263-74. An article on *The Odd Women*.

Francesco Marroni, "Recensioni," *Rivista di Studi Vittoriani*, Vol. 1, no.1, January 1996, pp. 159-62. Review of Volume 7 of the *Collected Letters*.

Francesco Badolato: "Squillace in Lenormant e Gissing: Cassiodoro e il Cardinale Sirletto," *Calabria sconosciuta*, no. 19, January-March 1996, pp. 53-56. With portraits of the four men concerned.

Francesco Badolato, "Scrittori vittoriani: Gissing tra positivismismo e pessimismo," *Il Corriere di Roma*, no. 694, 30 May 1996, p. 15. To be continued.

William Grimes, "Travel," *New York Times Book Review*, 16 June 1996, pp. 14 and 44. In a round-up of travel narratives Grimes announces the publication of a new edition of *By the Ionian Sea* by Marlboro/Northwestern University in July, a paperback priced at \$13.95. We shall give details in our next number.

Jacob Korg, "Reviews," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 51, no. 1, June 1996, pp. 126-29. Review of volumes 3-6 of the *Collected Letters*.

John Sloan, "Comptes rendus," *Etudes Anglaises*, April-June 1996, pp. 233-35. Review of Volumes 5 and 6 of the *Collected Letters*.

Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies (eds.), *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Volume 5: 1912-1916, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. On p. 25 is printed a letter of 25 February 1912 to an unidentified former naval officer on the *Boadicea*, in which Conrad writes: "Poor dear Gissing was always very friendly to me, and I had a great affection for him, tho' we did not sight each other very often." The Gissing-Conrad correspondence published in Gissing's *Collected Letters* corroborates this. Conrad also alludes in this letter to an article the recipient wrote on Gissing, seemingly for the *Quarterly Review*, and which did not achieve publication. No clue to the identity of this man is available.

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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*.

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