

CLASS AND CULTURE IN THE SELECTED FICTION OF GEORGE GISSING  
AND OF OTHER NOVELISTS OF THE PERIOD 1880-1914.

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## PREFACE

Gissing is the major novelist dealt with in this thesis, for in his work certain experiences that were shaped by the tension between democratic tendencies and traditional attitudes and values are most clearly articulated.

Part One seeks to provide a social and literary context in which his writing can be understood. The first chapter explores two crucial terms - "culture" and "class" - in their historical and artistic implications. This is followed by a discussion of Wells, Lawrence and Forster, who in their discovered pessimism, heroic romanticism and tentative optimism enable Gissing's particular understanding of his social world to be described and placed.

After examining Born in Exile in close relation to two other extremely important texts of the period in order to establish common approaches and significant distinctions, the main body of Gissing's relevant fiction is considered in the next chapters. Thyrza and The Nether World are judged to be the most successful working-class works of the 1880's and New Grub Street is viewed as providing a fine realisation of the intellectual in a mass type of society.

Throughout, this figure is focused upon because in him the social and political changes of the time gain their most acute and vital expression. Gissing's distinction, as the last chapter



clarifies, is that he most accurately can be regarded as the novelist of the intellectual. Through exploring the character and his position he developed, within a hard-won liberal perspective, a complex attitude to class and culture and a realism that made for his centrality in his literary context.

In my discussion of Gissing I have relied heavily on the biographical researches of Pierre Coustillas, Jacob Korg and Gillian Tindall as well as on the various compilations of his correspondence which are available. The critical approaches of John Goode and Raymond Williams have been influential in the shaping of my perspective.\*

Throughout all references made to the fiction I have dealt with, unless otherwise stated, are to first editions.

I should like to thank Dr. Mary Jarrett for her guidance during the writing of this thesis.

\* Adrian Poole's Gissing in Context (1975), was published after this thesis was completed.

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## INTRODUCTION

The period 1880-1914, it is commonly acknowledged, was a profoundly transitional one. Developments occurred which had a considerable influence upon many people's experience and understanding of their society. Opportunities and expectations emerged as well as more intense conflicts and difficulties in consequence of the impact of democratic tendencies on the social, political and cultural life of the age. Novel possibilities, emphases and strains, caused by alterations in the relations of the classes, came into tension with values associated with the world of culture. Not only did individuals encounter their society in ways different from earlier years but they were compelled also to understand that the complex world of culture was subject to altered pressures. Clearly such developments are not easily defined; they exist in the shifting and problematical area in which social and psychological reality connect. Fiction thus offers a particularly valid means for grasping their nature. However, the matter is complicated, for the way the novelists dealt with the subject is crucially a part of the real historical situation; novels both compose and reflect the connection between class and culture. To understand this fully, necessitates a fairly close reading of certain authors' handling of the relationship.

Gissing is central to my case because he was the one most occupied with the crucial issues at stake and because in his work their manifold aspects and implications are most intensively explored. His achievement, though, to be described precisely needs to be placed, first in a ~~broad~~ cultural context, then in

relation to those other writers of the period concerned with similar themes, in particular to Wells, Forster and Lawrence because of their preoccupation with issues central to Gissing in the 1880's and early 1890's. Wells was intensely engaged with the implications of popular culture and social advance, Forster with the nature of the liberal stance and the problems faced by intellectuals and self-educated working men, and Lawrence with the difficulties of the lower-class artist and with the experience of rootlessness. All three have a deep comprehension of the significance of class, appreciating how it can be the source of certain ways of seeing, feeling and judging that have to be lived with and which exist in potential friction with alternative ways located in other areas of society. In addition two other novels are selected for detailed examination - one by Hardy and one by James - for with Born in Exile they seem to penetrate to a major focus of the tension between class and culture in this period, and provide a suitable opportunity for establishing the kinds of comparisons relevant to an understanding of Gissing's central achievement.

No attempt is made to provide a comprehensive analysis of his output. Many of his novels of the 1890's are not considered in detail because I do not feel them to be relevant. Nor is Isabel Clarendon examined in depth, for a discussion of A Life's Morning serves to make the necessary points. Similarly biographical matter is introduced only when it seems to illuminate thematic issues. Throughout, in the case of Gissing and in the case of other writers treated, the effort is to grasp the way in which their fiction enacts a response to experiences which were fundamental to them as individuals having to live through them, and to them as intellectuals and artists needing

to comprehend and shape them according to their own sense of  
the truth of things. :

PART 1

THE CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

### The Social and Cultural Context

#### Culture under Pressure

The word "culture" obviously raises certain important issues. Raymond Williams has traced the modifications in its meaning<sup>1</sup> and Langbaum has indicated the different uses it can serve, demonstrating that in the mid-Victorian period it came to suggest the way art might act as an "index" to the quality of life in a society.<sup>2</sup> Although, then, any definition must be a loose one, it is important to stress certain related associations of the term. Actual aesthetic activity and its product are clearly central but also implied is a particular attitude to the world - an emphasis upon non-materialistic values and the idea of gentlemanly leisure. Culture is situated in those two realms beyond the economic - the one external to the self in which individuals have the opportunity to create their personalities through style, fashion, manners and art and the other internal to the self in which individuals can find fulfilment in literature, music and painting. The word is of both value and referential significance.

It is a crucial word for comprehending the nature of Victorian society, for throughout the period many intellectuals

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1. Raymond Williams, Culture and Society (1958), pp. xvi-xvii.
2. Robert Langbaum, The Modern Spirit (1970), p.45.

were concerned with finding alternative perspectives and orders to the existing social reality and working out their relationship to it. Coleridge's "clerisy", Carlyle's medievalism, Arnold's "best self" and State, Ruskin's feudalism, Tennyson's Palace of Art and Arthurian Court, in different ways, involve these writers in dealing with the meaning of culture. Against the ethos of laissez-faire capitalism, against the processes of industrialism new sources of coherent values were sought - a new imagery from art, a new emphasis from education, a new way of looking from aesthetics. The search was not always a confident or positive one - energy could fail, creativity become sterile. In the Idylls of the King, in Ruskin's later writings, in George Eliot's Daniel Deronda the sense is mainly of the powerful forces working against the civilised and humane; there is a touch of desperation present.

The growth of pessimism is seen most clearly in the way in which the crucial concern with the issue of the relationship of culture and democracy is understood in the latter part of the century. Fundamental is the disappearance of the sense that matters were still open to intervention. The legislation which expanded the franchise and education, produced for the intellectuals of the 1880-1914 period a 'fait accompli'. Arnold welcomed democracy because the aristocracy was no longer fitted to lead the nation and because it seemed inevitable; preparation for its coming was therefore central. Education thus became vital but Arnold never went on to examine the implication of these political and social advances, never came to grips with their necessary conflict with traditional sources of value and authority and the problems they would create for individuals caught in their midst; these matters



didn't press with their later urgency. For Carlyle, too, in Chartism education was a cause to be supported but his vision of it was shaped by his preoccupation with order; schooling was to discipline and train rather than deepen and widen men's understanding. Such a view, in its remoteness from the meaning of education for individuals, testifies to the generalised stance he could afford to adopt. For later writers faced with the social and political realities created by the legislation of the time, the problems involved in the relationship of culture and democracy pressed with greater intensity. Morris's conviction that genuine art was impossible in a society shaped by class divisions<sup>3</sup> and George Moore's feeling that it was endangered by the weakening of these divisions<sup>4</sup> were the two poles of a perspective that had abandoned the evasions and disinterestedness. The prophet figure is no longer applicable; it's a matter of coming to terms with the actuality that is already present.

Intellectuals had not only to confront the implicit conflict between culture and certain liberating tendencies of the time; they were also compelled to confront the growing strains under which culture was placed towards the end of the century. One major source of this strain was an increased sensitivity on the part of the middle and upper-classes to the reality of poverty. Guilt, fed by the reports of Booth and Rowntree, was certainly central in the motivation of many. However, as Simon has stressed, fear of possible revolution also provided

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3. See Asa Briggs, ed., William Morris (1962), p.31 and The Letters of William Morris, ed. Philip Henderson (1950), pp. 355-356.
  4. George Moore, Confessions of a Young Man (1898), pp. 158-160.

a major impulse to action.<sup>5</sup> A work like Charles Clegg's When All Men Starve, which is a futuristic account of a war between the classes as a result of a shortage of food, reveals the nature of the feeling that could exist. The narrator is intellectually in sympathy with the proletariat but the way its activities are described, through, for example, the picture of a mob dancing around Buckingham Palace, suggest that deep-seated anxieties are being articulated. The founders of Toynbee Hall in 1883 were eminently humane men but a primary worry was centred upon the dangers that the wideness of the gap between the classes implied. Gradually poverty was ceasing to be seen in individual terms but was becoming a social problem. Thus, through the period, the Charity Organisation Society, established in the 1860's, came under increasing criticism. It was beginning to be felt that its emphases on self-help and upon the weaknesses of indiscriminate philanthropy, and its concentration on particular cases was out-dated. A new belief in the advantages of collective action was emerging. Bosanquet, for example, condemned the idea that the poor should be seen mainly as objects of compassion<sup>6</sup> and the Fabians stressed the need for State intervention.

The intensification in philanthropic activity, the spread of radical ideas, the publication of numerous novels about the poor and what could be done to help them by such writers as Mrs. Humphrey Ward, James Adderly and John Law are an indication of the way that the reality of social deprivation was entering the imagination of intellectuals, making for a radical questioning of the use and value of culture. Ruskin in the early eighteen-seventies most clearly articulates the

5. Brian Simon, Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920 (1965), p.60 and p.80 (See also Note 1, p.353 below)

6. See Charles Mowat, The Charity Organisation Society 1869-1913 (1961), p.73.

experience:

For my own part I will put up with this state of things passively not an hour longer. ...But I simply cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else I like, and the very light of the morning sky... has become hateful to me, because of the misery I know of, and see signs of.

Increasingly it became more general and acute, causing intellectuals to feel the need to take their culture into the lower-classes in order to justify their commitment to it. This emerges most plainly perhaps in much of the fiction of the time, for the idea of renunciation is a common one. The heroes of both Constance Howell's radical A More Excellent Way and Adderley's Stephen Remarx not only desire to form a relationship with the working-class but are also intent, through resigning their wealth and leisure, upon freeing their values and ideals from their contaminating social and economic ties. In this light the tragic intensity of The Princess Casamassima becomes clear, for James in this book is struggling against the whole idea that the world of culture needs justification in front of the social misery that surrounds it. In Paris, Hyacinth articulates his knowledge that the poverty of the masses doesn't challenge the achievements of humanity:

...for that perhaps is the clearest result of extending one's horizon - the sense, increasing as we go, that want and toil and suffering are the constant lot of the immense majority of the human race. I've found them every where but haven't minded them. Forgive the cynical confession. What has struck me is the great achievements man has been capable of in spite of them - the splendid accumulation of the happier few, to which doubtless the miserable majority have contributed. (11, 30) 8

The need to put the case so clearly, the need to make the separation between the two orders so wide, indicates the urgent, defensive nature of the novelist's awareness, the fact that he is writing against a significant pressure of opinion,

7. John Ruskin in Readings in Fors Claviger, ed. Caroline Wurtzburg (1899), pp. 3-4.
8. Henry James, The Princess Casamassima (1886)

attitude and emotion.

Related to the challenge to culture from the increased consciousness of poverty, there is that which originates from the intensification of class enmity in society. Working-class radicalism, that had lost its edge after the collapse of Chartism, revived. London saw various large scale demonstrations; in the late 1880's the Dockers' Strike symbolises a new mass militancy; there were efforts to form an independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation introduced into England the philosophy of Marxism. It would be a mistake, however, to see the developments out of proportion. Hyndman's party, for one thing, as Tsuzuki stresses, was divided and uncertain in its approach;<sup>9</sup> according to Pelling there was an engrained scepticism on the part of the majority about the value and possibility of change<sup>10</sup> and the particular character of London - the small-scale of its industry and its high rate of mobility - worked, as Thompson has shown, against the formation of a solidly based class consciousness<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, compared with the preceding years, the late nineteenth century did witness a marked growth in hostility between the classes.

Antagonism against those with power and wealth necessarily means that the associated realm of art and refinement comes under criticism. Whereas in the eighteen-forties individuals could be isolated for blame, the whole burden of the argument being that if they would only act more humanely the economic and social situation would remarkably improve, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century this is increasingly difficult and less relevant. What comes to the centre of

9. Chushichi Tsuzuki, H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism (1961), pp. 57-86

10. Henry Pelling, Popular Politics and Society in Late-Victorian Britain (1972), p. 14.

11. Paul Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour (1967), pp. 13-16

consciousness, is the way that the world of culture is directly dependent upon the system of exploitation at the heart of the period's capitalism. In Shaw's An Unsocial Socialist, for example, the hero refuses to inhabit the artistic milieu of his wife because of his feeling that artists are types of parasites, using their brains and talents as other men their economic strength, to oppress, and in the Preface to Major Barbara the writer argues that there can be no evasion of the Undershaft world. Shaw's perspective was shared by increasing numbers.

In minor works like Hocking's The Madness of David Baring, in which the hero realizes that his wealth necessarily implies the poverty of others and joins a communal anarchist group and in such major books as The Golden Bowl, in which the forms of civilization hide the deep corruptions beneath the surface at the same time as containing them and Howards End, in which the Schlegels have to cope with the problem posed by Leonard Bast, it is apparent that culture can no longer easily be seen as detached from its society, capable of offering a critical alternative. Wells's attack, for example, on the upper-class in Kipps is also an attack on the traditional world of art. The new political consciousness of the time, which was shared by Liberals and Conservatives, meant that connections had to be made which before could more easily be evaded. To recognise the deep rooted conflict between the classes was to accept that culture had to be placed in a new kind of context.

The world of culture was also put under pressure by the educational changes of the period, for these made available

to large numbers the possibility that that world could be theirs, although for the vast majority the possibility was never fulfilled. On the surface there seems to have been an expanding enlightenment. The Board Schools created by the Act of 1870, the measures taken to compel attendance and abolish fees which followed, gave the working-classes new opportunities, suggesting alternatives in the attitude of established society to them. In reality the developments didn't signify a simple liberalisation. Elementary education, according to Kazamias, continued to retain its "low social class status",<sup>12</sup> and Barnard stresses its ~~seeming~~ inferiority.<sup>13</sup> A view from the lower-class is provided by the next passage:

School was never, and never seemed to be, a community. The seal of patronage was on it, of having been provided by some persons for others, but not for their sake, by one class for another, without emphasis on shared humanity or culture. <sup>14</sup>

The schools of the proletariat were indeed inferior.

Government was not ultimately concerned with enabling the fulfilment of individual potential but with servicing society; thus the efforts of the Board schools to provide learning at a slightly higher level than the basic was frustrated by an act of 1902. Education was valued for its disciplinary function. A characteristic attitude is the following:

Since the passing of the Education Act, more than one thousand Board school boys have found employment in the Cornwall works, and universal testimony concerning them is, is, that as compared with those of the era previous to the existence of Board schools, there is a most marked improvement in every way. The lads are more orderly, more amenable to discipline and much more intelligent;

12. Andrea Kazamias, Politics, Society and Secondary Education in England, Philadelphia (1966), p.21.

13. H.C.Barnard, Were Those the Days, Oxford (1970), p.60. (see Note 3, p.353 below)

14. M.K.Ashby, Joseph Ashby of Tysoe, Cambridge (1961), p.205.

they show a great eagerness to learn the business of their lives and as a natural consequence they master it much more thoroughly and in considerably less time. 15

Enormous numbers of adolescents were condemned to wasted and frustrated lives.<sup>16</sup> Scholarship schemes were introduced but both their scope and the ideology behind them were limited. The ladder concept, which came into prominence, was clearly designed to select the exceptional and justify the neglect of the majority. Even for those few which came into the former category, the difficulties were acute. S.J.Curtis remembers the attitude of the staff in the old foundation school he attended: "They were constantly reminded by the masters that they were scholarship pupils, were looked upon in the light of poor relations." 17

Educational expansion was also made more difficult by the attitude of many working people; a deeply-rooted hostility to the idea of compulsory schooling was prevalent.<sup>18</sup> This hostility was closely bound up with the wide separation between the classes at this time; the University Extension movement, for example, faced considerable difficulties in making sustained contact with the proletariat, as a result of the "extent and depth of the sense of alienation among the working-class".<sup>19</sup>

15. Quoted by W.H.B.Court, British Economic History 1817-1914, Cambridge (1965) pp. 162-163 (See also Note 3, p. 352 below)

16. See Kenneth Lindsay, Social Progress and Educational Waste (1926), pp. 137-138, and for an insight into the personal significance of the experience of frustration see Robert Roberts, The Classic Slum, Manchester (1971), p. 114

17. Quoted in Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920, p. 271.

18. See Florence Bell, At the Works (1907), pp. 139-40; George Ewart Evans, Where Beards Wag All (1970), p. 205; Sybil Marshall, Fenland Chronicles (1967), p. 17; C.F.G. Masterman, The Condition of England (1909), pp. 116-117; Popular Politics and Society in Late-Victorian Britain, p. 4; Stephen Reynolds, Seems So! (1911), p. 47; Frederic Rogers, Labour, Life and Literature (1913), pp. 52-53

19. J.F.C. Harrison, Earning and Living 1790-1960 (1961), p. 240

Yet, in spite of the limitations that the narrowness of the State's aims and the nature of much working-class response made for, a new climate did emerge in which education and its associated possibilities gained in importance.<sup>20</sup> Clearly it is difficult to document such a development but something of what is involved can be felt from Philip Snowdon's account of the impact made by the schools which were established after 1870:

I was between ten and eleven years old when this change took place. It brought me into a new world of learning. We were taught in a new school-room, which by comparison with the dingy old place we had left seemed like a palace to us. The walls were covered with maps and pictures. Our curriculum was extended to include grammar, geography, history, elementary mathematics and the simple sciences.  
21.

And for those too old to benefit from Forster's Act the fact that their younger contemporaries were learning more than they had could inspire an increasing desire for knowledge<sup>22</sup> — a desire which was articulated most powerfully by the working-class politicians and thinkers of the period, such as Mann, Blatchford, and Hardie.

Education's inextricable connections with class, in the ways outlined here, necessarily implicates culture in similar tensions. The effort to transmit it to the unsympathetic or to those mistaken about its true nature compels a re-evaluation of its significance and relevance, compels its

20. See Where Beards Wag All, pp. 207-9; Holbrook Jackson, The 1890's (1913), p.61; Donald Read, Edwardian England 1901-1915 (1972), p.57; David Wardle, Education and Society in Nineteenth Century Nottingham (1971), pp. 115-16 and p.134.

21. Philip Snowdon, Autobiography (1934), i, 36.

22. See G.A.N. Lowndes, The Silent Social Revolution (1969), p.35 and Tom Mann, Memoirs (1923), p.13. (Note 4, p.354 below).



redefinition in the light of society as a whole, for it now has to survive within a new set of social and psychological realities. For Wells, for example, after his unwilling entry into a draper's shop, it has to serve as a means of reassuring himself about his own worth:

I don't think I ever had any snobbishness in me about the relative values of latin and longcloth but it was an immense consolation to me in these drab days of humiliation, that after all I had been able to race through Euclid's 'Elements', Smith's 'Principia' and various scientific textbooks in quite unusual speed. 23

It acts as a shield for his own identity. For (a fictional character like Jude Fawley), on the other hand, it becomes caught up in a whole series of illusions and frustrations, whilst for Leonard Bast it provides a fragile and irrelevant escape.

In addition to being subjected to pressure from social and political developments of the time, the traditional world of culture also had to face the challenge posed by, what can conveniently be considered, as a rival in the shape of an emerging mass society. Obviously in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the phenomenon was at a very early stage but certain very significant features can be pointed to. A new type of entrepreneur - men such as Lipton, Guinness, Boot and Courtauld - was adopting novel production methods to exploit growing markets and take advantage of the increasing consuming power of the working-class. These, together with the manufacture of more consumer goods and more emphasis upon the importance of advertising on a national scale began to transform the nature of Britain's economy. There was a

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23. H.G.Wells, Experiment in Autobiography (1934), i, 154

considerable growth in the "intermediate class"<sup>24</sup> and London, with its dependence upon such secondary activities as banking and insurance became the dominant image of urban life. Parallel to this was the growth of a form of journalism concerned with achieving a mass audience.

It is difficult to state the precise effect of these changes but certainly in their tendency to foster standardisation,<sup>25</sup> in their tendency to depersonalise and reduce the possibility of genuine opposition or escape from society's dominant influence, in their tendency to turn art into a commodity and its audience into passive recipients they posed a far-reaching and aggressive threat to values associated with traditional culture.<sup>26</sup> In the short stories of James, concerned with the literary life, it is possible to feel the meaning of that threat, as the sensitive consciousness defends itself against the temptations and hostilities of the world around it. The following passage expresses the writer's sense of the dangers represented by the new journalism:

The faculty of attention has utterly vanished from the general Anglo-Saxon mind, extinguished at its source By the big blatant Bajadere of Journalism, of the newspaper and the picture (above all) magazine, who keeps screaming 'Look at me, I am the thing, and I only, the thing that will keep you in relation with me all the time without your having to attend one minute of the time'.<sup>27</sup>

Not only then, is the challenge an external one but it is also internal, corroding the individual's capacity to respond to the finest art.

In The Bostonians James sought to realise on a large

24. See British Economic History 1870-1914, pp. 316-317.

25. See The Making of Modern English Society from 1850, p.50, for a discussion of this topic.

26. See William Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society (1960), pp. 107-115, for an analysis of the mass society in these terms.

27. The Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock(1920), p.416.

scale his understanding of the mass type of society. The world of the novel is one of causes that appeal to vast numbers, of campaigns that aim to rouse public opinion, of newspapers and personalities. Pardon is its epitome:

All things with him referred themselves to print, and print meant simply infinite reporting, a promptitude of announcement, abusive when necessary, or even when not, about his fellow citizens...He regarded the mission of man upon earth as a perpetual evolution of telegrams; everything to him was much the same, he had no proportion or quality; but the newest thing was what came nearest to exciting in his mind the sentiment of respect.(1,16)28.

Or there is Tarrant, with his spiritualism, who strikingly resembles Chaffery in Love and Mr. Lewisham. At the centre of the book there is Verena. To see her simply as a victim is to simplify, for her innocence, the quality of indefiniteness she seems most of all to embody, is partly a reflection of the context she inhabits:

No, she was only supremely innocent: she didn't understand, she didn't interpret nor see the portée of what she described; she had no idea whatever of judging her parents. (1,14)

It is precisely this incapacity to judge, this amoral absence of discrimination, which is fundamental to the mass society. Thus Olive's use of the girl is an acknowledgement of her particular identification with that society:

She had already quite recognised however, that it was not of importance that Verena should be just like himself; she was all of one piece, and Verena was of many pieces, which had, where they fitted together little capricious chinks, through which little mocking inner lights seemed to gleam. (1,18)

The unformed nature of Verena's self, its vacuous vulnerability to external pressures, suggests a characteristic personality type - receptive, indiscriminate and open to manipulation. Only love can save her.

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28. Henry James, The Bostonians (1886). All references are to this edition.

A comparison of James's presentation of the opposition to the newspaper world with that of Wells' and Gissing in Tono-Bungay and In the Year of Jubilee is interesting. Ransome can be criticised<sup>but</sup> in the largeness of his interests and capacities, in the stylish elegance of his presence, in his backward-looking attachment to an age and region in decline, he seems a Yeatsian hero;<sup>29</sup> it is appropriate that he admires Carlyle:

He was a great admirer of Thomas Carlyle, and was very suspicious of the encroachments of modern democracy. I know not exactly how these queer heresies had planted themselves, but he had a longish pedigree (it had flowered at one time with English royalists and cavaliers), and he seemed at moments to be inhabited by some transmitted spirit of a robust but narrow ancestor, some broad-faced wig-wearer or sword bearer with a more primitive conception of manhood than our modern temperament appears to require, and a programme of human felicity much less varied. He liked his pedigree, he revered his forefathers, and he rather pitied those that might come after him. (ii, 21).

There is irony here but it is an irony that works through assuming a reader who is critical of the hero and subjecting that criticism to irony. It is thus a double-edged and complex response that is demanded, which recognises a certain stiff, limiting datedness about the character but which also acknowledges the validity of his opinion in the social context that exists. On Ransome's part, there is no bending, no assumption of tolerant open-mindedness. The rigour of the stance suggests the firmness of James's opposition to the mass society. George Ponderevo shares Ransome's role of critical spectator and has a similar earnestness. His allegiance to the values associated with research parallels the other's austere conservatism; the emphasis in both characterisations

29. See Lionel Trilling, The Opposing Self (1950), pp. 104-117.

is upon personal disinterestedness. Whereas, . . . Basil can stand apart, George has to become involved, attempting to explore the possibilities that mass culture might contain. Tarrant's stance in In the Year of the Jubilee is distant from the life of the Barambys and Crewes but it is a far less secure one than that of James's hero. He lacks a profession, his family's money comes from the manufacture of goods he despises and the only social group he can be said to represent is that of an informal club of pretentious young men; it is a rather dilettan<sup>t</sup>ish irresponsibility that is the dominant impression.

Writers then responded to the challenge of mass society to traditional sources of value in significantly different ways. Of the major novelists of the period James and Gissing were most profoundly concerned by the implications of the developments that were taking place, because without a sustaining social milieu, such as Forster had in Cambridge, without a sympathetic interest in popular taste such as Wells, without Lawrence's antagonism to established interests but with a passionate involvement in the fate of art in a democracy, they were most exposed to the impingement of those developments; they felt them as a threat to literature itself.<sup>30</sup>

Culture in the period 1880-1914 was then subjected to four main kinds of strain - that arising from the increased sensitivity of many to poverty, that from the growing hostility between the classes at this time, that from the consequences of the expansion of education and that from the altering

30. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in Illuminations, 2nd.ed (1973), pp. 219-253.

economic and cultural texture of the age. Novelists, as intellectuals would clearly be very sensitive to these tendencies, for they are necessarily committed to the task of transmitting cultural values. Difficulties were intensified by certain factors that were making for their relative insecurity. There was the appearance of inexpensive one-volume novels which subjected the writer to a greater degree than previously to the commercial market; the royalty system of payment which in some ways benefited him, increased uncertainty; more fundamentally the increasing fragmentation of culture which Bradbury has emphasised meant that literature found it harder to direct itself to a fairly wide audience whilst maintaining high standards.<sup>31</sup> The choice began to be between a small minority and the mass. A book such as Besant's The Pen and the Book, with its advice to young authors on exploiting the market, is a revealing product of the period. The business of culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century thus becomes more problematical. Such movements as Aestheticism, Naturalism and Symbolism can be regarded as responses to the deepening uncertainty of writers in their role; the effort was to find a new reality for art, one that would justify it in the midst of the growing marginality in the artist's position and his increasing responsiveness to the complexities of the relationship between the aesthetic and the real.

#### Writers and their sense of class

The political and social changes that occurred in the latter part of the nineteenth century not only altered

31. Malcolm Bradbury, The Social Context of Modern English Literature (1971), p. 47 and pp. 202-210.

novelists' understanding of culture but also considerably influenced their understanding of class. Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens, Disraeli and Kingsley and their readers had shared a certain conviction as to the central place of fiction in the on-going debate about the nature and direction of social development.<sup>32</sup> It could be turned to for solutions, for ways of re-awakening the significances that had been destroyed by economic advance. The author, as it were, was in a position to mediate between conflicting forces within his society in an honest and relatively persuasive manner. This, in the latter part of the century, was increasingly difficult, for by now democracy was in the process of being established and working-class radicalism was felt not so much as a form of protest but as the expression of an embedded separation between the classes. Issues were becoming set and the pressure to take sides was becoming more acute. The novel could no longer, for the most part, have an urgently dynamic role in historical development, enacting vital dilemmas and tensions.

Perhaps Gissing offers the best example of the writer's growing loss of centrality. Occupied by the major political

32. See The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, eds. J.A.V. Chapple and A. Pollard (1966), p.54, p.55, p.58, p.69 for her anxieties about the publication of Mary Barton and her reply to criticism that the truth could only be of value; Edinburgh Review, LXXXIX (1849), 404 for a review of the novel which claimed it might prove "mischevious in the extreme"; Sheila.M. Smith, ed., Mr. Disraeli's Readers, Nottingham (1966), p.21, p.34, p.38 for Disraeli's readers' praise of Sybil for the good it would do; Blackwoods, LXVIII (1850), 596-597 for the questioning by a reviewer of Alton Locke of literature's persuasive power.

and social problems of the time, he can in no way command the attention of society in the manner of Mrs. Gaskell or Kingsley. Coustillas and Partridge write of his attitude to his public: "He ultimately saw himself as a novelist with a small but tenaciously faithful public, regarded by publishers with a mixture of respect and contempt but supported by a minority of unknown reviewers emotionally devoted to his cause".<sup>33</sup> And he himself, said of Workers in the Dawn: "There is much of desperate seriousness in it and must be accepted by a handful..."<sup>34</sup> This kind of diminished claim for fiction can be sensed in the actual novels. Thus, although Adela in Demos, undergoes a similar experience to Margaret in North and South, in her introduction to the harsh world of industrialism, there is no possibility of her learning to make adjustment between competing claims, no possibility of a middle-way; the struggle of Eldon and Mutimer must end in the victory of the one and the defeat of the other. The decline in the belief in compromise can also be felt by a comparison of Alton Locke with Workers in the Dawn or The Princess Casamassima; the hero of Kingsley's novel is enabled to free himself from the conflicts that beset him through understanding, whereas Golding and Hyacinth can only imitate the contradictions and tensions that surround them in their society. The passivity of these latter heroes can be felt especially in their attitude as artists to the life of the poor. Whereas Sandy MacKaye tells his protégé to look there for types of human courage and suffering to use as material for art, they are either

33. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge, eds., George Gissing: The Critical Heritage (1972), p.3.

34. Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, eds. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (1927), p.59.



instructed to adopt a Naturalistic objectivity to poverty or feel no desire to deal with it in their art.

Clearly developments of this sort must alter *how* writers present the reality of working-class life in their fiction. The popularity of Naturalism in the late nineteenth century is surely connected with the way in which they felt that matters had already been decided, that the task was merely to record. Certainly Mrs. Gaskell and Kingsley had written from outside proletarian life but now writers began to do so more self-consciously. The whole question of the author's relationship to that life is thus put outside the bounds of the actual fiction. However, for some writers such as Gissing, Hardy, Wells and Lawrence, seeking in their work to come to terms with their own past, this strategy was not totally available, although its appeal can be felt in some of the former's writing. As novelists, possessed of a language which to a considerable degree was that of the educated and prosperous, they faced the problem of realising working-class experience as fully and sensitively as possible without seeming alienated from it. (The problem is still with us). Alan Sillitoe raises the matter explicitly in a short story, "The Fishing Boat Picture" through his first person narrator:

I've been a post-man for twenty-eight years. Take that first sentence: because its written in a simple way may make the fact of my having been a postman for so long seem important, but realise that such a fact has no significance whatever. After all it is not my fault that it may seem as it has to some people just because I wrote it down plain; I wouldn't know how to do it any other way. 35

35. Alan Sillitoe, "The Fishing Boat Picture" in The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1959), p.79.

Only Lawrence, according to Hoggart<sup>36</sup> and Green,<sup>37</sup> succeeded in achieving sufficient poise in his writing to realise and judge the total complexity of working people's existence.<sup>38</sup> Although his achievement is a major one, it is not completely unique. The opening of Edwin Pugh's The Man of Straw illustrates the capacity of other novelists in this respect:

The busy street throbbed and hummed with strenuous life. The Unhappy Penury in insufficient rags jostled unhappier penury in faded broadcloth and musty bombazine on the narrow way. Gutter vendors of pinchbeck trifles, that could never be of use to mortal man, chattered seductively with such poor wives and mothers as could be brought to tear themselves between vases or a chromolithograph for the parlour and boots for their small-yearred offspring. Hapless women, these! Most of them hard put to it to stretch a scanty store of toil-worn house money over a multiple of too pressing needs, yet retaining still, in the depths of their nature, a sediment, a few poor grains of puny, feminine aestheticism. (1) 39

In this scene both the vitality and poverty are conveyed. The woman is forced to choose between cheap and shoddy goods, yet the activity of choice is positive, revealing the desire and ability to discriminate. The narrator is clearly distanced from the scene - the rather self-conscious literariness of the language suggests this - but the distance is one that doesn't flatten, doesn't reduce the landscape to a single monotonous plane but allows the emergence of strong contrasts and emphases. The balance of Pugh's stance is reflected in A Street in Suburbia. In one of the stories there - "The First and Last Meeting of the S.H.D.S" - the narrator is asked to speak at a meeting of the local working-men's debating club. He is acknowledged

36. Richard Hoggart, Speaking to Each Other, 2nd.ed.(1973), ii, 185.

37. Martin Green, A Mirror for Anglo-Saxons (1961), p.71.

38. See Brian Jackson, Working-Class Community, 2nd.ed. (1972), pp. 16-18.

39. Edwin Pugh, The Man of the Straw (1896);

by the men to be superior and feels significantly apart from them, yet the sense of community includes him; he both belongs and doesn't belong. In the light of Pugh's relative success as a novelist of the working-class it is interesting to note that he himself came from a proletarian background and that his experience is that of a self-made man, who in his fiction, carries over a powerful awareness of the meaning of class. His identification with Dickens, his discovery in his predecessor of his own concerns and experiences, indicates the particular nature of his social imagination.<sup>40</sup>

Pugh's achievement in this period is not a common one. Often either a sentimental pathos, as in W.P. Dawson's or Leslie Keith's work or an instinctive distancing, prevails. The quality of the latter process, as it is expressed in James's fiction, is indicated by a quotation from Whiteing's No.5 John Street. A scene is viewed from a hotel window:

The toil and moil are just in the right place to heighten, by contrast, the sense of peace. Seen from this distance, the curious fusion is but bitter gray in the picture. The roar of traffic, reduced to a murmur, is positively soothing. The busman's blasphemy, the Cockney vowel cannot travel so far; no fumes of manufacture reaches us from the picturesquely grimy Surrey side. All is movement without shock, an effect with no coarsely dominating note. 41

The tendencies reflected here are felt in the following passage:

The night was muggy, the window was open and she was held there by a horrible fascination. Dusky forms of vice and wretchedness moved about in the stuffy darkness, visions of grimy, half-naked, whining beggary hovered

40. See Edwin Pugh, Charles Dickens (1908).

41. Richard Whiteing, No.5 John Street (1902), p. 148.

before her, curses and the sound of blows came to her ears...<sup>42</sup>

for its main concern is to produce an effect rather than to see clearly and honestly. Although there is nothing as extreme as this in The Princess Casamassima, there is little intimate sense conveyed by the book of the social reality *that makes* for Anarchism.

That James admired Wells and especially Kipps to such an extent is perhaps significant in this context. Both novelists have a tendency to treat their heroes as children, worthy but immature. The former gives to Hyacinth, however, a finely sensitive consciousness, whereas Kipps is far more limited in intelligence. A certain tone of patronage, mixed occasionally with contempt, distinguishes Wells's response to the lower-class. It issues in the later sociological works in the resort to the idea of the mass, which offers a way of grouping individuals together for effective dismissal. Those who don't form an élite are condemned to the abyss; the Frapps in Tono-Bungay provide an opportunity for some fine satire but only because they are denied the possibility of a genuine humanity.

The increased opportunity for education and social mobility that occurred in the period 1880-1914, influenced many novelists' understanding of working-class life. A central tendency of the fiction of these years is its focusing upon the proletarian figure, separated *through* varying causes and to varying extents, from his original

<sup>42</sup>. Henry James, "The Modern Warning", The Complete Tales of Henry James, ed. Leon Edel, vol. 7, p. 54.

social world. The exceptional working man had been common to nineteenth century fiction. Figures such as Adam Bede, Felix Holt and Alton Locke make positive and heroic impressions, reflecting the belief of the Victorian age in the value of self-help. According to Harrison the notion had originally represented a genuine attempt on the part of the lower-classes to grasp some of the benefits society denied them, but it had narrowed down in the last part of the century to vocational ambition<sup>43</sup>. Inevitably, once the State took over responsibility for schooling, self-improvement was felt more as part of the established order and far less as a possible challenge to the status-quo. Plainly, education still provided for many a means through which they could develop a radical approach to their society but it also now represented an acceptance of that society, a willingness to conform to established patterns of behaviour and fulfilment. Kingsley's or George Eliot's protagonists give way to Kipps, Hoopdriver, Brail and Mutimer - characters limited by their nice helplessness, their intense suffering or their crude self-interest. What occupies later novelists then, is not the individual set totally apart by attitude or quality and whose strength is an element<sup>of</sup> that apartness but the individual in partial friction with his world. They judged the experience of separation in different ways. One obvious indication of their position is provided by their response to the educational developments of the time. Many felt anxious. Lawrence was very conscious, for example, that learning would mean for the ordinary working man merely

43. Learning and Living 1790-1960, pp. 54-55.

an intensification in his discontent<sup>44</sup> and both Wells, in the characterisation of Miss Heydinger in Love and Mr. Lewisham and Gissing, in the characterisation of Jessica in In the Year of the Jubilee point to its potentially sterilising influence upon the personality. The pathos is deepened in the case of figures like Grail and Kingcoate, in whom the desire for learning is genuine and disinterested. Hardy's Jude meets exclusion; James's Hyacinth meets illusion;<sup>Lewisham</sup> and Ursula are forced to go it alone, but Gissing's protagonists experience the real thing only to have it abruptly removed from them; the pain is acuter and sharper in outline.

Closely related to the experience of separation through education is that undergone as a result of social mobility.<sup>45</sup> Clearly, for certain novelists the subject would have a crucial relevance, compelling them to confront their own past histories directly. Bennett was able to view the process of advancement as a fairly simple release from limitation as The Card makes clear, but for Lawrence, sympathising with the Brangwens' aspirations and yet registering William's fate in Sons and Lovers, for Wells, immensely successful himself but imaginatively drawn to the reality of failure in his work, for Hardy, realising in his novels the losses faced by Ethelberta, Henchard and Grace in their social progress and for Gissing, preoccupied in Born in Exile with the psychological implications of altering class, matters were far more complex. It is this complexity

44. See D.H. Lawrence, "M̄en M̄ust W̄ork and Women as Well", Phoenix 11 (1968), eds. Robert Warren and H.T. Moore, pp. 586-587. (Note 5, p. 354 below)

45. See Middleton Murry, Between Two Worlds (1935), pp. 45-47, for a profoundly sensitive record of what social mobility could mean for the individual, and H.G. Wells, Experiment in Autobiography (1934), i, 411-414, for an emphasis upon its damaging effects upon the personal life of the individual.

which, in part, differentiates these authors' fiction from that of minor writers such as Adcock, who in a story in East End Idylls, 'A Prodigal Father,' acknowledges the urgent need of the young hero to break away from his drunken parent in order to realise his own nature, but doesn't deal with the consequences that follow realistically, ending the tale in a comic resolution. Through such a strategy the complicated tensions set up by ambition and success are evaded.

A further form of evasion frequently found in the writing of the time dealing with the experience of separation lies in its tendency to indulge in a Dickensian sentimentality. An example is Leslie Keith's Nobody's Lad, in which a delicate orphan is made unhappy by the roughness of his environment. A self-indulgent insipidity marks the book. Through reference to such a novel the relative achievement of Edwin Pugh can be grasped. He seems far more clear-sighted and precise in his comprehension of the individual separated by temperament. On the one hand he emphasises his hero's resilience in Tony Drum and on the other he penetrates ruthlessly the situation of the artistically inclined working-class individual in 'The Story of Henry Cummers' in A Street in Suburbia. Through the narrator's close observation of Cummers in the detail of his life, in his perception that the youth's literary work is worthless, in his stress upon his weak dependence upon his mother, Pugh registers an unrelieved pathos that enables no sentimental consolation. Of the major writers of the period, Gissing is closest to Pugh in his characterisation

of the artistic sensibility apart, for they share an emphasis upon the pathetic. In contrast Paul Morel finds strength in his separation, Wells's Chitterlow, Ewart and Polly share an irresponsible, almost anarchic personality and James's Hyacinth is possessed of a fine responsiveness that is a direct function of his fragility.

Clearly novelists dealing with separation through education, ambition and sensitivity were forced to deal with the internal implications they involved. There is centrally the experience of frustration. In dealing with the theme a new note enters the fiction of the time. Through her heroine, Olive Birrell comments on a clerk who has to stand by whilst the girl he loves is taken from him by an upper-class gentleman: "He has such a love of beautiful things, though he has always lived in ugliness. Doesn't it seem wrong that anyone with a nature like his should be forced to go round and round in the same dreary monotonous circle?" (27)<sup>30</sup>

The idea of imprisonment connects with Wells but here it is essentially an internal matter. There is no simple way out; rebellion would be irrelevant to the predicament. As in Thyrza, what is crucial is the genuine possibilities that seemed available and their elimination through the reality of class. Yet the frustration of Grail implies more than that of Hudson, for what is at stake in the former case is not simply the happiness of the single individual but because of his association with culture, a whole body of values.

Separation of the lower-class individual can also mean

46. Olive Birrell, Love in a Mist (1900).



the experience of rootlessness. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth the issue was not simply a personal one; there were political implications. Morris was anxious that the socialist movement should be led by capable men from the working-class<sup>47</sup> and Chamberlain focused upon the matter in the following passage:

A very serious problem, therefore, to be solved, is, how these working men can thus be politicians of the most extended influence, requiring great knowledge of affairs and men, and yet compete as working men with the working class throughout the world. <sup>48</sup>

The problem was to educate a class rather than a few individuals out of it. Thus in the 1900s there occurred the formation of the Plebs League in Oxford as a result of the feeling that established working-class educational channels were too bourgeois. Consequently Wells's comprehension of the subject, which prevented him from imaginatively recreating successful proletarian achievement without it implying almost total submission to the class above it suggests he had little faith in the idea that radicalism could or should find its leaders among the lower orders. For Lawrence the experience of rootlessness was felt fundamentally in historical terms. Cyril, Paul and Ursula are caught between the tensions of two changing worlds. The possible losses involved in having to choose one rather than another are touched upon by William Pett-Ridge in such novels as Maud Em'ly and A Son of the State and explored in greater depth by Hardy. In Hardy's fiction the protagonists are often haunted, as it were, by their roots;

47. See Letters of William Morris, ed. Philip Henderson (1950), p. 152 and p.181 and Paul Thompson, The Work of William Morris (1971), p.199.

48. Joseph Chamberlain, "The Elevation of the Working-Class", Quarterly Review 172 (1891) p.223.

Arabella returns from Australia and Christopher and Giles continue to exert a powerful influence over their respective partners.

In Gissing's work this is less common, for the escape from class is a virtual impossibility. In Workers in the Dawn, Isabel Clarendon, A Life's Morning, The Nether World and Born in Exile the attempt of characters to enter a new social environment is ultimately frustrated. The heroes of these novels find themselves in a limbo area, unable to go upwards or downwards. The novelist sees through the implications of his perception and avoids the kind of evasion that distinguishes Blatchford's Julie, in which the heroine is released from her condition by a convenient naval officer or M.A. Curtois's Athlos, in which Johnnie is enabled to declare his loyalty to his original background by his marriage to the working-girl, Kate. When evasiveness doesn't figure, the pressures involved in moving class can assume an extreme intensity. Thus in H.M. Boulton's Josephine Crewe the main character's choice between the squire's son and the youth who is closest to the reality of her past life, finds torturous and almost melodramatic expression.

Very closely related to rootlessness is the theme of return. In Return of the Native there is the following important passage:

In passing from the bucolic to the intellectual life the intermediate stages are usually two at least, frequently many more; and one of these stages is almost sure to be worldly advance. We can hardly imagine bucolic placidity quickening to intellectual aims without imagining social aims as the transitional

phase. Yeobright's local peculiarity was that in striving at high thinking he still cleaved to plain living.<sup>(11,2) 49</sup>

These intermediate stages are lacking in the case of the artist. For the self-made man, whose rise is based on the wealth he accumulates, the world of his background seems at a greater distance than it does for the intellectual or author, who is set apart more by his education, by something internal rather than by something solidly external. The latter is compelled to work out a kind of relationship to his early environment, for that environment is part of the experience and knowledge that constitutes his separation from it.

Gissing treats the theme of return. There is, for example, Ida in The Unclassed, who needs for reasons of her own identity, to engage in philanthropic work or there is Emily in A Life's Morning, who finds that the pressures of her home force her to live out the tensions it is composed of instead of embracing the alternative life offered by Wilfred. Similarly both Mutimer and Kingcoate are compelled to go back to their lower class world by circumstances. In two short stories "A Daughter of the Lodge"<sup>50</sup> and "The Firebrand"<sup>51</sup> the writer deals with the actual process of going back and the immense difficulties involved. For May it means having to accept the class servility of her parents and for Andrew it means abandoning his radical ideas. These characters are criticised quite severely but nevertheless

49. Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (1878).ii, (2).  
50. George Gissing, "A Daughter of the Lodge", in The House of Cobwebs (1906) pp.175-191.  
51. George Gissing, "The Firebrand", in Human Odds and Ends (1911) pp.38-55.

the limitations they have to undergo remain significant.

Hardy, in Return of the Native, tackles the subject with a comparable understanding. Clym, in returning to Egdon to set up a school, finds that the intellectual detachment that this implies from the community, is impossible. Gradually he is reduced to a common labourer. Yet this decline occurs whilst he is married to the socially ambitious Eustacia, under whose influence his original idealistic plans are modified into something more self-interested, for he decides that his school will be for the sons of farmers rather than for the sons of peasants. Return for Clym, the intellectual, means succumbing to the power of his background both to erode educational aspiration and to stimulate material aspiration. The background is not flat then, but itself made up of tensions which the individual in going back has to experience within his own self.

If Gissing and Hardy stress the losses involved in going back, Lawrence recognises the possibilities of creative growth. In his essay "Return to Bestwood"<sup>52</sup> the journey home enables him to subtly penetrate the reality of class in that society, and in "A Shade of Spring"<sup>53</sup> return frees Syson from the illusions he was suffering under. It is interesting that in this emphasis upon the positive Lawrence resembles Bennett, of whom he was severely critical, for as A Man from the North demonstrates, contact with an original

52. D.H.Lawrence, "Return to Bestwood", Phoenix 11, pp.257-266.

53. D.H.Lawrence, "Shades of Spring" in The Prussian Officer (1914), pp. 153-173.

environment can quicken self-knowledge and activity.

The theme of return expresses to an extent novelists' understanding of their own experience as mobile intellectuals. For Lawrence the confrontation with his origins was potentially creative, enabling new and clearer insights to emerge, whereas for Gissing the world of the lower-class both drew the individual and rejected him, demanded acknowledgement and refused it. His fiction itself, as a whole, parallels this uneasy stance, for it can be seen as a working out of a relationship to that world, tacking between the need for exposure to it and the need to resist it.

Not only through imagining forms of return but also through exploring forms of commitment, do novelists seek to deal with their relationship to the lower-class. One prominent source of interest, for the prosperous and influential, in this area of society, is the hope that there could be found alternative values to the materialism of their own class. However, the idealism could prove shallow. Gladstone, for example, who had placed an intense faith in the possibilities of democracy, towards the end of his career:

.....was haunted increasingly by the fear that the masses might in the end prove to be just as corrupt and irresponsible as the classes which, in his view, had succumbed long ago to the temptations of wealth and power. 54

Stone sums the matter up when he says:

.....it came as a shock to many reformers of the period to discover that the working-classes were not immune to the solid conservatism, egoism and materialism of the other classes. 55

Surely the deepness and bitterness of Gissing's pessimism about the working-class originates from some notion that

54. Quoted by Philip Magnus, Gladstone (1954), pp.322-323.

55. Donald David Stone, Novelists in a Changing World, Cambridge, (Mass) (1972), p.13.

he would find there certain positives; both his first marriage and Workers in the Dawn are evidence of this.

Whilst some suffered disillusionment, others were profoundly anxious about the possibility of rebellion. It is interesting, in this context, to note that neither James, Forster, ~~nor~~ Gissing suggest that their upper-class characters' concern with the lower orders had any connection with this kind of anxiety. In Thyrza, an abstract philanthropy, in The Princess Casamassima a romantic rebelliousness and in Howards End an almost theoretical sense of justice prompts the protagonists to action. There was no willingness, then, to imagine that the impulse to help the poor had its roots in the self-interested defensiveness of a class that felt its position under threat. Wells, in Kipps, comes closest to it, for the Walsingham's' concern with the hero is almost totally selfish but the book doesn't translate the economic differences between them into political terms.

There was, it is true, genuine human concern with the condition of the proletariat. Writers, however, differed in their faith in the value of reformist solutions to the problems posed by poverty. For James the whole idea of a sincere and meaningful effort to improve conditions lacked substance. In 1914 he wrote:

Infamous seems to me in such a light all the active great ones of the earth, active for evil, in our time (to speak only of that) from the monstrous Bismarck down! But il s'agit bien to protest in the face of such a world - one can only possess one's soul in such dignity as may be precariously achievable. 56

or there is the following:

With it all too is indeed the terrible sense that the

56. The Letters of Henry James, ii, 390.

people of this country may well -- by some awful brutal justice -- be going to get something bad for the exhibition that has gone on so long of their huge materialised stupidity and vulgarity. I mean the enormous national sacrifice to insensate amusement; without a redeeming idea or a generous passion, that has kept making one ask oneself, from so far back, how such grossness and folly and blatancy could possibly not be in the long run to be paid for. 57

The extremity of this, the way that James's imagination dwells not on what can be done but on an apoc<sup>h</sup>lyptical sense of what will happen, suggests that he had an almost metaphysical comprehension of social issues, that worked against an ideological reforming liberalism.

In contrast, in Thyrza and Howards End that ideology is very central, for Egremont and the Schlegel sisters possess at the beginning of their respective books, a sincere and active idealism. In both cases it goes wrong but betrayal doesn't issue as it does in The Princess Casamassima from the absence of all principles that would prevent it.

Writers' treatment of the development of upper-class sympathisers with the poor also make clear their particular ideological stances. A common pattern centres on a character's movement from a position of relative radical extremism to a position of moderation. There is, for example, Joseph Hocking's The Madness of David Baring which traces the main protagonist's growth through a period of anarchism to a recognition of the need to help reform society by individual charity, or there is William Barry's The New Antigone which presents the movement of hero and heroine from conventional revolutionaries to reformists. Most significantly, however, 57. The Letters of Henry James, (1920), ii, 390-391.

because of her immense reputation, there is Mrs. Ward's Marcella. Here a liberal ethic dominates, one which unlike that of Forster or of Gissing is still confident. The novel's range and complexity of plot, the way the development of the heroine parallels the progress of the reader's knowledge, so that we are always in sympathy with her rather than judging, indicates the concern of the writer to shape the reader's attitude by enabling him to participate vicariously in the heroine's experience. Both are altered by living through the world of the book and that process implies a rejection of radical politics. A conventional novel form thus becomes allied to a particular ideological perspective.

Besides offering a focus for the philanthropic impulse, the working-class could also provide a more personal source of interest for individuals. To those alienated from their middle-class milieu, for various reasons, it might represent an alternative home. Gissing is central in this respect. One fictional portrait of the writer by Morley Roberts in Maurice Quain represents him as being torn between the physical life of labour and the intellectual and spiritual life. This makes him out to be another Jude Fawley, whereas there is little evidence to suggest that manual labour had much appeal for Gissing. Nevertheless, it is true to say, that the proletarian world held a deep fascination for him, a fascination he was constantly struggling against. The clue is perhaps that moment of security and warmth Egremont finds in Grail's house or the relaxation of mental and emotional



excitement which Kingcoate experiences in the home of his sister. In the reality of lower-class life, as Thyrza testifies, the novelist saw glimpses of a potential community which could release him from his alienated state. Gissing, however, was too knowledgable about himself to believe too deeply in those glimpses. Others were more impressionable, and faced considerable problems.<sup>58</sup>

Novelists, under pressure of the political and social developments of the time, showed themselves highly sensitive both to these problems and to those connected with the experiences of separation, frustration, rootlessness and return. Gissing shared with certain major writers an awareness of the complexity of the issues at stake and a willingness to reject easy solutions, but more than any of them, in his comprehension of the deep and bitter pathos of the individual imprisoned in the gap between expectation and fulfilment, he captured the localised intensity of feeling found in such writers as Pugh and Birrell. The characteristic Gissing protagonist is situated in a social no-man's land - unable to advance because of internal and external factors and having nothing to gain from going back, yet being forced to inhabit a fictional world that still holds out alternative possibilities. Such a description of the novelist's distinctive sense of class can only emerge through specific comparison with his contemporaries. Both for him and them a very significant element of that sense is a close realisation of the internal implications of individual's social experience.

58. See Edward Carpenter, My Days and Dreams (1916), p.170; Thomas Gautrey, "Lux Mihi Laus": School Board Memories (1937), p.11; Basil Henriques, Fratres (1951), p.xv. (Note 6, p.355 below).

With the reality of democracy pressing, simple hostilities and sympathies have to be abandoned and the psychological and ideological consequences lived with. Solutions, evasions, and easy polarisations become less available for intelligent use. The significant emphasis centres upon the complex and subtle ways in which historical reality implicates the self at the deepest levels. A novelist such as Wells, who deals with the relationship of class and culture, is not concerned with providing answers and compromises as certain of his Victorian predecessors or his contemporaries still working contentedly within their legacy, but with examining and testing art, education and culture in the context of his knowledge of the social world. As the next chapter demonstrates, such a procedure could yield profoundly pessimistic results, putting into question the value of the effort itself.

## CHAPTER 2

### H.G.WELLS

The recent attempt to evolve a serious approach to the work of Wells, although worthwhile, faces certain difficulties, for his achievement raises the whole question of the status of literary art. Straddling as he does the frontier between high and low-brow art, between realism and romance, between fiction and journalism his work constantly refuses the settled response. Suddenly, out of context, there is the superb death scene of Mr. Waddy in The Wealth of Mr. Waddy or as in Mr. Polly and In the Days of the Comet, the creation of a totally new aesthetic world, or as in the quapp episode of Tono-Bungay the emergence into prominence of a complex symbolism.

#### Wells and Class

In connection with this unevenness it is interesting to note that in his early reception he was regarded both as a writer for the newly educated masses and as a serious novelist deserving attention by the quality papers. Matters were in addition complicated by his class. It is not that there is a general hostility to him on the part of the critical establishment but that rather, occasionally, there emerges a note which implies a strong consciousness of his social

position.<sup>1</sup> Wells in achieving literary fame then, was doing more than becoming a writer of popularity and quality; he was encountering in one form the realities of his society. To live by writing was to be compelled to see himself and the task of the writer in a particular way and to be placed into a particular kind of encounter with his background. The rôle of author could not be taken for granted. He writes in his autobiography, of himself and Bennett:

We were both about of an age; to be exact he was six months younger than I; we were both hard workers, both pushing up by way of writing from lower middle-class surroundings, where we had little prospect of anything but a restricted salaried life, and we found we were pushing with quite surprising ease...<sup>2</sup>

The association of writing with 'getting on', means he places great emphasis upon the financial rewards of the career.

His early years as an author are a search for material that would sell.

Obviously, however, an earnestness and concentrated energy exists in Wells's work which would suggest that he did not see his literary activity simply in terms of the sales and status it would bring him. The problem is that really he had no alternative conception. His uncertainties can be seen in Boon and the hero's radical doubts of literature's importance.<sup>3</sup> These doubts about the status of literary art are also Wells's. F.J.Hoffman considers the central problem to be an indecisiveness about whether he preferred to educate or thrill his readers<sup>4</sup> but the matter goes deeper than that,

1. See Patrick Parrinder, ed., H.G.Wells: The Critical Heritage (1972), p.67 and p.89; and pp.100-1 for a positive response to Wells's background by a French critic (Note 7, p.356 below)

2. H.G.Wells, Experiment in Autobiography (1934), ii, 627.

3. See H.G.Wells, Boon (1915), p.168 and p.171.

4. F.J. Hoffman, 'Howards End' and the Bogey of Progress, Modern Fiction Studies 7 (Autumn 1961), 245.

having to do with the difficulty Wells had in shaping out of his personal experience of being an author an idea of the writer which would make him more than a mere tradesman in words. His solution is to give him a public role, to turn himself into a kind of politician of the novel and his work into an ideological forum. He is forced to widen the scope of fiction in order to find an identity for himself as an author - an identity that can keep him in contact with a large public upon whom he is imaginatively dependent and can give his work a serious significance.

Prior, however, to this resolution of his difficulties the tensions created by his uncertain concept of his role go very deep. An aspect of this involves his attitude to class. In Anticipations he writes:

Under the really very horrible morality of today, the spectacle of a mean-spirited, under-sized, diseased little man, quite incapable of earning a decent living even for himself, married to some underfed, ignorant, ill-shaped, plain and diseased little woman, and guilty of the lives of ten or twelve ugly alien children, is regarded as an extremely edifying spectacle, and the two parents consider their reproductive excesses as giving them a distinct claim upon more prosperous people.<sup>5</sup>

The response here to the urban poor suggests a genuine concern with the triviality and narrowness of their life, with the cultural vacuum it represents and a fastidious distaste for the sordid ugliness of its surface. Such infusion of socio-moral and aesthetic reactions makes for the characteristic Wellsian tone. In In the Days of the Comet it produces a quality of nightmarish distortion:

The horrible meanness of its details was veiled, the hutches that were homes, the bristling multitude of chimneys, the ugly patches of unwilling vegetables amidst the makeshift fences of barrel-stove and wire.<sup>6</sup>

5. H.G. Wells, Anticipations (1901), pp. 306-307.

6. H.G. Wells, In the Days of the Comet (1906).

The sustained intensity of this suggests comparison with Lawrence. Distinctive of both writers is the way that the power of the prose and the content work against each other, the one making for the reader's involvement, the other for his distance. Both novelists, having come from the lower ranks of society and not being able to identify with the ideal of the gentleman, when dealing with the proletariat declare in their language both their connections and their separation from their origins.

Similarly they are not content to accept the intellectual milieu in which it would seem appropriate they should fit. Lawrence after the association with Russell and his circle broke away into total exile and Wells profoundly alienated the Webbs and Shaw. He strongly favoured an intellectual élite but towards contemporary versions he was often acidly hostile; there are the satirical portraits of <sup>the</sup> Baileys in The Machiavelli and the Groopes in Ann Veronica.

Wells, having emerged from the disordered muddle of his background and having gained an education that enabled him to achieve a perspective upon that background, felt that he was uniquely capable of giving a lead to others. His works are constantly probing and analysing contemporary experience and constantly seeking ways to radically change the social circumstances of people's lives. They exist, as it were, in that area between his rejection of the typical and ordinary and of the established alternatives that seem to offer opposition to it. Characteristic of the pattern of much of his fiction

is thus the release of frustration into fantasy—through the fire in Mr. Polly, the fortune in Kipps, the comet in In the Days of the Comet or in the short story, "The Purple Pileus", the plant. Wells's art had both to describe reality and offer ways of overcoming its limitations.

However, in the relatively early Love and Mr. Lewisham, the resolution of the work comes, unlike in Mr. Polly, through fairly ordinary means. Although Wells sought to change the actual he was very well aware of the difficulties involved and did not simply use his fiction for escapist ends. A story like the farcically comic "The Purple Pileus" should be set against "The Apple" from the same collection, in which the fantastic implications of the situation are diverted into a realistic context. Wells had a strong commitment to realism.<sup>7</sup>

Love and Mr. Lewisham is Wells's first work to concentrate on the common, everyday experience of the individual, to work out its theme within a fairly narrow range of possibilities. He regarded the book with a good deal of seriousness, stressing the amount of labour he put into its writing; and the opening, in its cultivated down-to-earthness and coy self-conscious cleverness, reflects this.

Not only the amount of work that went into it gives the novel significance. There is also its theme, for it deals, as Hardy's Jude, with the tense and complex relationship of education and class that the social changes of the period produced.<sup>8</sup> Love and Mr. Lewisham is not obviously an external account of the relationship but is shaped profoundly by the personal experience of Wells himself, for in his own life

7. See Arnold Bennett and H.G. Wells: A Record of a Personal and Literary Friendship ed. Harris Wilson, (1960), p.45. (Notes p.357 below)

8. See G.N. Ray, "H.G. Wells Tries to be a Novelist", in Richard Ellman, ed., Edwardians and Late-Victorians, New York (1960), pp.114-115 for Wells's reaction to Jude the Obscure, and Ingvald Raknem, H.G. Wells and His Critics (1961), pp. 303-304 for a claim that Wells was strongly influenced by Hardy.

its reality entered very deeply into his psychological and emotional experience. In their biography, the Mackenzies<sup>9</sup> attempt to analyse this experience.

A central feature would seem to be a conflict between education as an agent of freedom - Wells's emphasis and education as an agent of social and economic advancement, a support to respectability - his mother's emphasis. It is not a simple external dichotomy, for inevitably Wells internalised in part Sarah's point of view. Thus, in his early growth he both escaped authority and conformed to it through the educational experience. As a result of the status his learning gave him, he was able to assume the role of his irresponsible father but the authority he gained here was suddenly undermined when he was forced to leave school in order to enter the drapery trade. Ironically it is his capacity for academic knowledge which has placed him in the uncongenial situation he finds himself in. Awareness of this irony perhaps makes him keen in his demands for what he considers a relevant school curriculum.<sup>10</sup> Recognising the liberating value of education, he is too conscious of the way, in which in actual society, it can prove meaningless for him to be able to accept its worth in an abstract way; it can both give authority to the individual and remove it from him.

#### Love and Mr. Lewisham: Class and Education

This double understanding emerges in Love and Mr. Lewisham, although in actual fact Wells's main emphasis, in

9. Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, The Time Traveller (1973).

10. See Experiment in Autobiography ii, 591 for Wells's hostile attitude to Gissing's classical education and H.G. Wells, The Story of a Great Schoolmaster (1924), pp. 105-107 for evidence of his sympathy with the idea of vocational education. (Note 9, p. 357 below)



his presentation of the world of education in the work, is upon its ~~repressive~~, anti-human aspects. The opening of the novel portrays Mr. Lewisham's subjection to his scholastic ambitions. He studies with the unsure desperation of the stereotype lower-class intellectual. He has neither the pathetic dignity of Gilbert Grail in Thyrza or the strong dignity of Jude; rather he is similar to Jessica, in her nervous anxiety, in In the Year of the Jubilee.

At the school where he teaches, education is again associated with a repressive authority through the characterisation of Mr. Bonover, the headmaster. Observed first, interrupting a conversation between Lewisham and Ethel, he continues to act as a barrier between them.

Later on the connection is with another form of repression in the shape of the class system. The students of the Normal School are described in the following way:

There was a strong representation of new hands, the paying students, youths and young men in black coats and silk hats or tweed suits, the scholar contingent, youngsters of Lewisham's class, raw, shabby, discordant, grotesquely ill-dressed and awestricken; one Lewisham noticed with a sailor's peaked cap gold-braided, and one with mittens and very genteel grey kid gloves...

(8) 11

The details of dress Wells picks out here reveals his sensitivity to the social distinctions of the institution. It is a sensitivity that takes its particular form and penetration from the fact that the context is an educational one, for it is the tension between the equality of merit the college theoretically assumes and the inequality of economic

11. H.G.Wells, Love and Mr. Lewisham (1900). All references are to this edition.

status and poise which in fact exists, that shapes Wells's response.

An interesting insight into this response is provided by "A Slip Under the Microscope,"<sup>12</sup> in which the hero, as a result of being discovered accidentally cheating, finds in education an inhumane machine. At the end Hill is defeated by his imprisonment between his illusions and the reality of the class society that exists.

The awareness of the implications of that defeat can be felt in the slightly later Love and Mr. Lewisham, where, in a more direct way, the novelist faces the social and economic basis of the educational system. In attempting to find a teaching post Lewisham has to confront the snobbishness of the profession:

The precise young man by a motion of his eyes directed the newcomer's attention to Lewisham's waterproof collar, and was answered by raised eyebrows and a faint tightening of the mouth....

"You don't happen to be a public-school boy?" asked the precise young man.

"No" said Lewisham.

"Where were you educated?"

Lewisham's face grew hot. "Does that matter?" he asked with his eyes on the exquisite gray trousering.

"In our sort of school - decidedly. It's a question of tone, you know".(25)

Throughout the whole scene it is the waterproof collar that is the focus of attention, gaining a symbolic implication, summing up Lewisham for his two companions. There is, though, perhaps a certain lack of poise on Wells's part, for the figure of the upper-class teacher who enters the room is merely a comic stereotype and diverts attention away from the possibility of a serious, realistic comprehension of the situation.

12. H.G.Wells, "A Slip Under the Microscope", in The Plattner Story and Others (1897) pp. 274-301.

More interesting is the figure of Parkson. Behind the characterisation can be felt Wells's hostility to the platitudes of conventional liberal education. Slightly superior to his fellow students, Parkson is an example of the way education can corrupt the personality, giving individuals ideas in a vacancy of intelligence. Through Ruskin he finds a language and a justification for his own insipid conventionalities. After his walk with him Lewisham decides to marry Ethel. In reaction against the scholastic world, as it is represented by Parkson, he turns to the character who has been, throughout the work, in opposition to it.

The repressive nature of the world is also felt through the presentation of Miss. Heydinger, who embodies another version of the way education can work against the good of the self. With an intellectual and emotional complexity fostered by her reading, she has little outlet or capacity for expressing her inner life. Her dedicated earnestness of outlook is closely connected with the strong sense of solitude she experiences. Her feelings can only take stale literary form: "How we are wrapped and swathed about - soul from soul! ' she thought, staring out of the window at the dim things flying by outside." (12)

But then Wells comments:

Suddenly a fit of depression came upon her. She felt alone - absolutely alone - in a void world. Presently she returned to external things. She became aware of two people in the next compartment eyeing her critically. Her hand went patting at her hair. (12)

The move from the moment of profound epiphany to her shallow and confining self-consciousness gives to her situation a concrete pathos, which is intensified when she realises she

has lost Lewisham. Sitting in her "sanctum" full of intellectual and aesthetic clutter, she breaks down:

Her face, her pose, softened into self-pity.

Futility...

"It's no good..." Her voice broke.

"I shall never be happy..."

She saw the grandiose vision of the future she had cherished, suddenly rolled aside and vanishing, more and more splendid as it grew more and more remote - like a dream at the waking moment. The vision of her inevitable loneliness came to replace it, clear and acute. She saw herself alone and small in a huge desolation - infinitely pitiful, Lewisham callously receding, with 'some shop girl'. The tears came, came faster until they were streaming down her face. She turned, as if looking for something. She flung herself upon her knees before the little arm-chair, and began an incoherent sobbing prayer for the pity and comfort of God. (16)

Through the mixture of the over-dramatic and precise in this language, Wells has caught both the subjective response of his character to her situation, her tendency to view things through a literary medium and the objective reality of her condition. Education has not caused her loneliness but in the novel one of the human significances of education is this loneliness.

Set against the scholastic world there is that of Chaffery. Through Ethel's associations with her Uncle she comes to represent, rather than a pure, uncultivated alternative to the educational system, a shallow and sophisticated product of an urban society that lacks the rigid hierarchical structure of that system:

"I like London", she generalised, "and especially in winter". And she proceeded to praise London, its public libraries, its shops, the multitude of people, the facilities for 'doing what you like', the concerts one could go to, the theatres. (It seemed she moved in fairly good society.) "There's always something to see even if you only go out for a walk" she said, "and down here there's nothing to read but idle novels. And those not new". (4)

London offers the opportunity for being oneself or rather for exploiting various possible selves. When she leaves Lewisham to return to the capital she writes to him:

It was typewritten on thin paper. "Dear", she wrote simply, and it seemed to him the most sweet and wonderful of all possible modes of address, though, as a matter of fact it was because she had forgotten his Christian name, and afterwards forgotten the blank she had left for it. (7)

Such stress upon Ethel's relative lack of deep feeling continues throughout, and should be seen in relation to the Chaffery world.

Chaffery is a comic creation but the comedy is, as it were, the embodiment of the significance of the portrait, for it is a function of his morally irresponsible, anarchic philosophy of life. He is a type of artist, justifying his activity by the persuasive quality of the illusion he is able to create. The point is that he can see no distinction between his spiritualist activities and real life; both exist only in terms of pretence and artifice. His social analysis is made explicit in the following:

"Now I am prepared to maintain" said Chaffery, proceeding with his proposition, that honesty is essentially an anarchistic and disintegrating force in society, that communities are held together and the progress of civilization made possible only by vigorous and sometimes even violent lying; that the social contract is nothing more or less than a vast conspiracy of human beings to lie and to humbling themselves and one another for the general good. Lies are the mortar that bind the savage individual man into the social masonry." (11)

and:

"And his case (the scientist's) is the case of all comfortable lives. What a lie and sham all civility is, all good breeding, all culture and refinement, while one poor ragged wretch begs hungry on the earth!" (23)

In this perspective there is no room for integrity or disinterestedness; the world of education becomes a sham, a way of disguising the brutal realities upon which civilization is founded. Chaffery then, both offers a critique of society, and, in his dishonesty, amorality and indifference to others, acts out its values. He is less a character than a principle of attitude and action; he knows too much to be a conventional fictional character. Thus the advice he gives Lewisham about doing all the ordinary things does not really contradict his earlier philosophy. For real people, having to live with the contradictions between the actual and the illusory, to understand society is not necessarily to be compelled to submit to it but is to recognise the essential elements required to survive; it is a defensive strategy.

Lewisham then, in the novel moves between two orders -- that of education and that of the society beyond. His choice between ambition and love is, in these terms, a choice between attempting to alter reality through sacrifice, through following the career mapped out for him by Miss Heydinger or submitting to reality through acknowledging the actual nature of the self, through giving it free play. Education and its social context thus exist in a close, tense relationship, shaping and being shaped by the hero's development.

At the beginning that relationship takes the fairly simple form of a conflict between his duties and his inclinations. He eventually comes to recognise his necessary involvement in the Chaffery world; it marks the final stage in his growth. To marry Ethel is to commit himself to a particular connection with society, is to, in some way, comprehend its forms and

values; understanding offers the only possibility for integrity.

Love and Mr. Lewisham then, is concerned with growth, with the hero's loss of illusions about his own potentialities for advancement, with his gradual understanding of his own desires and with the encounter with the world of the Chafferys. In this growth the value of education which had seemed to offer so much, is diminished by the fictional realisation of its actual substance in the world. Wells having experienced both the promise it seemed to hold and the irrelevance it came to hold when he was forced into work, writes Love and Mr. Lewisham out of a very personal perspective. The novel has the certainty and edge given by truths newly comprehended; its rhythms are quick and sharp, its characters for the most part fairly sketchily developed, its tone generally prosaic. G.N. Ray calls it the "most carefully constructed and shapely" of Wells's novels.<sup>13</sup> Rather it is the most compressed, the one that allows the least possibility for indulgence in illusion or romance. Chaffery's message is Wells's - see the truth about education and society and live without "mauvaise foi".

#### Kipps: Class and Culture

In connection with Love and Mr. Lewisham Wells wrote to Bennett:

My wife and I have read "A man from the North" with the very keenest of interest and we are both struck by the curious parallelism (in spite of their entire independence and authenticity) of the two books. Your approach and line of thought are clearly rather more toward Gissing than are mine, and I am reminded by that, that Gissing some years ago when I was telling him the idea of 'Lewisham' told me that he had also

13. "H.G. Wells Tries to be a Novelist", in Edwardians and Late-Victorians, p. 125.

contemplated the same story. His title was to have been "The Common Lot", and there you have as compactly as possible a certain difference in point of view. 14

The similarities and differences between the three novelists are revealing of their distinctive imaginations. Central is the issue of class. For Gissing it was of crucial importance but his classical education, his strong identification with the idea of the gentleman gave him a certain detachment of stance. For Bennett it was the general human condition, the universal experiences that unified people that most counted in his fiction. He thus found it difficult to understand one aspect of Kipps - its hostility to 'hace' people and Wells's attack upon the Hampstead set in A Modern Utopia. For Wells the class issue was fundamental. He wrote out of an exposed, internal position revealing the tensions and prejudices of his perspective. Kipps contains a good deal of criticism of all levels of society but essentially it centres its critical attention upon the superior classes.<sup>15</sup> Basic is the concern with the inhuman treatment of a lower-class individual. Thus the generous and friendly spirit with which Kipps's fellow shop assistants receive the news of his inheritance offers a fundamental contrast with the impact the news makes on their social superiors.

Wells's attitudes to the lower-classes were complex but, intellectually he was very aware of their changing historical situation.<sup>16</sup> To achieve thus an appropriate outlook, to move away from the condescension of George Eliot

14. Arnold Bennett and H.G. Wells, p.48.

15. See Kenneth. B. Newell, Structure in Four Novels by H.G. Wells, The Hague (1968), pp. 49-50 for an argument that it is the "entire social structure" that Wells is criticising in Kipps.

16. See H.G. Wells: Journalism and Prophecy, ed. Warren Wager (1964), p.44. (Note 10, p.358 below)



or the sentimental romanticism of Dickens, or the generalised hostility of Gissing, to come to terms, in other words, with the democratic situation that existed, was difficult. In

First and Last Things he writes:

I find it hard to fix any standards that will determine who is above me and who below. Most people are different from me I perceive, but which among them is better, which worse?... My 'inferiors', judged by the common social standards, seem indeed intellectually more limited than I and with a narrower outlook; they are often dirtier and more driven, more under the stress of hunger and animal appetites; but on the other hand have they not more vigorous sensations than I, and through sheer coarsening and hardening of fibre, the power to do more toilsome things and sustain intenser sensations than I could endure?...

No, I do not want to raise people using my own position as a standard, I do not want to be one of a gang of consciously superior people, I do not want arrogantly to change the quality of their lives...<sup>17</sup>

The attempt here is to work out an attitude that neither patronises nor distorts reality. In this process the established attitude to the lower-class comes under critical examination, for respect and understanding, Wells recognised, cannot exist in a vacuum - they have to be earned.<sup>18</sup> The need of the governing classes to justify their privileges comes not out of a reservoir of emotional guilt but from an objective realisation that actual society in its changed state demands a change of outlook, that old ways of seeing and behaving will no longer work.<sup>19</sup> Fundamental to the recognition that luxury has to be curtailed is a radical questioning of culture itself. Arnold's and Ruskin's anxieties about the value of art in a context of social misery have deepened. Perhaps there has to be a choice between the minority world

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17. H.G. Wells, First and Last Things (1908), p.102.

18. See H.G. Wells: Journalism and Prophecy, p.46 (Note 11, p.358 below)

19. See H.G. Wells: Journalism and Prophecy, p.48.

of possessions and the claims of justice and equality. The major elements of Kipps include then, both the presentation of a representative lower-class figure who is placed in terms of his limitations and is a focus of the reader's sympathy, and a satiric attack upon a middle-class which does not acknowledge the need for respect towards the lower-class in the way that Wells did.

Together with this, the novel embodies a more internal sense of class, one that arises from Wells's personal experience of its significance. The concern of Kipps with manners and behaviour, although treated comically has very serious undertones. Wells is not simply using his hero for effect but is exorcising through his fiction his own anxieties.

Thus the hard-won poise and ease of tone of the work should not be taken for granted. Wells's problems in writing it, suggest that his own position was not an easy one. The Wealth of Mr. Waddy, which represents his original conception of the story, is a brilliant exercise, giving scope for the novelist's invective and satire. The concentration, however, is purely upon personality largely detached from its social context and the narrative voice is an impersonal one. Compared with this early, unfinished book, the published novel which eventually emerged from it, has a warmth and a depth of evocation that suggests Wells's effort to move closer to the experience he is centrally concerned with.

The tensions which compose Kipps revolve around what can be called three versions of culture. First of all there

is what in actual fact is the pre-cultural world of New Romney, of the hero's childhood. Here, the possibility for self-realisation, for fantasy exists. Authority, in the shape of his aunt and uncle are strongly present but the presence is a remote one:

His aunt and uncle, (as it were) were the immediate gods of this world, and, like the gods of old, occasionally descended right into it, with arbitrary injunctions and disproportionate punishments. (i,1) 20

Within its range he can temporarily discover space in which to be himself:

There was a corner under the ironing board which, by means of a shawl, could be made, under propitious gods, a very decent cubby house, a corner that served him for several years as the indisputable hub of the world... (i,1)

His imagination responds to the inanimate, to the objects in his guardians' shop:

The other things included books to read and books to give away, and local photographs; it had some pretensions also to be a china shop, and the fascia spoke of glass; it was also a stationer's shop with a touch of haberdashery about it, and in the windows and odd corners were mats and terra cotta dishes, and milking stools for painting; and there was a hint of picture-frames, and fire-screens, and fishing-tackle, and air-guns, and bathing suits, and tents - various things indeed, but all cruelly attractive to a small boy's fingers. (i, 1)

The rhythms of the prose here, the listing, suggests an infantile, Whitmanesque wonder. As he grows older that element of wonder becomes more self-conscious, more extreme, coming into opposition with the rigidity of school. Play comes to represent the imaginative potentialities of the self; when Ann meets Kipps one of the first things they do is run a race. Although, inevitably, this childhood world is idealised it is not seen in total isolation from the life

20. H.G.Wells, Kipps (1905), All references are to this edition.

around it. On its borders are the petty social rivalries between the two families, the fact that Sid's imagination has been significantly shaped by the reading of cheap literature and that Kipps's idea of using the half-sixpence as a token comes from Tit-Bits. Thus the class structure and the products of an urban mass society are oblique presences in what can be called the culture of play.

This culture is essentially one of retreat. On the other hand there is Chitterlow. In The World of Mr. Waddy he is seen above all as an exploitive, money-grabbing figure; his artistic pretensions simply hide his greed. In Kipps this extremity has been considerably modified, so that it is not really a moral evaluation that is demanded but rather an immediate response to his vitality and charm, to his comic irresponsibility and extravagance of personal projection, and an understanding of his significance in the context of the novel as a whole. Above all, Chitterlow's capacity for believing in himself, for identifying himself with his wishes and ambitions is striking:

Chitterlow became in very truth that ripe, full man of infinite experience and humour and genius, fellow of Shakespeare and Ibsen and Maeterlinck. (Three names he placed together quite modestly far above his own), and no longer ambiguously dressed in a sort of yachting costume with cycling knickerbockers, but elegantly if unconventionally attired, and the room ceased to be a Folkestone slum, and grew larger and more richly furnished, and the fly-blown photographs were curious old pictures, and the rubbish on the walls the most rare and costly bric-a-brac, and the indisputable paraffin lamp a soft and splendid light. (i, 4).

Not only is he associated with drink, with the avoidance of work but also with chance and with the accidental. The meeting with Kipps occurs after he has knocked him down, the

inheritance Kipps receives results from his attempt to imitate the random actuality of life through choosing names for his characters from the newspapers, and luckily, towards the close, the play he has written succeeds. Throughout he suggests possibility, so that it is wrong to view his final success as unconvincing; it is just its extraordinary unlikelihood that is appropriate. Perhaps an illuminating parallel is with Jay Gatsby in Fitzgerald's work. In spite of obvious differences both figures exist most truly in their own imaginative conceptions of themselves, both are the creations of novelists with profoundly romantic and transfiguring sensibilities. Thus, when Chitterlow reappears near the end with his good news he is described in the following way:

He opened the door and stood, tall and spread, with one vast white glove flung out, as if to display how burst a glove might be, his eyes bright, such wrinkling of brow and mouth as only an experienced actor can produce and a singular radiance of emotion upon his whole being - an altogether astonishing spectacle. (iii, 3)

In the pose, in the spectacle he presents, he is most himself.

Appearing at various moments through the novel, with his confusion of serious and trivial art, with his pretensions to the artistic and his hopes of financial success, Chitterlow is an embodiment of the significances that can be associated with a popular urban culture - its vigour, its philistinism, its self-interested generosity of spirit and the opportunity it gives for role-playing and mobility of identity. He appears the most Dickensian of the characters because he seems to embody the essential qualities of the world of Dickens - its histrionicism, the possibilities it embodies for sudden changes of fate and fortune, its

brash directness and its emphasis upon the instinctive and spontaneous.

The popular culture of the city represented by Chitterlow is counter-poised in the novel by the traditional culture associated with the world of the Walsinghams. Helen is described in the following way:

...she had a pale, intellectual face, dark grey eyes, and black hair, which she wore over her forehead in an original and striking way that she had adopted from a picture by Rossetti in the South Kensington Museum. (i,3)

She makes attempts at writing and her mother speaks of her and her brother like this: "'They are so quick, so artistic', she said, 'so full of ideas. Almost they frighten me. One feels they need opportunities - as other people need air.'" (i,3)

Through art Helen finds a justification for her existence; it is a social asset. Although there are attempts to soften her portrait, fundamentally the sketch Wells gave of her in The Wealth of Mr. Waddy remains an accurate one. She is regarded as an-

over-educated, aesthetic prig. Her temper is not good. Her regard for Kipps is very dubious. With a gross disregard for his feelings she sets about shaping Kipps into a sort of Fabian aesthete. Kipps is brought into almost violent contact with Beato Angelico, Botticelli, Wagner, Browning, Italy, Munich, the keltic renaissance and the essential vulgarity of being English. (22) 21

With Coates, the changes between the two books are more radical. In the earlier, the characterisation is given a significant internal dimension, a dimension that enables the explicit emergence of the sinister implications of his nature. In a note Wells writes: "...suggestions of extraordinary subterranean activity of Coates. He is presented flushed,

21. H.G.Wells, The Wealth of Mr. Waddy, ed. Harris Wilson, 1969. All references are to this edition

tremulous, active, dropping a hint here, arranging a tête-a-tête there..." (19) Working behind the scenes, he cunningly exists parasitically off other people's lives, making subtle connections between power, culture and the emotional life of individuals, exploiting his knowledge of their weaknesses and vanities while sharing them himself:

Cootes grew visibly in Kipps's eyes as he said these things; he became not only the exponent of 'Wagner or Vargner', the man whose sister had painted a picture to be exhibited at the Royal Academy, the type of the hidden thing called culture, but a delegate as it were, or at least an intermediary from that great world 'up there' where there were men servants, where there were titles, where people dressed for dinner, drank wine at meals, wine costing very often as much as three and sixpence a bottle, and followed through a maze of etiquette the most stupendous practices... (ii,1)

Here, the social reality of art, what it actually signifies in society is made clear. In the same way that Gissing does with Mutimer in Demos, Wells reveals the shallowness of Cootes's taste by an examination of his bookshelves:

...an almost haphazard accumulation of obsolete classics, contemporary successes, the Hundred Best Books (including Samuel Warren's 'Ten Thousand a Year'), old school books, directories, 'The Times', Ruskin in bulk, Tennyson complete in one volume, Longfellow, Charles Kingsley, Smiles and Mrs. Humphrey Ward, a guide book or so, several medical pamphlets, odd magazine numbers, and much indescribable rubbish - in fact a compendium of the contemporary British mind. (ii, 2)

The traditional culture he and the Walsinghams represent is thus a false one, a mere matter of manners and conversation; art and etiquette have become inextricably connected. And behind this surface there is the intense concern with money and status, the ruthlessness that enables the exploitation of Kipps.

Through the three worlds of the novel then the hero moves, reacting at different times in different ways, experiencing

their values and seeking to find his true path. Nor do these worlds remain the same, our attitudes and their actuality are gradually modified, so that the world associated with Kipps's childhood, for example, takes on political implications. The lines of the novel are in subtle and ongoing relationship with each other, being determined by the requirements of character.<sup>22</sup>

Wells stressed the typicality of his protagonists.<sup>23</sup> Although there are obvious romantic elements involved in the characterisation, the novelist works against a sentimental idealisation, as, for example, in the scene at the wood-carving class. The impression is not of a frustrated working-class intellectual or of a frustrated artist as is the case with Polly, but rather of a not particularly intelligent individual attempting to remedy the inadequacies he feels. His development consists in coming to terms with the intensifying tensions that beset him. After his encounter with the Walsinghams the strains became most acute; the image of the shadow, the burial of his inner-self when he is socialising, suggests the degree of acuteness. Parallel, however, there is a gradual disenchantment with his new world; once Helen becomes available, once she is no longer an object for awe, he frees himself from his earlier illusion. For the lower-class individual the world of culture cannot be possessed; it must either remain a focus for unreal romanticisation or an instrument by which he is removed from his background, set in a psychological and social limbo,

22. See Lovat Dickson, H.G. Wells: His Turbulant Life and Times (1969), p. 173 for Wells's description of his novel. (Note 12, p. 359 below).
23. See Kipps, i, 3 for Wells's mockery of the idea that Kipps is a frustrated working-class talent.



and conditioned to conform to certain modes of behaviour and attitude. This is the fundamental meaning of Kipps's story - its exposure of the connections between class and culture.

The attempt Kipps makes after his marriage to Ann to maintain his ambitions and pretensions thus proves futile; it is not possible to have both. In the figure of the architect trying to sell the couple a house completely unsuited to their needs, trying to make his art relevant to their lives in the pursuit of his own self-interest, Wells offers a representation of the whole way in which culture in the novel can be regarded as the fraudulent effort to use people's inexperience and aspirations for exploitive ends. To marry Ann is necessarily to make a class decision. Wells is slightly wary of being too explicit but indirectly, by connecting Masterman with Sid, he suggests what in fact Kipps choice signifies. For Wells the former is a symbolic figure, indicating both the possible ways of responding to the kind of fictional world presented in the work and the possible results of its impact upon the identity. Masterman is an extremist, refusing all compromise. His bitterness suggest a depth of personal unresolved experience, and it becomes apparent that Masterman has, as it were, been broken by the system. As a child he had worked in a factory. The following passage reveals his view of the experience:

'I got out at last - somehow', he said quietly, suddenly plumping back in his chair. He went on after a pause, 'For a bit. Some of us get out by luck, some by cunning, and crawl on the grass, exhausted and crippled, to die. That's a poor man's success, Kipps. Most of us don't get out at all. I worked all day and studied half the night, and here I am with common consequences.'

Beaten!' And never once have I had a fair chance, never once!'. His lean, clenched fist flew out in a gust of tremulous anger. 'These skunks shut up all the university scholarships at nineteen for fear of men like me. And then - do nothing... We're wasted for nothing. By the time I'd learnt something the doors were locked. I thought knowledge would do it - I did think that! I've fought for knowledge as other men fight for bread...'  
(ii,7)

As with Gissing in his characterisation of Scawthorne in The Nether World, Wells here shows his awareness of the way self-education for the lower-class intellectual can take a heavy toll. Through the sharpness and depth of the anguish, the hysteria, the novelist succinctly registers a sense of the tragedies that society produces. Kipps's luck is thus given a context in which it can be viewed in perspective. His final domestic contentment with Ann conforms to Masterman's advice: "That's about the only course one can take nowadays, with everything getting more muddled and upside down every day. Make your own world and your own house first of all..."  
(ii, 9) As in Love and Mr. Lewisham, the hero acts out the philosophy of another figure, his action being given in this way a general and explicit significance in terms of the novel as a whole.

The pre-cultural world of his childhood becomes the 'post-cultural' one (to use Bellamy's phrase)<sup>24</sup> of his adulthood:

'We'll just 'ave a sensible little 'ouse, and sensible things. No art or anything of that sort, nothing atuck-up or anything, but jest sensible. We'll be as right as anything Ann.' (ii, 9)

Books, which previously had represented the key to his adventure and refinement, now are simply objects to be sold

24. William Bellamy, The Novels of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy 1890-1910 (1971).

over the counter; through trading in literature Kipps finds a way of dominating it. It is appropriate that at the close the money from Chitterlow's success should underpin their security, for the world of popular culture and the childhood world associated with Ann and Sid have together, in their different ways, served as contrasts to the Walsingham way of life - the one embodying a spontaneous and crude vitality of response that opposes its hypocrisy and rigidity, the other an innocence and honesty of emotion that opposes its sophisticated deadness of feeling. For the lower-class aspiring individual, unable to easily adapt to the mode of behaviour of his social superiors the only way not to become a victim of that behaviour is to opt out. Culture, the novel says, cannot be appropriated as an asset in the way Kipps desires without internalising the values of the class with which it is inextricably connected, without the extinction of the real self and the assumption of a new role.

#### Tono-Bungay: Wells and the Mass Society

This meaning should not be abstracted from the novel, for it is important to stress the degree to which it avoids the analytic and discursive. Wells's next novel to deal directly with society, Tono-Bungay, in contrast, relies far more on dissection and generalisation to work out its themes. Whereas Kipps exposes traditional culture, the later book is about the vacuum that results in its absence. In it Wells confronts the modernity of his social world in its relationship to his own role as author. His attitude to the kind of mass society that in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was growing up, is ambiguous and uncertain. He was very strongly aware of its manifestations and recognised his

own dependent connection and sympathy with it.<sup>25</sup> Yet, although Wells discovered certain values in mass culture he was by no means<sup>va</sup> critical of it, seeking to maintain certain standards in opposition to it; in writing about novelists such as Hall Cain he is rigorously severe.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to writers like James and Gissing, who made of their unpopularity part of an aesthetic, Wells sought a seriousness of significance that did not necessitate an isolated detachment from society at large. At the heart of Tono-Bungay there is an attempt to fictionalise his shifting, ambivalent relationship to the mass culture that exerted such a tremendous influence upon his career and work.

Recently the novel has come to be considered Wells's finest achievement. What is perhaps most striking about it is the way in which it imitates rather than simply presents change and growth, so that George's search for values within his society is an embodiment of the novelist's. The authorial voice has been absorbed into the fiction and the reader has been freed to experience the fragmented, relativistic world directly, the fragmentation, the lack of significance becoming, as in Conrad, part of the total meaning the fiction implies. Ultimately only the narrator's consciousness holds the diverse strands of the novel together.

This narrator's first involvement is with the aristocratic world represented by Bladesover. The judgement of this world is a complex one. It offers both an image of stability and of change. For the boy the house appeared as a completely

25. See H.G.Wells, Certain Personal Matters (1887), p.2 and Boon, p. 196-197 (Note 13, p.359 below)

26. See H.G.Wells Tries to be a Novelist; in Edwardians and Late-Victorians, pp. 109-112.

"authentic microcosm" (i, 1) 27 of society and for the man it has become.

...one of those dominant explanatory impressions that make the framework of my mind. Bladesover illuminates England, it has become all that is spacious, dignified, pretentious and truly conservative in English life. (i,2)

The type of life it signifies still has a powerful imaginative force: "Everybody who is not actually in the shadow of a Bladesover is as it were perpetually seeking after lost orientations". (i, 1) Yet this significance is not held in opposition to historical reality but within an awareness of its development; Bladesover has fallen into the hands of new entrepreneurs.

These two aspects of the country-house system - its stability and its subjection to change are thus both simultaneously implied. Wells offers an image for this paradoxical linking in the following passage:

The new order may have gone far towards shaping itself but just as in that sort of lantern show that used to be known in the village as the 'Dissolving Views', the scene that is going to remain upon the mind, traceable and evident, and the newer picture is yet enigmatical long after the lines that are to replace those former ones have grown bright and strong, so that the new England of our children's children is still a riddle to me. (i, 1)

And the doubleness is continued into the sort of values that the Bladesover world represents, for it is a home both for civilisation and for the petty snobbery and absence of true individuality found amongst the servants.

This critical understanding is continued with the characterisation of Beatrice herself, for here, ultimately, it is the old Bladesover system that dominates; she betrays

27. H.G.Wells, Tono-Bungay (1909). All references are to this edition.

George and stands with Lady Drew:

'But I'm talking wisdom - bitter wisdom. I couldn't be any sort of helper to you, any sort of wife, any sort of mother. I'm spoilt by this rich, idle way of living, until every habit is wrong, every taste wrong.' (iv, 2)

Their love can only exist in an intense and unreal limbo.

George's relationship with the world of the upper-classes is a complex one then. His realism prevents him romantically idealising it but he is still drawn to it; he is allowed to move within its orbit but not to join it; it serves both as a reference point for him and also an indication of the altering social landscape in which he lives. Its place in the novel is so central because it is the focus of the stresses that the transition to a mass and democratic society involve - the tensions between old and new, between acceptance and rejection are here most acute. In this developing society the choice for the socially mobile individual is to suffer rejection from an ossified, traditional class system or to join the ranks of the new class leaders, the Bechenhams for example, with their pretensions and trivialities.

George in his progress through society also encounters the lower-classes. This world is shaped directly by the Bladesover system, for the one is limited and denied by the wealth and privilege of the other. The landscape of industrialism is of an ugly futility and the Frapps, with whom he is sent to stay resemble their surroundings; the environment has imprinted itself upon their identity. Nicodemus is simply a machine, offering no resistance at all to the outside world:

As I remember him, indeed, he presented the servile tradition perfected. He had no pride in his person,

fine clothes and dressing up wasn't 'for the likes of him', so that he got his wife, who was no artist at ~~it~~ to cut his black hair at irregular intervals, and let his nails become disagreeable to the fastidious eye; he had no pride in his business nor any initiative, his only values were not doing certain things and hard work. (i,2)

And this total suppression of the self finds its ideological justification in the fanatical Puritanism to which the family cling. Against this kind of narrow life, George finds an alternative satisfaction in "Police News" and other pieces of popular literature. The products of a mass society can then, in however crude a way, act as an alternative to the dinginess and limitations of the lower-class world; they can suggest possibilities of excitement and glamour that are denied by the Frapps.

In the case of Marian again, George's involvement with the development of his Uncle's medicine, acts to counter the gnawing pettiness and conventionality of his life with her, opening out new possibilities of energy and relationship. It is true that the world of the lower-classes is not completely associated with this kind of oppressive frustration of human vitality, for there is Effie who exists totally in the present moment but she is more a product of a Forsterian romanticisation of the instincts than a character open to development through relationship. In any case she is connected, by her work, with the activities of Edward.

George, it is important to note, falls in love with Marian, with her simplicity and ordinary virtues, for in his nature there is a strong sense of traditional values. His marriage is thus a kind of testing of these values against their social equivalent and a discovery of their limitations, of the fact that in spite of his disapproval of many aspects

of his Uncle's venture, there are opportunities for self-realisation and expression which an adherence to his principles must necessarily deny. To rise and live fully in the new society, the emphasis upon work and duty, upon living economically and morally, must be sacrificed; instead the values and characteristic modes of behaviour of this society, its system of assumptions and expectations, must be adapted.

George, however, is always fighting against this adoption and one of the strongest agents of his resistance is his commitment to science. Although his powerful drive for education diminishes after he experiences London, his surrender of his college place is an abandonment not of science but of the institutional framework in which he studies it. For the rest of the novel it becomes a solitary, pure and concentrated attempt to invent a satisfactory flying-machine. Yet this idealisation of scientific disinterestedness cannot be absolute. George's work with flying machines is financed by the profits from Tono-Bungay and when Edward goes bankrupt he uses one of them to effect an escape. There can be no total isolation from the surrounding mass society.

Together with this, is the fact that the pursuit of science must inevitably exclude certain important areas of life, that it involves certain costs. Thus, the last section of the novel, which describes the passage of a destroyer, that George built, through the Thames, is double-edged. On the one hand the voyage becomes symbolic of the critical and urgent achievement of Wells himself: "That rush down the river became mysteriously connected with this book. As I passed down the Thames I seemed in a new and parallel manner to be passing all England in review." (iv, 3) Both science



and his art expose the truth of things. However a destroyer implies destruction and the impersonal, inhuman elements involved are not excluded:

Through that central essential London reach I drove, and X2 bored her nose under the foam regardless of it all like a black hound going through reeds - or what trail even I who made her cannot tell. (iv, 3)

These elements are mystified though, so that their real significance in the actual world is lost: "It is a something, a quality, an element, one may find now in colours, now in forms, now in sounds, now in thoughts." (iv, 3) Such a mystical idea suggests the extent of George's dissatisfaction with the sort of world in which he has existed, his desperate need for a compensating, almost religious conviction to cling to.

The earnestness, the sense of moral purpose which produces this need is contrasted, in the novel, with the figure of Ewart, who represents a further alternative to the mass society. He is described at school: "Surely no boy ever played the fool as Bob Ewart used to play it, no boy had a readier knack for mantling the world with wonder." (i 1) He is the artist as jester, intensely aware of the comic in life. In contrast to George, who is looking for absolutes and certainties, Ewart accepts the lack of them, and his connections with the spirit of the Aesthetic movement are made clear:

His was essentially the nature of an artistic appreciator; he could find interest and beauty in endless aspects of things that I marked as evil... (ii, 1)

Not able to remain completely apart from the mass society in which he lives and which supports him, he yet seeks to maintain a certain degree of integrity. Wells strongly

opposed an art that sought to evade the world but in his sympathetic characterisation of Ewart he revealed his understanding of the artist's problem in the developing social world of the time, of the way certain stances were necessary and appropriate ; he was after all the friend of James and Gissing. Yet Ewart is not really a substantial character and this fact may be due to the novelist's own uncertain attitude towards him, his own difficulty in deciding the extent to which he can be regarded as a positive element in the world of the novel.

For in one way he parallels rather than contrasts with Edward Ponderevo; they both share an irresponsible outlook upon the world. The irresponsibility of the latter, however, is carried through with a vivacious and explosive energy that seems, in the novel, a justification for a good deal of his action. Like Chitterlow in Kipps he is totally alive to the chances and openings that are available to the enterprising individual; and they were considerable in this period.<sup>28</sup> His characterisation through the novel suggests the mixture of fascination and dislike with which both George and Wells regard him. The novelist superbly catches the magnificent flair of his personality, the way he seems to embody the whole spirit of a society, to live out its meaning. He, like Thomas Lipton in the field of groceries, is one of the new men of the age, responsive to its particular qualities. The latter is described by Peter Mathias as an "ebullient, self-assertive, egocentric, extrovert person who had no interests at first beyond his business to perpetuate his name or absorb

28. See James.B. Jeffereys, Retail Trading in Britain 1850-1950, Cambridge (1954) pp. 381-382 for changes in the drug trade during this period.

his energies and ambitions".<sup>29</sup> The similarities with Edward are obvious and significant.

Thus one of Tono-Bungay's most interesting aspects is the way in which the altered culture of the time is present throughout the novel, moulding a particular landscape. There is London: "The whole illimitable place teemed with suggestions of indefinite and sometimes outrageous possibility, of hidden but magnificent meanings". (ii,1) and it embodies not simply popular significances, for high art also comes within its boundaries; Beethoven becomes an aspect of the city - a city seen as the focus of a diversity of impressions and appearances:

And after the ordinary overcast day, after dull mornings, came twilight and London lit up and became a thing of white and yellow and red jewels of light and wonderful floods of golden illumination and stupendous and unfathomable shadows - and there were no longer any men as shabby people - but a great mysterious movement of unaccountable beings... (ii, 1)

The romance of commerce is paralleled by the romance of London. Ewart's glorification of advertising, although obviously meant to be ironic, is thus not totally opposed to the response of the novel to the phenomenon. Walking along the Embankment the hero is very conscious of the scenery it has created:

And then my eye caught the advertisements on the south side of 'Sorber's Food', of 'Cracknell's Ferric Wire', very bright and prosperous signs, illuminated at night, and I realised how astonishingly they looked at home there, how evidently part they were in the whole thing. (ii, 2)

There is, on the part of Wells, a very real interest in the whole process of advertising and selling on a large-scale, for he is seeking to point to the particularly contemporary

29. Peter Mathias, Retailing Revolution (1967), p.105.

features of Ponderevo's activities, to present them as elements of a wider transitional movement. It is the character's absolutely indiscriminating philistinism which is the main impression; never does he question the value of what he is doing.

George is, of course, opposite in this respect, deeply conscious of the futility and unreality of the whole business. Repeatedly, through the novel, he and Wells offer frequent analyses, placing the Ponderevo's work with Tono-Bungay in a sociological and economic perspective, emphasising its connection with the whole capitalist system which concentrated increasingly upon the control of the market. As profits increase, as the enterprise expands, the actuality of these connections becomes clearer and clearer. Just before the boom collapses, the novelist, seeking to suggest his understanding of the implications of the mass society at the centre of the novel, resorts to a type of symbolism. Through the quapp episode he renders powerfully his own sense of the underlying meanings of the world he has shown. George's journey involves theft and murder, in order to obtain a product instinct with decay and a fertile corruption; these are felt as the crude realities behind capitalism itself. At the close there is what must, in the context of the novel as a whole, be a desperate and anxious attempt to wrest some positive out of the disillusioned awareness that has become fundamental.

For in the work Wells had sought to explore the significance of the new social order that he sensed himself to be growing up with, to explore, in other words, the context of his own art. Having in Kipps exposed the deadness of conventional middle-class culture he attempted to discover an alternative in that of the masses, to find there certain values which might support and sustain his writing. He was

clearly, from the beginning, very conscious of its limitations, but he was also aware of its importance to any one eager to communicate with a large audience. To have ignored or simply despised it would for Wells have meant to stop writing. Edward in his ebullient and enthusiastic vitality, in his ambitiousness, in the warmth he generates can be seen to represent an aspect of the novelist's own personality. Fundamentally what counts against Ponderevo is not the fraudulence of his activities but their meaninglessness. Mass culture in spite of its energy and the quickness of human contact it can make possible lacks ultimate purpose. In these terms then, the final embrace of science involves the rejection of art or at least of one possible area of its existence in the world. Mass culture, which might have seemed to offer a possible alternative to the traditional culture from which Wells, because of its social and psychological implications, revolted, proves in its implications of futility and inhumanity to be equally unsatisfactory. Tono-Bungay is really about testing and comprehending that unsatisfactoriness.

The particular quality of the work comes from the way this process of testing is made concrete in the fiction. Avoiding a simplicity of cynicism or satire the novel embodies in its tone and structure, in the rhythms of its prose and its scenes, the tentative, searching movement of Wells's intelligence and imagination. In reading, it is this above all that emerges and the confidence in the narrative voice that the implied complexity of vision and understanding creates, means that the world created has a genuine substantiality, a world that is both judged and felt from within through the consciousness

of George and examined from without by Wells who uses both other characters, such as Susan and Cothorpe, to provide additional points of reference which can qualify and amplify the narrator's perspective, and the plot, to carry the major significances of the novel.

#### Mr. Polly: Wells and Art

The work that followed Tono-Bungay was Ann. Veronica, which represents an extreme rejection of the social world and a consequent glorification of personal relationships in isolation from that world. A year later, however, in 1910, Wells once more returned to an examination of the connection between art and society. Even more than Love and Mr. Lewisham, The History of Mr. Polly is a compressed and concentrated book, even more than Kipps the comedy derives from close social observation. After ~~that~~ the satiric attack of that work upon the upholders of traditional culture and after the expression of disillusionment of Tono-Bungay with the possibilities of mass culture, Wells in Mr. Polly concentrated his attention upon the significance of the artistic impulse for the individual in society. Whereas before, art and culture had been something external to the main protagonist, in this later novel they exist within him, generating a genuine tension between his own capacities and potentialities and society. Wells's prime concern in Mr. Polly is with the meaning of creativity in a context that represses and denies it expression; art, in the work, is dealt with at its source.

Any approach to an understanding of Wells's relationship to the aesthetic must confront that crucial debate he had with

Henry James. First of all it is necessary to stress that their argument cannot be seen in terms of the philistine confronting the man of culture, for throughout, the latter never lost his respect for his more popular friend and Wells, under pressure, was constantly seeking to develop an alternative to the Jamesian creed. Essentially what is important is the implications of the quatrel. Leon Edel and G.N. Ray in their introduction to the correspondence point out finely its class significance, explaining Wells's hostility to the American writer by his need to maintain his identity against and in conflict with the kind of world he represented, for not to have done so would have been to surrender it.<sup>30</sup>

There are also political significances involved. James writes:

There's no representation, no picture (which is your form), that isn't by its very nature preservation, association, and a positive associational appeal - that is the very grammar of it; none that isn't thereby some sort of interesting or curious order. I utterly defy it in short not to make, all the anarchy in the world <sup>31</sup> *aiding, far more than it unmakes...*

The connection here of art and order is a fairly conventional one but words such as 'preservation', 'order' and 'anarchy' cannot be stripped of their associations. Similarly Wells, when he had refused to join the literary establishment, had not been, in his identification of himself with the anarchic, rigorously concerned with aesthetic matters.<sup>32</sup> It is in James's long article on the younger generation of writers that the issues involved became, however, explicit:

Never was the reservoir so bubblingly and noisily full, at any rate by the superficial measures of life; and this tide, swollen by extravagant cheap contribution, the increase of affluents turbid and unstrained, shows us the number of ways in which the democratic example, once gathering momentum, sets its mark on societies and seasons that stand in its course.

30. Henry James and H.G. Wells (1958), eds. Leon Edel and G.N. Ray. (1950), pp. 19-20.

31. Henry James and H.G. Wells, p.162.

32. Henry James and H.G. Wells, p.160 (see Note 14, p.360 below)

Nowhere is that example written larger than in the New Novel. 33

Democracy here is associated with the undisciplined production of literature and with the actual nature of the fiction written - its uncritical saturation in life and contentment in sheer energy. Form is seen as a reflection of the social world. Wells then, in defending his particular concept of the novel was seeking a relevance for it that he thought necessary if it was to survive under the new conditions which had come into existence. He, an intellectual representative of the lower-classes, newly enfranchised and educated, felt that he had to make art meaningful in its social context, had, in some sense, to justify its existence or to give it over totally to the shoddy and cheap exploiters of popular taste. Inevitably in the process of this attempt certain things, essential and unessential, had to be sacrificed. In contrast to James it was the essential that was lost; in contrast to Arnold Bennett it was the latter.

Bennet wrote to Wells:

What you say about the ugliness of modern women's dress is absolutely wrong. Indeed your notions about material beauty are shockingly inferior to your other notions. You would like to laugh me out of being a cultivated person, but you never will, and as a Cultivated Person I say that your remarks on architecture, for example, are painful. And yet you have a glimmering sometimes, even about architecture. 34

and:

Art, really you hate. It means to you what 'arty' means to me. You live in a nice house, but you know perfectly well you wouldn't care what sort of house you lived in. When you say that a great pianist is not a marvellous person, you give the show away. For you he is not. The astounding human interest of a dramatic triumph is for

33. Henry James and H.G.Wells, p.173.

34. Arnold Bennett and H.G.Wells, p.119.



you a 'silly uproar'. In these two instances you show clearly, as regards art and as regards life, where your interests stop. You won't have anything to do with 'surface values' at all. You don't merely put them in a minor place; you reject them. 35

The criticism expressed here has probably a good deal of justification, but it lacks a proper perspective, lacks an awareness that Wells's neglect of "surface values" was part of a wider stance that sought to confront the identity of "art" and "arty", of art and property, of art and the fashionable, of art and cultivation, that sought to give it an independence that would make it meaningful. Thus in

Boon:

At least the Germans stand for something. It may be brutal, stupid, intolerable, but there it is - a definite intention, a scheme of living, an order, Germanic Kultur. But what the devil do we stand for. Was there anything that amounted to an intellectual life at all in our beastly welter of writing, of nice-young-man poetry, of stylish fiction and fiction without style, of lax history, popular philosophy, slobbering criticism, academic civilities? Is there anything here to hold a people together? Is there anything to ~~make~~ make a new world? 36

A kind of Leavisite rage against the artistic establishment is articulated here, a conviction that the equivalents of the New Statesman and the review pages of the serious Sunday papers were sapping the central strength of English cultural life. And Wells, perhaps unlike Leavis, ~~did~~ not underestimate the forces that were working against the creation of a genuine art. Like Morris he saw the connections between capitalism and artistic creation:

Things made by mankind under modern conditions are ugly, primarily because our social organisation is ugly, because we live in an atmosphere of snatch and uncertainty,

35. Arnold Bennett and H.G.Wells, p.124.

36. H.G.Wells: Journalism and Prophecy, p.66

and do everything in an underbred strenuous manner. 37 There is a certain second-hand crudity about this but it does suggest the novelist's awareness of the problem. It gains a more striking and original form of expression under the pressure of war.<sup>38</sup> Later, however, in his career a definite philistinism does emerge.

A short-story, "The Temptation of Harringay" expresses allegorically one aspect of Wells's resistance to the claims of the artistic. It suggests Wells's conviction that the artist has the right, indeed the duty, to stand apart from his art, to resist the temptation to become completely possessed by it and thus remain capable of living a life outside its confines. The artist who does not do this, and the immediate example that comes to mind is James, is less than fully human and has in fact sold his soul. Artistic activity then for Wells must always remain involved with the world.

In The History of Mr. Polly, because he concentrated upon the artistic impulse rather than its products he comes closest to this aim than anywhere else in his fiction. Lawrence Jay Dessner, in an essay that centres upon this aspect of the book, has called Polly a surrogate for the author<sup>40</sup>. As opposed to Kipps or even Lewisham, he has an intelligence and complexity of nature, a creative talent that suggests an approach to equality with the narrator. From the very beginning this emerges. In contrast to the rather imprecise and detached way in which Kipps's discontent is expressed, the opening scene of the later novel enables the hero to articulate in a

37. H.G.Wells, A Modern Utopia (1905), p.366.

38. H.G.Wells: Journalism and Prophecy, p.70

39. H.G.Wells, "The Temptation of Harringay", in The Stolen Bacillus (1895), pp. 93-105.

40. Lawrence Jay Dessner, "H.G.Wells, 'Mr. Polly' and the Uses of Art", English Literature in Translation 16 (1973), 122.

concrete and intense way his angry frustration. The whole tone, the way annoyance focuses upon small details such as the cap suggests the slow build up of unresolvable emotion. Whereas in the earlier novel education is opposed to a world of imagination that is associated with childhood and holidays, in Mr. Polly it is felt as a destructive process; the metaphor is of a bungled surgical operation. The imagery suggests how education is regarded as a much more intense and concentrated system of attack upon the worth of the self than had been the case in Kipps, where it was the lax, uninformed inefficiency of Cavendish Academy that had been the main impression.

Against the pressure of education it is Polly's intelligence which serves in opposition. He is attracted to language:

At the back of Mr. Polly's mind, and quite beyond his control, the insubordinate phrasemaker would be proffering such combinations as 'Chubby Chops' or 'Chubby Charmer', as suitable for the gentleman...(3) 41

This represents a kind of subversive, anarchic activity of the imagination, turning the ordered external world that relies upon conventional classification into a private realm that exists upon the frontier between reality and fantasy. At one point in the novel Wells meditates on his hero's inner life:

Deep in the being of Mr. Polly, deep in that darkness, like a creature which has been beaten about the head and left for dead but still lives, crawled a persuasion that over and above the things that are folly and 'bits of all right', there was beauty, there was delight; that somewhere - magically inaccessible perhaps but still somewhere - were pure and easy and joyous states of body and mind. (1)

This delight in beauty puts him into opposition to the work he is engaged in.

Something of the novelist's intentions and achievements in the characterisation of Polly can be grasped perhaps by a

41. H.G.Wells, The History of Mr. Polly (1910). All references are to this edition.

comparison with Keith Waterhouse's Billy Liar. Here again, through language and fantasy, a character resists the pressures of his world, sustains the vitality of his self against the undertaking firm who employ him and the deadening experience of personal relations with individuals such as the Witch and Rita. His invention of jokes becomes in this context an analogy for artistic activity. In both Billy's case and Polly's it would be too pretentious to call them types of artist but certainly they embody the artistic impulse, existing as they do in a particular kind of creative conflict with their society. When the latter goes to Canterbury Wells writes:

...in the Middle Ages he would, no doubt, have sat upon a scaffolding and carved out penetrating and none too flattering portraits of church dignatories upon the capitals... (3)

and the music he hears there makes a strong appeal to him. In a different society, a more organic one, Polly would have had the opportunity to express himself through his work. Wells then, continues in a diluted form, the traditional Victorian idealisation of the Middle Ages in contrast to the modern world. That world is necessarily represented most intensely for Polly by his work; the imagery, conventionally enough, is that of imprisonment. Looking out of a carriage window the domination of work in his imagination transforms the passing landscape into a vision of blankness.

...in which every possible congenial seemed either toiling in a situation or else looking for one with a gnawing and hopelessly preoccupying anxiety. He stared out of the window at the exploitation roads of suburbs and rows of houses all very much alike, either emphatically and impatiently To Let, or full of rather busy unsocial people. (5)

In this environment the survival of the aesthetic impulse is inevitably a precarious matter. Fairly near the beginning

there occurs the dismissal of Parsons, the natural leader of the '3 ps', who becomes possessed by new ideas about window-dressing. Wells writes:

There are events that detach themselves from the general stream of occurrences and seem to partake of the nature of revelations. Such was this Parsons affair. It began by seeming grotesque, it ended disconcertingly. The fabric of Mr. Polly's daily life was torn, and beneath it he discovered depths and terrors. Life was not altogether a lark. (2)

Art then, as it is embodied in the creativity of the lower-class individual can imply rebellion, for in a certain type of social context it must either be extinguished or become separated from that context through a stance of revolt. The window-dressing scene is comic but the meaning it embodies is a genuinely tragic one.

The value of art is also undermined for Polly himself by his social position, for it encourages a strong strain of romanticism in his nature that necessarily loses touch with the actualities of life. There is his reading for example. He enjoys stories set in foreign lands, especially in the East but he is unable to get on with Dickens. Literature offers him not a way of deepening his awareness of reality but an escape from its confines. Even with Shakespeare his response reduces the worth of the art. The escapist, idealising tendency of his imagination is most significantly apparent in his encounters with the girl he meets whilst cycling:

Then romance appeared. Or to be exact, romance became audible. Romance began as a series of small but increasingly vigorous movements on the other side of the wall, then as a voice murmuring, then as a falling of little fragments on the other side as ten pink finger-tips, scarcely apprehended before romance became startlingly

and emphatically a leg...(5)

Wells accepts here that for Polly the girl does represent romance but through the ironic tone in which he presents her, the emphasis on the details of the way she becomes visible, he suggests the unreal, the literary quality of the whole incident. He falls in love but the extravagant manner in which this is described suggests the remoteness of the experience from reality:

And Mr. Polly fell in love, as though the world had given way beneath him and he had dropped through into another, into a world of luminous cloud and of a desolate, hopeless wilderness of desiring and of wild valleys of unreasonable ecstasy... (5)

Necessarily the disappointment will be sharp and bitter, for when he tries to break out of the role he has created for himself he is rejected. Attempting to climb the wall he falls:

Then the grip of Mr. Polly's fingers gave, and he hit his chin against the stones and slipped clumsily to the ground again, scraping his cheek against the wall, and hurting his shin against the log by which he had reached the top. (5)

As is the case elsewhere, the physical here acts as an image for the internal; his pain is really an emotional one. Through a romanticisation of real life, through the idealisation of an upper-class girl who suggests to Polly all the beauty, grace and wonder he has read about and admired he is forced then to suffer intense disillusionment. Art makes for this disillusionment because for the lower-class individual it cannot exist in any close relationship with him; it stands as a world apart and detached, and has sustaining significance only while that remoteness remains. He can be seen as a potential artist in another way too: "He wanted - what did he want most in life? I think his distinctive craving is best expressed as fun - fun in companionship." (5) The need and desire

to communicate are very strong in his nature. His early relations with Parsons and Platt remain with him as an indication of what real friendship could be. After he leaves his original employment he is only able to find weak substitutes. In the two set scenes of the novel - the funeral and the wedding - the main impression is of noisy conviviality in which individuals act out what they consider to be the appropriate or expected roles. To achieve a lost intimacy he marries, but he finds himself locked into a relationship of non-communication. In the area where he sets up his shop, neighbours are unfriendly and hostile. Polly finds it practically impossible to form satisfying personal relations. The choice for him is really between an imprisoning and stultifying intimacy in a typical lower middle-class marriage or rejection by individuals content in their own narrow isolation. Genuine, creative communication seems in the world of the novel an impossibility.

Wells, thus, in the work, examines the significance of culture as it exists in real life. He was not simply content to value it in an abstract form, to stand in awe of it but felt the necessity to see it in relationship to other areas of human experience.

The book contains, in various ways, severe qualifications of the importance and value of the artistic pursuit. Ultimately Wells perceives that it cannot exist in a worthwhile form in a social context that denies the impulse of creativity, and suspects it is not an adequate means for obtaining change in that society. Meaningless revolt, painful disillusionment, empty communication or isolation are Polly's lot. Finally he

can take it no longer - thinks about suicide and then in the midst of the destruction he has begun, obeys the will to live and runs away. In the world of the Potwell Inn he becomes a hero, he lives out in actuality the adventures he has read about through his life - becoming a genuine knight rescuing a lady from evil. The rendering is escapist but escape in the work now has a thematic significance for there is, for the potential artist, no other alternative. If the impulse he embodies cannot exist in the representative social world that is portrayed, then the most impressive way of stating this is for Wells to separate his own fiction from that world, to incorporate his cultural perception, in other words, into the form of the novel. There is no real attempt to suggest that the last episode should be regarded as of a piece with the relatively realistic scenes that have gone before. Polly's journey to his final destination is described in a language that suggests its relaxed and idyllic nature, its fantastic quality:

He crossed some misty meadows by moonlight and the mist lay low on the grass, so low that it scarcely reached above his waist, and houses and clumps of trees stood out like islands in a milky sea, so sharply defined was the upper-surface of the mist-bank. (9)

and he sees Christable, the school-girl again. For this land he is entering is one of romance - an aesthetic world in which Wells surrenders his fiction, as it were, to his hero and allows him to live out his comprehension of art. For Polly the conclusion of the novel is a triumph, for the novelist it represents a defeat. The problem of class and culture which he had attempted to examine and come to terms with in the work proved insoluble, for his perception of the divisions,



conflicts and tensions between them was so deep that only in their separation could he close his book.

### Conclusion

Through four major social novels Wells wrote then, there can be observed a common preoccupation. In Love and Mr. Lewisham, the hero has to abandon education because he cannot live happily in its world; in Kipps the hero abandons conventional culture because not to do so would be to betray his class identity; in Tono-Bungay the hero finds a substitute for traditional culture in the activity of his Uncle but is left at the end only with science. Finally, in The History of Mr. Polly the truths learnt earlier are incorporated into a novel, which stresses less growth and searching (it begins in the middle, as it were) but the significance and consequence of the discovery that the conflict between culture and a class society is too acute for solution. Thus through the four works there is apparent a profound anxiety about the significance of art and education, a profound need to justify its existence. David Lodge has claimed that Wells felt a deep guilt about his success.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps it is this which motivates his concern with the problem but not necessarily, for simply being an aware artist with a lower-class background in a developing mass and democratic society, meant facing directly the central issue of the relationship between art and society.

In Love and Mr. Lewisham, Kipps, Tono-Bungay and Mr. Polly he dealt with the issues from different angles, with different emphases. At the same time he was writing scientific fantasies and sociological treatises but the main energy went into the

42. David Lodge, The Novelist at the Crossroads (1971), pp. 219-220.

novels, for there he was obliquely coming to terms with his own role as writer. The book that followed Mr. Polly and the rejection of realism at its end, was The New Machiavelli, the first of his attempts to deal with the public world directly in fiction, the first in which a self-opini<sup>o</sup>ated narrator is given his head and in which the life of the private individual and his particular social milieu shrinks into relative unimportance. The absence of the traditional art of the novelist here suggests the urgency with which Wells encountered the theme of class and culture in the fiction that preceded the novel.

-x On the outcome of the encounter the shape of his future work was dependent.

### CHAPTER 3

#### D.H. LAWRENCE

##### Lawrence and Wells

One of the most significant connections between Victorian and modern literature is that between H.G.Wells and D.H. Lawrence. Both novelists sought very self-consciously to transform the novel, to enable it to deal with contemporary historical experience and both claimed for it a new importance which involved going, in different ways, beyond the moral exploration of character. Neither writer was afraid of the prophetic role.

Although Lawrence criticised his predecessor, his early immense enthusiasm (especially for Tono-Bungay) continued well into his career.<sup>1</sup> The book must have revealed to the young author certain possibilities of subject-matter and form. Its colloquial flexibility of voice, its panoramic range, its use of the autobiographical structure as a controlling centre, the connections it makes between the inner life of personal relationships and the public one, its integration of symbol into a basically realistic texture, above all its representation of the dynamics of growth and change can be felt in Lawrence's

1. See The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, ed. H.T.Moore (1962), i, 51 and 226.

own fiction.

In addition, the two writers were deeply involved in the new movements of thought and feeling which were undermining traditional assumptions and ways of thinking. Socialism, feminism, the relations between the sexes - these were the issues that provided matter for debate in their particular worlds. It might seem a long way from Mr. Lewisham to Ursula Brangwen but they are the creations of novelists intimately responsive to the potential wonder of knowledge and new ideas for the young and mobile individual and to the felt meaning of institutional learning in a class context. Through them it is possible to feel the quickening and liberating significances of the social changes taking place, sense the emergence of new, more difficult and precarious roles and opportunities.

Essential distinctions also, however, have to be made for the temptation is to see them both as working-class writers who, through adopting a literary career, were able to rise socially. Perhaps the most important point to emphasise, in this respect, is that for Wells literature was an aspect of a wider effort to move upwards, whereas for Lawrence it was absolutely fundamental. It's not that the former did not take fiction seriously or that he was willing to use it for ulterior ends but more that his idea of himself as author was radically different from his successor's. The latter had to become a writer, as it were, in the working-class environment in which he was born. He could move out of this environment - become a pupil-teacher, go to University, become a schoolmaster - but the crucial experience was located very firmly in the

in his original background; there he had to achieve his identity.<sup>2</sup> For Wells, teaching, writing articles for mass circulation periodicals, getting accepted by the literary establishment and being a novelist were all part of the same process. Early in his career, he is unsure, experimental, needing the confirmation of his social superiors; he makes himself into a writer. Lawrence is a writer from the start, not because he is better but because he has a more romantic and self-sufficient comprehension of what it means.<sup>3</sup> His anxieties concern not the opinion of editors but the opinion of his contemporaries; there is no doubt that he is capable of being a poet.<sup>4</sup> It would be easy to dismiss this as arrogance and leave it at that but the significance of this confidence must be understood, for it means that having few doubts about his talent and destiny, his problem centres upon being a working-class novelist, that is on discovering how to live as an artist in the imaginative world of his early years rather than upon the difficulties of social mobility. He did undergo the latter but the experience remains curiously apart from his role as author. Thus, as a student and as a schoolmaster in Croydon, he saw education as a distraction from the business of writing.<sup>5</sup> Being a novelist had little to do with fulfilling class aspirations. What was more fundamental was its meaning for him as an individual. It was the separation that it implied that counted; a separation which

2. See Graham Holderness, "Lawrence, Leavis and Culture", Working Papers in Cultural Studies (Spring 1974), pp. 85-110 for a discussion of the process through which Lawrence made himself a writer. Holderness stresses that he had to live out the conflicting tensions within his social world at the same time as having to go beyond them.
3. See Edward Nehls, ed. D.H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography, Madison (Wisconsin) Press (1959), i, 70-71.
4. See Jessie Chambers, D.H. Lawrence: A Personal Record, 2nd. ed. (1965), p.57.
5. See Collected Letters, i, 31-32 and J.T. Boulton, ed. Lawrence in Love, Nottingham (1968), pp.134-135 and p.148.

went beyond social or economic definitions.

Central to that experience is the failure of acknowledgement. Educational or financial success could be grasped and responded to but artistic genius merely provoked puzzlement and suspicion. The problems he faced in his home background were to remain crucial to Lawrence in his development as a writer. Drawing his imaginative resources from there, the more in his imagination he places himself within its experiential world, the more he penetrates into its reality, the more he puts himself outside its range of understanding and sympathy. Wells escaped these difficulties by absorbing the tensions and strains he faced into a socially mobile career, so that one kind of separation incorporated another. Lawrence, taking his education and social advance more for granted, for his path, in many respects, was easier and more straightforward had to experience directly the alienation of being a working-class artist. This alienation is a profound one; it issues from a radical division between the finished product - the book and the producer responsible for it, for the former represents a further stage in the progressive separation of the latter; creativity for the creator thus, paradoxically, has destructive implications. It is necessary not to melodramatise the process. Obviously there existed a minority, such people as Jessie Chambers and the friends of his pupil-teacher days, who could respond, but they themselves were growing away from their original community; the deep rooted nature of the process can be gauged from the necessity Lawrence felt to make the extreme break he did with his past life. His move to Croydon was natural, part of a normal young man's progress in the world but the decision to run away with Frieda

and to live abroad, signifies something else - the need to seal and confirm a separation that had become too difficult to live with, the need to make the mutual tensions and rejections between the writer and his background, into an exile that would break them, and free Lawrence from their burden. In his later life, through his outspoken and individualistic political and social beliefs, and his direct challenge to the prevailing conventional standards of taste, he made that exile more radical and intense. It is as if he had to provoke rejection and thus make his original separation from his working-class environment a more general and abstract one: it was a way, perhaps, of seeking to reduce its significance.

The fundamental experience of Lawrence's early life can be felt in the fictional world of his work. It would be wrong to make a reductive generalisation that failed to account for its variety, but there does seem to be running through much of it a profound concern with growth and separation. There is the historical decline of community recorded in The White Peacock and The Rainbow, there is the repeated emphasis upon the constantly altering strains within the family - between a socially superior wife and coarse husband as in plays such as The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd and The Daughter-in-Law, in short stories such as "Adolph" and "Rex" and between the generations in A Collier's Friday Night and a tale such as 'The Christening'.

Another way of stating this would be to say that alienation is the characteristic experience, for the term suggests the manner in which the conflicts and frustrations of people cannot be dealt with through choice; they are part of an ongoing process. Out of community and harmony tension comes, out of

tension new possibilities; there is no ideal state which can be striven for or has been lost. The vision is ironic, relativistic and comic rather than tragic. Lawrence's fiction then is shaped out of two kinds of alienation - that of the man himself and that present in the world he presents. It is tempting to say that the latter is a reflection of the former, that the novelist's concern with separation mirrors his own state. In part this is true but the relationship is not a simple one, for the two aspects work subtly upon each other in a constant process of modification. Thus, the writing of Sons and Lovers, which has at its centre the issue of the artist's apartness, alters the nature and meaning of Lawrence's own situation. In part he recognised this. He writes to a friend: "I felt you had gone off from me a bit, because of Sons and Lovers. But one sheds one's sicknesses in books - repeats and presents again one's emotions, to be master of them."<sup>6</sup> It is not simply that fiction could provide a perspective upon previously unresolved emotions but also that it could alter and redefine them. The fact that whilst writing the novel he persisted in sending his drafts to Jessie Chambers for her comments suggests how the process of creation was closely connected with Lawrence's continuing effort to come to terms with the role of working-class writer. The alienation recorded and the novelist's own alienation thus closely interacted.

### The White Peacock

In The White Peacock the two forms of alienation can be observed together, connected but still independent of each other.

6. Collected Letters, i, 234. - - -



Lawrence wrote the novel between 1907 and 1910, during the period which saw his departure from Nottingham University College, his search for suitable employment and his final decision to take up a teaching post in London because of the greater financial rewards. Part of a letter he wrote in 1908 gives an interesting insight into his state of mind at the time of writing:

And I am poor - and my mother looks to me - and I shall either have to wear motley all my days and be an elementary school-teacher, or be an elementary school-teacher without motley - a lamentable figure I should cut - unless I can do something with that damned damnation of a 'Laetitia', which is almost the sole result of my college career - except of course, loss of my mental and moral boyhood and gain<sup>n</sup> scepticism. 7

Here the particular stress he must have undergone as a working-class artist is apparent, his feeling that he needs to conform to his mother's expectations and his hope that he need not devote himself to school-teaching to accomplish this. The novel he is writing is seen both as a way of fulfilment and a way of attaining success. It also parallels the mental and moral development he notes that he has undergone whilst at college and mirrors in certain respects the experience of transition and disruption which the move to Croydon involved.

The unique quality of The White Peacock emerges from the interaction of these different elements. It has a self-consciously literary feel, makes an almost calculated appeal to a general consensus about what fine writing consists in. The dominant preciousness though, is only an aspect of a wider remoteness the book possesses which has to do with the form of narrative technique employed, with its pastoral setting,

7. Collected Letters, i, 10. - - - - -

with its mode of characterisation and with the total mood which envelopes it.

Yet this quality of distance exists side by side with the fact that in the novel unassimilable areas of Lawrence's experience can be located; the presentation of the father and of Cyril's relationships with Emily and George provide obvious outlets for some of the writer's deepest anxieties. Art and life are not then integrated in the fiction, for the novelist is still formulating his particular creative comprehension of the world. He seems in The White Peacock to be testing out his sense of the possible conflict between aesthetic criteria and an alien reality, and working out ways of going beyond it.

This quality of experimentation is re-enforced by the narrative technique Lawrence employs, for by placing a representative of himself in the fiction he produced a theoretical effect of openness. Cyril is a difficult figure to come to terms with, mainly because he functions both as a narrator and an independent character in his own right. Only spasmodically does he emerge, however, as an individual apart from his observing role, when for example he sees his father's corpse, or when he is together with Emily.

In spite of this, the central experience he undergoes through the novel is fundamental to its meaning. For his apartness from the main action, to a degree, parallels a wider thematic interest in the theme of alienation. Listening to Lettie and Leslie courting, Cyril sits and watches the clouds:

It seemed as if everything were being swept along - I

myself seemed to have lost my substance, to have become detached from concrete things and the firm trodden pavement of every day life. Onward, always onward, not knowing where nor why, the wind, the clouds, the rain and the birds and the leaves, everything whirling along - why? (i, 7) 8

That intense detachment and internal loss of connection is given a more concrete and social emphasis elsewhere, for there occurs in the work the disintegration of the community in which the characters live and their dispersal.

It would be a mistake to see this purely in terms of loss. In one sense, all that happens is that the external reality comes to reflect the internal. When rootlessness emerges it is nonetheless painful and real:

I suffered acutely the sickness of exile in Norwood. For weeks I wandered the streets of the suburb, haunted by the spirit of some part of Nethermere. As I went along the quiet roads where the lamps in yellow loneliness stood among the leafless trees of the night I would feel the feeling of the dark, wet bit of path between the wood meadow and the brooks... (iii, 3)

The nostalgic longing expressed here is not, however, for a loss of community but for a landscape in which the individual could lose his identity; the immaturity of the emotion is implicitly present. The question is to what extent is the immaturity Lawrence's and to what extent Cyril's, for through expressing a sense of exile in that form, the novelist, himself, in the process of separating from his home background, can avoid the difficult task of registering the human meaning of the experience. When the narrator returns near the end he finds Emily altered, thus preventing him from having to face his own past relationship to her. The contrast is with the 'Shades of Spring', in which Syson realises his own earlier

8. D.H. Lawrence, The White Peacock (1911). All references are to this edition.

errors of judgement; nostalgia is not simply qualified but exposed. Central to the story is the tragedy that Hilda's ambitions for her lover caused their separation:

'You triumphed in the wine-merchants offer to send me to Cambridge, to befriend his only child. You wanted me to rise in the world. And all the time you were sending me away from you - every new success of mine put separation between us, and more for you than for me.' 9

The perception goes very deep into Lawrence's own experience <sup>10</sup> and is certainly far more related to real emotion than the lyrical longing for a lost scenery and vague regret that its power over his imagination has faded, which is in The White Peacock.

That the feelings of rootlessness are focused within Cyril suggests their closeness to Lawrence's own, for in spite of the insipid elements in his character making for a world-weary passivity, his delicate sensitivity, capacity for enthusiastic friendship, intelligence and kindness suggest an idealised version of the writer, one that is incorrect only by omission. He stands at the centre of the novel, connecting its various strands, mediating its various meanings. The stance is that of the intellectual, caught between conflicts and tensions, watching rather than acting. His relationship with George is marked by the educational and cultural differences between them as well as by a more basic, almost physical attraction. For him, the farmer, in his masculine strength, in his insensitive attitude to nature, in his direct enjoyment of labour and lack of a narrow mental

9. D.H.Lawrence, "The Shades of Spring", in The Prussian Officer (1914), p.70.

10. See D.H.Lawrence, "Return to Bestwood" (1926), Phoenix 11, eds. Robert Warren and M.T.Moore (1968) pp. 257-266.

self-consciousness represents a type of ideal working man. Throughout, the strain of romanticism is present, most often in scenes in which he is shown actually in the fields. The romanticisation though is not simple-minded, for the limits of the character are very clearly seen. He seems childlike in his frustrated passion and irresponsibility. The novel seeks to trace his development - the growth of the impulse to take decisive action. The crucial point comes when the Caxtons are given notice to quit Strelley Mill and George looks at some Beardsley sketches:

'I'd been sort of thinking about it - since father had that notice. It seemed as if the ground was pulled from under our feet. I never felt so lost. Then I began to think of her - but not clear, till you showed me those pictures. I must have her if I can - and I must have something.' (ii,3)

The contrast then, between the disruption and disorder of life and the stable, clear forms of art, focuses itself upon George's attention and causes him to aspire to the former in the figure of the educated and cultured Lettie. What this signifies is most apparent in what his failure means. The devitalising, painful degeneration he undergoes is finely dramatised:

'You feel awful, like a vacuum, with a pressure on you, a sort of pressure of darkness, and you yourself - just nothing, a vacuum - that's what it's like - a little vacuum that dark, all loose in the middle of a space of darkness, that's pressing on you.' (iii,5)

The tragedy is that his aspirations were inevitable, for his own social group was in the process of disruption, with his parents planning to move to London and Emily moving into higher circles through her job and marriage. The rootlessness then he experiences, the extreme decline which overtakes him towards the end is not simply that of the risen working-class individual who feels insecure in his new environment but of

the individual caught between two sorts of impossible position. Unable to stay where he is and unable to go forward he is a victim of a society that has forced mobility upon people without making provision for it.

For the intellectual, the working man's alienation mirrors his own, providing, however, an intenser version of it, for Cyril has the protection of culture and education, whereas George has to fight through the separation totally exposed. Implied in the work is a disillusion with the idea of the proletarian hero which does not basically undermine a fundamental attraction, an attraction composed of unresolved personal feelings that move beneath the surface of the relationship.

If in The White Peacock George's history represents the human significance of social aspiration and failure, Lettie's represents that of aspiration and success. It would be wrong to conclude from her behaviour that she is merely a self-seeking adventuress. The matter is more complex than this. A quick, discontented restlessness defines her character:

Difficult to please in every circumstance; she, who had always been so rippling in thoughtless life, sat down in the window to think, and her strong teeth bit at her handkerchief till it was torn in holes. She would say nothing to me; she read all things that dealt with modern woman. (i,7)

The rebellious quality she has issues paradoxically from her failure to resist the temptation of conventionality.

Repeatedly she seems to move away from marriage to Leslie but ultimately she goes through with it.

It is important at this point to recognise the significance of class in this decision. It is taken within a context of bitter social conflict occasioned by the miners' strike and defeat, and in an environment perverted by snobbery, as the

picnic scene reveals. Her choice forces on her a form of living which gradually alters her. A natural grace, revealed in her dancing, becomes an artificial pose; a girlish vitality becomes a statuesque stillness; and most importantly her quick careless enjoyment of life hardens into cynicism. Discovering her outer life to lack meaning she devotes herself to the maternal role. And it is this devotion that finally means she breaks with George.

The trouble with this characterisation of Lettie is that the precise causes of her decline remain unarticulated. Obviously the repression of her feelings for George plays a part but to what extent the upper-class world which she enters is a contributory factor is not particularly clear, for that world is not presented in depth. A comparison of The White Peacock, in this respect, with 'Daughters of the Vicar', which finely delineates the rigid shallowness that distinguishes bourgeois life in Lawrence's fiction, demonstrates the limitations of the novel. Leslie, unlike Lindley, in the short story, has not sufficient depth of embodiment to assume a representative significance in the work. His narrow snobbishness is made clear in his attitude to George, his inability, similar to that of Cecil in Where Angels fear to Tread, to treat women as equals is revealed in political discussion with Lettie, but the perception of these failings in human relations is not sustained and given significance. He is injured before his marriage and becomes very weak, and after it the narrator writes of his development:

I found a good deal of difference in Leslie since his marriage. He had lost his assertive self-confidence. He no longer pronounced emphatically and ultimately on every subject, nor did he seek to dominate, as he had always done in the company in which he found himself.(iii,3)

Nothing in the work justifies this radical change. It is as if Lawrence in The White Peacock is still too unsure in his attitude to the middle-classes to turn his insight into their life into a totally coherent critique. Leslie does not emerge as a fully comprehended character but as a sketch for future use. It is a mixture of idealism and distrust that seems at the root of the portrait. Lettie's history in consequence is blurred.

The contrast it offers with George's, however, seems fairly plain. Whereas he is overwhelmed by reality so that his identity has no direction, she reduces reality to a single form of activity in the production and rearing of children, so that her identity has no substance. For Lawrence these two versions of the experience of social and cultural aspiration must have expressed profound anxieties about his own situation and fate. As George and Lettie, he was attracted by the life of refinement but it is not a case of simple snobbery. The point is that he is unsure and tentative, divided between his attraction to the cultural world of the metropolis and his undeniable consciousness of his own close connection with the working-class.<sup>11</sup>

It is in this light that The White Peacock's concern with social aspiration should be seen. The particular quality of the book issues from the fact that it embodied his aspirations at the same time as questioning the possibility of real achievement. In it two kinds of alienation are at work - that of Lawrence himself, reflected directly in the position

11. See D.H.Lawrence: A Composite Biography, i, 137 and 217 for evidence of Lawrence's tendencies towards snobbery and Collected Letters, i, 176 for a sense of the complexity of Lawrence's feelings in this area.



of Cyril in the novel and that of Lawrence the novelist, reflected in the thematic significance of the character's development. The narrator's story never really connects with that of George and Lettie. This separation suggests the writer's failure to wholly commit himself to his art, his inability or unwillingness to explore through his fiction his own situation both as man and writer.

### Sons and Lovers

By the time of writing Sons and Lovers, Lawrence's distance from his background was becoming extreme. The move he had made to Croydon had disturbed and worried him. In a letter to Jessie Chambers on his second day there he expressed in an intense imagery his fears:

Finally he said he felt afraid for himself; cut off from us all he would grow into something black and ugly, like some loathesome bird. <sup>12</sup>

It was the death of Mrs. Lawrence, however, which represented the ultimate separation. Instead of turning to Jessie he becomes engaged to Louie Burrows. It is as if he is seeking out the new, knowing that now he is no longer able to live with the elements of his past. Nor can he fully enter the metropolitan literary world which the publication of his first novel had made available to him. <sup>13</sup>

The book is started when he feels insecure and unstable, and it is continued abroad whilst living with Frieda, in even greater isolation from his early home. His alienation, which had been implicit previously, is becoming part of a conscious perspective available for mature comprehension and articulation. Thus, the aesthetic remoteness The White Peacock suffered from has disappeared; the gap between the writer and his world

12. D.H. Lawrence: A Personal Record, p.151.

13. See D.H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography, i, 142 and Collected Letters, i, 67 for evidence of Lawrence's difficulties in entering the established literary world.

has been recognised and therefore can be bridged.

If the remoteness has gone, however, so has that sense of total, inclusive community the previous book realised as well. Nevertheless, in spite of the conflicts and disintegrating tendencies it contained, was felt as a whole. The world of Sons and Lovers is felt as disparate and fragmented. The closeness of the mining village is apparent, when Morel is ill, the Leiver's home offers a pastoral cosiness and in the factory where Paul works there is, amongst the employees, a genuine spirit of friendliness. These positives, however, are set in a more general awareness of division. Arnold Bennett, to a far greater extent conveys, in Anna of Five Towns, the active meaning of community. Having experienced and partially absorbed the experience of alienation Lawrence is not especially interested in wholeness and harmony; he finds in his youthful environment reflections and parallels for his own state of separation.

Nor should the immediate and vivid responsiveness of the novel obscure the very real rather than aesthetic distance of the novelist from the characters he is portraying. In The White Peacock there was a genuine interest in George and Lettie, an attempt to realise them as distinct and free individuals. What should be stressed about Sons and Lovers is the way in which the majority of characters are subordinate to a preoccupation with the life of Paul. Obviously a great deal of attention is given to the figures of Miriam and Clara but they exist in the fiction really only as elements in the hero's world. This obviously has to do with the autobiographical stress of the book but what is important is the cause of that stress;

the choice of form is also a choice of stance and vision. That the novelist felt he needed this type of fiction, at this particular stage in his development, suggests his knowledge that the reality of his own apartness went too deep for him to realise a full and complete comprehension of his early background.

That apartness has a profound influence on the way the working-class world of the novel is presented. Lawrence's attitudes towards it were complex,<sup>14</sup> and this emerges in the portrayal of Morel. He is first directly pictured returning home rather drunk. It is possible to sympathise with his wife's antagonism but his warmth and generosity should not be underestimated. The scene in which he relates the episode in which he was given a coconut suggests his outgoing energy and talent for story-telling. This is related to the pleasure he enjoys in work and to his gift as a dancer. For the miner has an intuitive and deep-rooted creativity, a quality that should not be romanticised or dismissed as irrelevant in context of the other elements of his nature, but accepted as part of the world of the book. For the novel does concern itself with the growth of an artist and Paul's abilities cannot simply be accounted for by reference to his mother.

Within a certain range of understanding and sympathy, Morel has a very positive role. Certainly he throws a drawer at his wife but the action is a reflex one and he is almost instantly steeped in remorse. It is important to emphasise

14. See D.H.Lawrence: A Composite Biography, i, 43 and Collected Letters, i, 106.

the depths of his sorrow, how he feels that what he has done is shocking and shameful:

As he looked at her, who was cold and impassive as stone, with mouth shut tight, he sickened with feebleness and hopelessness of spirit. He was burning drearily away, when he saw a drop of blood fall from the averted wound into the baby's fragile, glistening hair. Fascinated he watched the heavy dark drop hang in the glistening cloud, and pull down the gossamer. Another drop fell. It would soak through to the baby's scalp. He watched fascinated, feeling it soak in; then, finally, his manhood broke. (2) 15

The violence does not assert his masculinity but destroys it.

The problem is that he is not willing to expose his sensitivity to his wife:

He lay and suffered like a sulking dog. He had hurt himself most; and he was the more damaged because he would never say a word to her, or express his sorrow. He tried to wriggle out of it. It was her own fault, he said to himself. Nothing, however, could prevent his inner consciousness inflicting on him the punishment which ate into his spirit like rust, and which he could only alleviate by drinking. (5)

It is important to note the sequence of this passage, the fact that his decision not to express his sorrow preceded the attempt to evade his responsibilities for the episode; the latter is in part the result of the former. For both partners are forced to play the rigid roles the nature of their conflict demands; there are moments when these break down, as in the period after the drawer-throwing incident, but for most of the time they shape responses and attitudes. When Walter comes down to eat the feeling is of him playing a part, seeking to fulfil the worst expectations of others. When later on Paul tells him of a prize he has won at school he refuses to show much interest; to do so would be to expose himself, to go beyond his role. That his attitude is a pose and not the expression of a real lack of affection for his children can

15. D.H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers (1913). All references are to this edition.

be sensed from the pride he feels in William when he improves his situation and from his sharing of the whole family's feelings of excitement and expectation on the youth's return for Christmas; his emotions are deep and strong. When he can be himself - in daily tasks around the house or in his emotional life, he embodies positive qualities and values, but when he feels himself the outsider he is most aggressive. Thus seeing Paul and his mother together in obvious emotional intimacy his temper is roused.

Yet, there is something unsatisfactory about the characterisation; it is as if his thematic alienation is imitated by his aesthetic alienation. His significance, that is to say, in terms of the novel's total world is not sufficiently absorbed and comprehended. It is taken for granted that there is a good deal of enmity between Paul and his father; in one scene they nearly come to blows. But this is never satisfactorily explored and accounted for. If the novel centres upon the growth of Paul than a closer and profounder treatment of that relationship is needed.

Something of what might have been achieved in this respect can be gathered from A Collier's Friday Night. It powerfully conveys the estrangement of the miner from his family; the way that his blackened figure is seen entering the house visually delineates the feeling that he belongs to another world. Like Morel, although the dramatisation is more explicit here, he plays up to his children's coarse expectations of him out of a deep resentment of their attitude. The parents' argument is the crucial point of comparison:

Mother...And that lad works ten times as hard as you do.  
Father. Does he? I should like to see him go down the pit every day! I should like to see him working every day in the hole. No, he won't dirty his fingers...  
I begrudge 'em nothing. I'm willing to do everythin for

'em, and 'ow do they treat me? Like a dog, I say, like a dog! 16

It is precisely this aspect of the relationship of the novelist with his family that Sons and Lovers omits. Paul at fourteen looks for a job whilst the writer continued his education, except for a brief pause until his late teens and early twenties. The difference is central, for it means that in the more ambitious and autobiographical novel Lawrence could avoid working out fictionally not only his relationship with his father but also by implication his relationship with the whole working-class world his father represented. In a fairly static way he could appreciate the values to be found there as well as the obvious limitations, but he could not penetrate into what was more important for him - his own connections with that world.

There is a failure in the novel then, to explore the thematic significance of alienation. What there is instead is a projection of the writer's own very personal sense of it, for Paul's history cannot be given a representative historical significance. Lawrence is not concerned with the typical biography of his time, with the lower-class youths who were beginning to benefit from the increasingly systematic educational provision of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is the exceptional individual that he is interested in. 17 In this light his failure to realise the theme of alienation as a general experience comes in part from his inability to satisfactorily penetrate his own relationship with the working-class, and from the growing self-consciousness

16. "A Collier's Friday Night", The Complete Plays of D.H. Lawrence (1965), p. 520.

17. See D.H. Lawrence: A Personal Record, p. 182 for Lawrence's identification of himself with the proletarian hero of J.M. Barrie's Sentimental Education, who is unable to find fulfilment through established channels. His stance at the close resembles Paul's, facing towards the town of Ursula's facing the possibilities of her own destiny at the end of The Rainbow.

and self-dramatisation of his own position of separation. These two aspects are obviously, however, not distinct, for it is precisely the former which shapes the latter.

For the novelist, the figure of the artist had considerable importance. His perspective was a romantic one, in his exalted view of the creative individual<sup>18</sup> and in his pessimistic view of the possible public for his work.<sup>19</sup> He never thought of art as a retreat from life but rather saw the artist's isolation as coming from the depth of his involvement in its flux; the artist felt and saw more than other people, had a divine gift. Thus he claims that his novels are written from his religious experience and believes that in them he can fulfil a prophetic role.

For the working-class individual of talent or genius the difficulties of sustaining this burden would be intense,<sup>20</sup> and Sons and Lovers it can be said, dramatises exactly what this means.<sup>21</sup> In the work Paul's growth constitutes not so much a progress in moral or social understanding as a process of learning to accept his own situation and destiny.

18. See Collected Letters, i, 285 and "Introduction to 'Memoirs of the Foreign Legion by Maurice Magnus,'" Phoenix 11, p. 359. (Note 15, p. 360 below)
19. See Collected Letters, i, 305 and "Introduction to Bibliography of the Writings of D.H. Lawrence" (1925), Phoenix, ed. E.D. McDonald. (1936), p. 232.
20. See Alfred Kazin, "Sons, Lovers and Mothers", Judith Farr, ed., Sons and Lovers: Twentieth Century Interpretations, New Jersey (1970), p. 79 for Chekov's view that the working-class artist 'purchases with his youth what his middle-class contemporary is born with'.
21. See Collected Letters, i, 167-168 for evidence that Lawrence was interested in the phenomenon of the working-class artist rather than merely his own personal experience; at the end of 1912 he was thinking about writing a novel based on the life of Robert Burns.

<sup>This is an</sup>  
1 abstract way of stating it but the achievement of Sons and Lovers is that the movement is rendered with such close subtlety and fluidity of perception.

The fact that Paul's case is meant to be exceptional is emphasised by the kinds of distinctions that are made between him and his brothers. The experience they undergo provides a context in which his own history can be placed. Their tragedies - the one of social advance, the other of social rebellion, establish the intense difficulties involved in the intelligent working-class youth's growth to maturity. The hero's development combines elements of both: as an artist he shares the alienation of aspiration and the alienation of individual revolt.

From the beginning the desire for social advance is associated with Mrs. Morel. Her ambitions for her son are, however, not clear. In one passage she thinks:

... he was going to make a man whom nothing should shift off his feet; he was going to alter the face of the earth in some way which mattered. (9)

But this vague and grandiose belief sits uneasily with her more conventional emphasis upon social success. In general terms, for her the public world of work and success is supreme. Although, then, she is obviously crucial for the hero in his development, providing him, as he admits, with the persistent determination to create, she in no way satisfies all his needs as an artist. He recognises this when he claims an identity with the common people. Her criticism, that for him the common people mean intellectual friends like Miriam, is a just one but that he needs to make this kind of emotional commitment suggests his dissatisfaction with the sort of bourgeois ethic Mrs. Morel



is dedicated to. When he learns that he has sold his first picture, Lawrence stresses the shock and fear he experiences at her reactions. These feelings should not be taken as conventional exaggerations, for it is in such moments that Paul perceives the hard, almost impersonal quality of his mother's attitude to his life. The movement then must be through and beyond her values, for Paul is not William and his needs and claims are more complex.

Miriam, very directly in the working-class world of the novel, represents another form that individual separation can take. She aspires to the realm of knowledge and aesthetic values:

She hated her position as swine-girl. She wanted to be considered. She wanted to learn, thinking that if she could read, as Paul said he could read, 'Colomba' or the 'Voyage autour de ma Chambre', the world would have a different face for her and a deepened respect. She could not be princess by wealth or standing. So she was mad to have learning whereon to pride herself. For she was different from other folk, and must not be scooped up among the common fry. Learning was the only distinction to which she thought to aspire. (7)

Not for utilitarian social reasons does she desire learning, nor because of disinterested academic purposes. Feeling different from her contemporaries, she needs education to confirm her own sense of identity.

For the hero the girl is vital to his art. Partly this is connected with the way in which the Leiver's family represents a kind of religious response to the world; in their presence the ordinary is heightened and intensified. This awareness obviously has strong links with the artist's experience of life. Under their influence the youth receives the vision and inspiration to create and learns to appreciate the significance of his art.

There is, however, the inevitable estrangement.

Essentially this is caused by Paul's unwillingness to enter into the sort of spiritual and intense relationship Miriam offers and demands. His rejection of her is a rejection of a certain type of alienation, a refusal to identify himself totally as artist with the cultured and refined sensitivity she embodies. The pastoral, intellectual romantic world associated with her is finally too cosy and aerified for him to accept it. The breaking with Miriam, however, is not a simple matter, for he discovers in the process, when the girl claims that their friendship had always been fraught with conflict and denies those perfect moments which Paul values so highly, that he had not been the heroic figure he believed himself to have been:

She should have told him when she found fault with him. She had not played fair. He hated her. All these years she had treated him as if he were a hero, and thought of him secretly as an infant, a foolish child. Then why had she left the foolish child to his folly? His heart was hard against her: (11)

In this light the end of the relationship with the girl is also the end of one type of possible self-image.

In moving away from Miriam, Paul turns to Clara. She is a difficult character to come to terms with but Lawrence captures her distinctive quality well, avoiding the easy clichés of the stereotype new woman, yet succeeding in suggesting her modernistic sensibility. To see her merely as the embodiment of the physical in contrast to Miriam's spirituality is to simplify. What the hero says of her—"Yes you do feel like one of the open space sort, trying to force yourself into the dark, don't you?" (9) is most precise and suggestive, for the sense that she is a frustrated and discontented rebel emerges most strongly.

Involved in feminism and radical politics, separated from her husband, having to work for a living she is a figure of resentment and isolation.

She seemed to be stranded there among the refuse that life has thrown away, doing her jennying. It was a bitter thing for her to be put aside by life, as if it had no use for her. No wonder she protested. (10)

a victim of the impersonal urban process. Yet there is nothing pathetic about her. Educated, she is conscious of her superiority and in the factory her apartness from the other women is very marked. For Paul.

She was ~~in a way~~ extraordinarily provocative, because of the knowledge she seemed to possess and gathered fruit of experience he could not attain. (10)

She seems to know, to have been through things. Her alienation is that of self-conscious revolt, a proud, unbending rigidity to her own perspective.

That word 'seemed' however in the passage just quoted, is significant, for, although Clara represents the posture of revolt, its quality is very questionable. In the first place, in spite of being separated from Baxter Dawes she feels that she still belongs to him. Towards the end she contrasts <sup>him</sup> favourably with Paul. Her criticism of the hero's instability has a fairly conventional ring to it and suggests that Clara is looking for a partner who is more human, with fewer difficult elements in his nature than Morel. And this aspect of her character explains in part his drift away from her: "Clara could not stand for him to hold on to. She wanted him, but not to understand him. He felt she wanted the man on top, not the real him that was in trouble." (14) Something of Clara's conventionality is suggested earlier on by, for example, the visit of the

couple to the theatre and Clara's desire that Morel wear evening dress, by her refusal to go to his room whilst he is staying in her mother's house, and by the scene after she has been taken to his house, in which she is preoccupied with the time; in spite of a seemingly passionate make-up, a certain wildness, she obeys the dictates of the railway timetable. It would be a mistake, however, to suggest she is a hypocrite or there is a manifest division within her character; the impression Lawrence achieves is more subtle, the outlines blurred by the depth of felt life evoked. The general thematic emphasis, however, is fairly plain. For once again, as was the case with his mother and Miriam, Paul has to reject one form of possible alienation as inadequate to his needs and demands. His experience of the sort of relationship Clara offers is profound, but he has to live through it, see it for what it is, for his separation as artist is of a different kind.

It is the pain involved in that separation which emerges in the last part of Sons and Lovers. Here, Paul, under the pressure of isolation, sterility and a sense of futility struggles to live with himself:

Everything seemed so different, so unreal. There seemed no reason why people would go along the street, and houses pile up in the daylight. There seemed no reason why these things should occupy the space, instead of leaving it empty. His friends talked to him; he heard the sounds, and he answered. But why there should be the noise of speech he could not understand. (15)

His whole identity is dislocated, he feels an intense removal from the actual life around him. This experience was potentially present early on in the boy's extreme sensitivity when he had to collect his father's pay and in

Miriam's observation: "And she had discovered him, discovered in him a rare potentiality, discovered his loneliness." (7) That solitude goes deeper than any of the other sorts of alienation realised in the novel; it includes them all. Paul has to exist with it, but also to embrace it. Thus, significantly, it is he who is the direct agent of his mother's death, who refuses finally to marry Miriam and who allows Clara to return to Dawes: he makes, to a certain extent, his position, his alienation. His turn at the book's close towards the town and life carries the weight of the thematic movement of the novel, for only in facing the radical separation embodied in his character can he come to terms with it; survival is the great achievement. And that he is finally to survive is hinted by the growth of his friendship with Dawes, for this represents a new kind of connection with life radically different from the sort he discovers with the three major female protagonists. Instead of being intellectual and apart, Baxter is unintellectual and very much mixed up with the turmoil of life. For Paul he signifies the possibility of going beyond his loneliness to the world. It remains in the work only a possibility, for the main stress falls on the way that the hero's position includes the social, spiritual and emotional alienation of Mrs. Morel, Miriam and Clara, from their lower-class backgrounds, and in so doing transforms their differing situations into something more painful, complex, and potentially creative.

Given this thematic significance of Sons and Lovers it is important to note a certain unsatisfactoriness in the way that the development of Paul is presented, for although

he is obviously moving from youth to manhood through the work, the lines of this progress are not particularly clear. Partly this has to do with the extent to which the meanings of the fiction are immersed in its creative life but it is also the result of Lawrence's close identification with his hero, the fact that with too much emphasis he expresses his own sense of alienation, swamping the novel and forcing Paul into a self-consciousness that seems excessive. The particular and precise forms of separation experienced by the working-class individual to do with education, the attitudes of parents and friends, difficulties of communication and a sense of uprootedness are then to some degree overwhelmed by the general pressure of the feeling of separation, projected into the novel by the writer himself. This is the cause of the distinguishing atmosphere of Sons and Lovers - its claustrophobic intensity, the result of emotion that often seems disconnected from the actual substance of the fiction.

### The Rainbow

If Sons and Lovers is distinguished by the failure of Lawrence to disassociate himself sufficiently from his hero's experience and The White Peacock by his failure to enter sufficiently his protagonist's experience, The Rainbow represents such an outstanding achievement because it succeeds in attaining a balanced poise between the two earlier positions. The characters in the novel have an independence and freedom of being and at the same time seem in very close contact with the novelist. In The Rainbow then, the two forms of alienation that compose Lawrence's world are fused; the writer's personal concerns

and his themes achieve a creative integration. This emerges most clearly in the distinctively impersonal but warmly humane tone of the narration; for here it is apparent that the writer's separation from his original community has become transformed into a type of freedom in which a new language and vision can be made.

The novel has an enormous range and variety of interest. There is clearly present, however, a fundamental concern throughout with the possible nature and significance of individual aspiration. From the opening, which obviously is more than a simple piece of scene setting but seeks to establish certain characteristic rhythms and patterns of feeling and insight, the dominant thematic note is sounded:

The Brangwens had lived for generations on the Marsh farm, in the meadows where the Erewash twisted sluggishly through alder trees, separating Derbyshire from Nottinghamshire. Two miles away, a church-tower stood on a hill, the house of the little country town climbing assiduously up to it. Whenever one of the Brangwens in the fields lifted his head from his work, he saw the church-tower at Ilkestone in the empty sky. So that as he turned again to the horizontal land, he was aware of something standing above him in the distance. (1) 22

In the first paragraph there is present the fundamental structure - on the one hand the sluggish river and on the other, on a hill, a church tower and town to which the Brangwens look. The landscape defines a psychological and social reality, through establishing the two forms of aspiration at work throughout the novel - the spiritual and the material. The latter is emphasised strongly in the first chapter. The main impression is of the positive elements involved; an imagery of travel and words such as 'Wonder', 'poem', and 'strange' stress the value of ambition.

22. D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (1915). All references are to this edition.

Through the novel, however, its difficulties are emphasised - wrong choices, perhaps Anna choosing Will; the inhuman faces of institutions, such as Ursula's school; the problem of distinguishing between fulfilment and success prevent a simple and clear forward movement. In one way achievement makes for failure. Thus Will's gain in status leads him to resist Ursula's desire to become a school-teacher. This complex form of insight is also present in visual terms from the start: the canal built in 1840 to connect the new colliers of the area, cuts off Marsh Farm from Ilkestone. Progress and regression are therefore both instigated by the same means. Within this almost paradoxical structure the Brangwens have to live out their frustrations and desires.

Tom Brangwen is the first major protagonist the novel deals with. In many respects he combines the various elements to be found in the brothers. There is the eldest boy's desire to escape, the creative impulse of Alfred who has a talent for drawing, which is crushed by the nature of his work and a concern for social status, and the weakness of Frank who takes to drink. At the wedding of Will and Anna, Tom and Alfred meet. The latter has moved away from the farm and talks about the need for having to stand and advance alone: "And again Tom Brangwen was humble, thinking his brother was bigger than himself. But if he was, he was. And if it were finer to go alone, it was; he did not want to go for all that." (5)

And yet the younger, although he has stayed rooted at home, has been strongly motivated by ambitions and dissatisfaction, has looked beyond the farm to discover the possibility of satisfaction. In his character there is



both social aspiration and the desire for creative fulfilment.

The former is reflected in the powerful impact that is made on him by his meeting with an upper-class foreigner and by his visit to his brother's mistress. Only after this visit do he and Anna discover a close union. The language which describes their coming together emphasises the way in which the man discovers himself in the woman:

The reality of her who was just beyond him absorbed him. Blind and destroyed he pressed forward, nearer, nearer, to receive the consummation of himself, he received within the darkness which should swallow him and yield him up to himself.  
(3)

Their consummation represents the achievement of freedom:

She was the doorway to him, he to her. At last they had thrown open the doors, each to the other, and had stood in the doorways facing each other, whilst the light flooded out from behind on to each of their faces, it was the transfiguration, the glorification, the admission. (3)

For Tom, having looked beyond his class and region for a way of freeing himself from the limits of his home environment, the discovery of space and liberty in his relationship with his wife is of supreme importance.

But the 'rainbow' does not last. Their child grows up and Tom declines. His history then partly embodies the experience of social aspiration, not in the crude sense of the simple desire for status and money, but more subtly and complexly in the desire he has for a kind of life that seems freer, offering more opportunities for proving one's worth. Through his marriage he succeeds to some extent in his aim but the stasis it offers does not satisfy the continual impulses which urge him forward.

In Anna these impulses become more urgent and sustained. The development of this next generation, although shaped by similar elements as the previous, seems more extreme in its nature. There is, for example, Tom who

suffers a failure of identity. He is associated with the oppressive ugliness of industrialism, with a rigid commitment to class exploitation in spite of his claim to dislike it, and with the lesbian Winifred, representative of a sterile sexuality. His success then, implies a drying up of his potential humanity. On the other hand to stay within the home circle is to experience the frustration of unrealised possibilities, as Fred does.

Within this kind of conflict, Anna's development should be placed. As a child she is seen as dynamic and restless. But her energy does not exist in a vacuum; it is connected with an eager discrimination that makes her reject the friendship of Tilly and at school hold herself apart; only people she does not know have a power over her. Her aspirations are not narrowly ambitious ones; the problem is finding an adequate focus for them in her society. In addition the hold of her home is a strong one; the attempt to draw away is not an easy matter:

There was in the house a sort of richness, a deep, inarticulate interchange which made other places seem thin and unsatisfying. (4)

Towards Baron Skrebensky's house she is however, strongly attracted. Given this, her marriage to Will is a radical mistake. From the start her laughter at his intense and serious singing suggests that their natures are in contradiction. Anna, in spite of her eccentricity, is limited in her awareness of the world by a fairly narrow perspective. In the pub with her father for example she had resented the light banter of the men and refused all sympathy for the deformed figure of Nat. Her imagination can take her out of her situation but does not really make

her capable of responding fully to it.

Towards Will she feels often an instinctive fear and hostility in face of the unknown, mysterious elements he embodies. Neither the intense emotion of matrimony nor the mechanical aspects of success can satisfy her. Once again Lawrence, in seeking to characterise her, attempts to articulate what this form of aspiration consists in: "Her soul was in quest of something, which was not just being good, and doing one's best. No she wanted something else; something that was not her readymade duty." (6) Later on he has recourse to the rainbow image:

And from her Pisgah mount, which she had attained, what could she see? A faint, glimmering horizon, a long way off, and a rainbow like an archway, a shadow-door with faintly coloured coping above it. Must she be moving thither? (6)

Given Anna's character, her belief in the power of the mind, her refusal to accept her husband's intense response to the cathedral they visit, the figure of the rainbow should not be mystified to too great an extent into a theological symbol. It provides a poetic metaphor for feelings, that although they lack in the novel precise definition, nevertheless emerge clearly in the course of Anna's characterisation. Through her history social aspiration is present both as a real dissatisfaction with her circumstances and as a tendency to romantic fantasy; it has however, not yet reached concrete and specific expression, although the signs of the latter process are clearly marked.

These signs are, to an extent, realised in the figure of Skrebensky. The connections between the latter and the former are not direct and manifest; he is perhaps

closer to Tom, her brother. However, Lawrence through the work is concerned with examining the significance of desire and ambition through the generations, with comprehending the phenomenon in a historical perspective. Thus when he writes -

So Ursula thought him wonderful, he was so finely constituted, and so distinct, self-supporting. This, she said to herself, was a gentleman, he had a nature like fate, the nature of an aristocrat. (11)

The passage refers back to Anna and her enchantment by the aristocratic world. He is the son of a baron, a soldier - a type which she and the women before her have romanticised about. The reality of his character therefore, is an implicit comment upon their social dreams and an embodiment of what those dreams mean in the new kind of world that is developing through the book. Of the major protagonists he seems, however, the least satisfactory creation precisely because he seems to too obviously typify all those qualities which Lawrence so much opposed. Yet, even given this, it is the novelist's achievement that he is able to arouse sympathy and understanding for him; his helplessness before Ursula, his collapse into tears when she seeks to question the permanence of their relationship, transforms him from being simply an object for animosity. That animosity nevertheless, is very deep. In Skrebensky the values of the external social world have become internalised. The individualism which is the basis of Anna's character is now extreme. Thus on his return to Nottingham:

He was free. Their trains and viaducts and theatres and public meetings were a shaken kaleidoscope to him, he watched as a lion or a tiger may be with narrowed eyes watching the people pass before its cage, the kaleidoscopic unreality of people, or a leopard lies blinking watching the incomprehensible feats of the keepers. He despised it all - it was all non-existent. (15)

The feline animal imagery superbly suggests the cunning

superiority he embodies - a superiority associated with the rigid, hierarchical structure and aggression of the army of which he is a member. Here then, in Skrebensky, the implications of social aspiration are drawn out, for it can mean not the triumph of the self over a hostile society as is the case with the self-made man but the sacrifice of that self to society.

The Rainbow is also concerned with the issue of creative fulfilment. In Tom Brangwen, alongside and allied to his attraction to the upper-classes, there runs what can, for convenience, be called an artistic impulse. Intellectually he is slow and for the most part he makes little impact at school but he is more refined than his fellow pupils and this quality enables him to respond deeply to poetry. Throughout this strain in his character is at work, forming part of that intense dissatisfaction with his life which frequently overtakes him. Only part, however, for it is balanced by the down-to-earth, more materialistic aspects of Tom's nature. His character includes both elements.

In the generation that follows, these elements separate out, can no longer be contained within the same individual. What is emphasised about Will is his intense and introspective nature, the way the outside world is of less import to him than the enclosed world he can create within himself and with the family. His passionate interest in church architecture, his enjoyment of and skill in wood carving, his talent for singing, his responsiveness to the intuitive and unspoken - all suggest that like Tom,

but to a greater degree, he can be seen as a type of artist, for only this word can really indicate the depth of creative potentiality he embodies.

That potentiality, however, is threatened by his relationship with Anna and the values she represents. In defence against her he significantly turns to a common girl. It would be a mistake to read too much into this, but in context of the social awareness of the novel as a whole, it does indicate that in the lower-class world both Will and Lawrence are seeking an alternative to the type of life his wife offers. The scene itself is rather inconclusive but on returning home he seems to possess a new strength and independence. It is as if his encounter has given him a foothold in an actuality significantly distinct from Anna's.

The creativity which previously had been totally mystical and spiritual begins to find expression in his teaching and art-work. The advance in maturity is considerable, as is the social progress that parallels it. The assumption of bourgeois cultural status is viewed critically by Lawrence but the criticism does not deny the positive value involved. When Will hears about the new post the novelist comments: "... it was as if a space had been given to him, into which he could remove from his hot, dusty enclosure." (14), and the whole scene of removal suggests a similar opening out: "They looked through the windows past the new red houses to the wooded hill across the valley. They had all a delightful sense of space and liberation, space and light and air." (14). In certain respects then, Will's history represents an ideal form

of development, consisting as it does of an integration of internal potentialities with the life of society. As Paul in Sons and Lovers, the artist figure in The Rainbow achieves the capacity to enter the latter through confronting his separation from the female and in the process discovering his own individual self-hood. The novelist then, can still, from his own stance of alienation, imagine the possibility of real fulfilment for the creative individual.

That fulfilment has to take place in the social world. Will's instinctive nature can be admired for itself but Lawrence recognised its limitations, for in the portrait of Anthony Schofield the instinctive has become almost animal-like. He is described as 'a satyr', a 'faun' and a 'goat'. (14) It is an Edenic pastoral world he offers to Ursula in which the senses rather than the intelligence are supreme. Her rejection of him is inevitable:

She liked Anthony, though. All her life, at intervals, she returned to the thought of him and of that which he offered. But she was a traveller, she was a traveller on the face of the earth and he was an isolated creature living in the fulfilment of his own senses. . . . (14)

For the girl, the kind of life which Schofield and the early Will embody, is no longer a satisfying possibility; the demands, pressures and searchings have become more difficult and extreme.

All the thematic threads of the novel culminate in Ursula. Once again, as was the case with Tom early on, the themes of creative fulfilment and social aspiration become embodied in a single individual but the tensions are tighter and more concrete than they were then. One aspect of this is, of course, education. In this issue

Lawrence was deeply interested throughout his life. His experience of learning had an immense impact upon him and shaped the particular kind of assured and passionate way he considered it. His disillusionment with college,<sup>23</sup> his dislike of the relationships school-teaching involved,<sup>24</sup> his sensitivity to the possible damaging effects of schooling and of the possible tensions implied in the connection between education and class<sup>25</sup> emerge from an imaginative understanding of his own experience, from worrying at the question - what would have happened to him if he had not become a great novelist and what did happen to his contemporaries? These discussions of the issue in the later essays are marked by a clarity of insight and a note of certainty which suggests that Lawrence has fully come to terms with the matter they articulate.

In The Rainbow, in the treatment of the theme of education through the exploration of Ursula, the sense is of attitudes still in the process of formation, still being tested in the fiction. Education is felt, in one of its aspects, as a release from narrow bonds. In moving to the Grammar School in Nottingham the girl frees herself from the companionship of the poor and mean Philipsons and the claustrophobic life of her home, to experience the wonder of learning and the company of ladies. In contrast to Gudrun the outer world is essential to her; it provides the romanticising and idealising imagination contact with actual possibilities. The urge to move outwards is also,

23. See Collected Letters, i, 8-9.

24. See Collected Letters, i, 31.

25. See D.H. Lawrence, "Men Must Work and Women as Well", and "Enslaved by Civilization", Phoenix 11, pp. 586-587 and 581-582.



however, in a way the urge to move backwards. What is being sought is an image of reality partly taken from the Brangwens themselves:

She measured by the standard of her own people, her father and mother, her grandmother, her uncles. Her beloved father, so utterly simple in his demeanour, yet with his strong, dark soul fixed like a root in unexpressed depths that fascinated and terrified; her mother, so strongly free of all money and convention and fear, entirely indifferent to the world, standing by herself, without connexion; her grandmother, who had come from so far and was centred in so wide a horizon; people must come up to these standards before they could be Ursula's people. (10)

Significantly, the imagery which describes Ursula's delight in learning is an agricultural one:

She was upon another hill-slope, whose summit she had not scaled. There was always a marvellous eagerness in her heart, to climb and see beyond. A Latin verb was virgin soil to her; she sniffed new odours in it; it meant something, though she did not know what it meant. (10)

Education offers a way back then, as well as a way forward. The strain is present in specific terms in the girl's shame of her father when she first goes to school.

Through her adolescence her self remains in flux, wavering and undefined but the desire for independence is strong and compels her to study. Education in this context provides a resolution of the contradictions inherent here, for through the opportunities it provides, Ursula is able to establish her identity, mainly in reaction to them. There is Winifred and the disillusion which results from that relationship, there is teaching and the painful loss of idealism and there is college and the absence of real worth she discovers in that institution. Throughout the pattern is similar. When she is applying for teaching posts it finds compressed expression, in her dreaming of what each of her future jobs might be like:

So that in Gillingham, an old, old village by the hop fields, where the sun shone softly, she came out of school in the afternoon into the shadow of the plane trees by the gate, and turned down the steep road towards the cottage where cornflowers poked their blue heads through the old wooden fence, and phlox stood built-up of blossom beside the posts. (13)

Once again a pastoral imagery suggests the impulse to go back through going forward. It is an imagery though, that is far more conventional and escapist than previously and parallel to this, the break that advance means is this time far more radical and painful. Increasingly then the space between past and future becomes wider: "She was isolated now from the life of her childhood, a foreigner in a new life, of work and mechanical considerations." (13) Through the educational system she becomes cut off from her background but that isolation enables the development of her self-hood and the rejection of education which follows.

In addition at various points in her history the genuine desire for knowledge and culture and its values are stressed, working against the assumption that this whole world represents a corrupting of real energies. Lawrence writes:

She wanted to read great, beautiful books, and be rich with them; she wanted to see beautiful things, and have the joy of them for ever; she wanted to know big, free people; and there remained always the want she could put no name to. (13)

and one afternoon the class becomes transformed into a garden: "They were flowers, birds, little bright animals, children, anything. They only were not standard +ive ." (13) and most significantly whilst examining a microscopic slide her response to reality is suddenly deepened in an epiphanic

moment that suggests the power and life-enhancing qualities available through learning. The mystical awareness that had been embodied in Will, is suddenly recaptured; once again education enables a type of connection with the past to be made. And at the close the fight is to make this connection real, not simply to face the new but to see the new in the old. The organic metaphors suggest the type of understanding that is achieved.

The educational development of Ursula should not, of course, be seen in a vacuum; it is placed very firmly in a wider context. The class question is significant in this respect. Once again as is the case with Lawrence's treatment of the educational theme, a poised ambivalence prevails. Ursula is aristocratic in her attitudes, despising those poorer and meaner than herself. Thus, after listening to a sermon on the virtues of poverty, she applies the message to her father:

She had her qualms, when in imagination she saw her father giving away their piano and the two cows, and the capital at the bank, to the labourers of the district, so that they, the Brangwens, should be as poor as the Wherrys. And she did not want it. She was impatient. (10)

The effort, however, to move away from the world of scarcity, to attach herself to a superior social group involves recognising the losses involved. Skrebensky, Winifred, Uncle Tom and his mines all reveal a final barrenness and coldness that prevents them satisfying her needs; the idealism she projects on to them meets with frustration. Return is of course impossible but in the important barge scene of the work the richness and warmth that such a course might imply ideally is suggested. The naming of the child a

after Ursula and her gift of the necklace have obvious symbolic overtones setting it apart from the on-going life of the fiction. The implications are not, however, simply retreatist for the strong sexual undertones at work suggest the pressure of powerful, creative elements. Lawrence, however, refuses to follow through the implications raised. His own stance of alienation has to be re-embodied in his heroine, for not to do so would be to challenge his own position.

Radically isolated at the close, Ursula, having rejected the bourgeois ethics represented by Skrebensky and the ethos of democracy, struggles with the attempt to make momentary contacts with genuine positives into a vision that holds out the possibilities of social transformation. One form of aspiration has deepened and broadened into another. The writer's alienation has, through an imagined exploration of its historical sources and meaning, become a type of creative freedom. Where formerly his personal experience had been an individual case-history it now has a representative and general significance. His fiction then, in its treatment of growth also presents evidence for it.

#### Lawrence and Class.

Given the emphasis in his work, Leavis's attitude to the issue of Lawrence's treatment of class needs some modification,<sup>26</sup> for although he is right to stress the novelist's sensitivity in this area what should also be

26. F.R. Leavis, D.H. Lawrence, Novelist (1955), pp. 73-95.

given prominence is the way in which his class experience shapes the nature of his work. Class is not simply another subject for him but crucial, for in dealing with it, he places his whole identity as a man and writer into focus. Repeatedly, almost obsessively he deals with the themes of separation and return, working out the different tensions involved. It is possible to praise Lawrence for his lack of snobbery or sentimentality but Leavis's way of emphasising the quality of 'Daughters of the Vicar' seems inappropriate. He writes:

When he presents working-class people or milieux he doesn't write up or down; the people are first and last just human beings; his interest in them is an interest in them purely as such. The fact that they are working-class does not affect in the least his feeling for them or his attitude towards them. 27

The general gist of this is correct but the radical division made between human beings and their social environment, reduces the story. What does an interest in them 'purely as such' signify, when the whole significance of the story lies in the way the characters are the focus of a whole range of social implication?

Lawrence's origins are of the utmost importance. Beginning with no self-conscious aesthetic commitment as other modernists such as Joyce, Woolf and James, he was compelled to work through and beyond the novel as it was being written by Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy to forms that would truly emancipate the writer from the bourgeois order. The comic satire of the one, the resignation of the other and the fake rebellion of the latter could not meet the needs of a highly and roundly educated writer who was

not only anxious about the connections between classes and culture but had to break through that anxiety to some kind of absolutist position. He was a reactionary and a revolutionary, and the effort most apparent in The Rainbow and Women in Love to abandon traditional notions of character for something deeper and more <sup>fundamental</sup>, testifies to the fact that it was in the fiction that his stance was formed. There the pressure of his class alienation compelled the emergence of new types of creative response. Whereas Wells had chosen to abandon the past for an invented future, Lawrence through the dynamic and fluid forms of his fiction, discovered the past in the light of the future. Both novelists thus declared their alienation.

## CHAPTER 4

### E.M. FORSTER

#### Forster and Art

In 1915, in the midst of war, Lawrence sought to account for his sense of Forster's bondage, his feeling that his fellow-writer was locked into a knowledge of his own helplessness and limitation:

His ultimate desire is for the continued action which has been called the social passion - the love for humanity - the desire to work for humanity. That is every man's ultimate desire and need. Now you see the vicious circle. Shall I go to my Prometheus and tell him beautiful tales of the free, whilst the vulture gnaws his liver? I am ashamed. I turn my face aside from my Prometheus, ashamed of my vain, irrelevant, impudent words. I cannot help Prometheus. And this knowledge rots the love of activity. 1

In many respects this is more revealing of Lawrence than of Forster but its significance for the latter novelist is suggestive. At the centre of his work there is a deep-seated concern about the purpose of art and culture, one that plainly arises from an acute sensitivity to those individuals and groups who do not identify with the values and forms of

1. The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, ed. H.T. Moore (1962), i, 318.

living associated with the cultural world. Italians, rustics, non-conformists, working men all cause responsive upper-class figures to question their own attitudes and behaviour and ultimately their own class, in other words to assume the role of the intellectual.

The concern with art has an obvious thematic expression but more importantly it can be felt in the whole impression his fiction makes - its modesty, its lack of manifest difficulty and obscurity, its reliance for much of the time on the traditional form of social comedy. He believes in the seriousness and significance of his work but he has few illusions about exactly what it can do, neither a Jamesian faith in its power to 'make life' or a Lawrentian one in its prophetic role. After the first world war he ceases to write fiction of any length about the English scene. Various explanations have been offered for this but surely one of the most important factors involved is precisely the lack of confidence he feels in the activity, his sense of its possible futility. Under the enormous pressure the war and its aftermath created, art seemed to have even less relevance than previously.

Yet, in spite of his critical attitude to its possibilities and claims, he valued it very highly, for really he had nothing else to identify with. Without political commitment, without a conventional religious loyalty Forster discovered in art a way of confronting the world without succumbing to or evading its flux. Thus in discussing the subject his emphasis was sure and plain. In Two Cheers for Democracy he writes in one essay that



a work of art is -

... valuable because it has to do with order, and creates little worlds of its own, possessing internal harmony, in the bosom of this disordered planet. 2

and again:

A work of art - whatever else it may be is a self-contained entity, with a life of its own imposed on it by a creator. It has internal order. 3

His knowledge that culture has little impact upon the vast majority of people and his awareness of the way it can be misused and misunderstood by those who claim a commitment to it, however, is too deep for him to exalt it. 4 His scepticism was reinforced by his sense of its contrast with the social misery he was aware of around him. He is unable, for example, to concentrate upon a Beethoven symphony after hearing a story of misfortune<sup>5</sup> and in a strange essay in Abinger Harvest he writes about a picture of ordinary soldiers placed in a gallery full of portraits of upper-class gentlemen and ladies:

For what could we do without you? What would become of our incomes and activities if you declined to exist? You are the slush and dirt in which our civilization rests, which it treads under foot daily, which it sentimentalises over now and then, in hours of danger. 6

His sense of the dependence of civilization upon those it deprives and treats inhumanly is clearly a powerful one. For many intellectuals, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was a common enough feeling,

2. E.M.Forster, "The Challenge of Our Time", Two Cheers for Democracy (1951), p. 71.
3. E.M.Forster, "Art for Art's Sake", Two Cheers for Democracy, p.99.
4. See E.M.Forster, "Does Culture Matter?", Two Cheers for Democracy, p.113. (Note 16, p.361 below)
5. See E.M.Forster, "A Note on the Way", Abinger Harvest (1936), p. 72.
6. E.M.Forster, "Me, Them and You", Abinger Harvest, p.29.

springing from various different if associated motives. In Forster's case, what should be emphasised, is the remoteness and abstractness of his attitude. The poor hardly figure at all in his work and the figure of Leonard Bast is really his only sustained treatment of a lower-class individual in an urban environment. Rather it is a concern for justice that seems at the root of his outlook. In the following passage the wrongness of what is described is assumed:

But though the education was humane it was imperfect, inasmuch as we none of us realized our economic position. In came the nice fat dividends, up rose the lofty thoughts, and we did not realize all the time we were exploiting the poor of our own country and the backward ones abroad, and getting bigger profits from our investments than we should. 7

That last word 'should' is not really worked for by the language; its force comes from the extent to which it is taken for granted. The world of culture then, Forster realises, is closely connected with the class society upon which it depends and of which it is a part. For the intellectual and the artist the problem is to accept this fact, to achieve the correct stance both towards his work and towards his society. Culture is itself of little use; it is the nature of the individual's commitment to it that counts.

#### Forster and the Intellectual.

Thus in "A Celestial Omnibus", Forster points to the distinction between a true and genuine response to

7. "The Challenge of Our Time", Two Cheers for Democracy, p.68.

literature, and one that is sterile; Mr. Bons's bookishness is contrasted to the child's genuine openness. This critical attitude to the intellectual is continued in A Room with a View. Here is centrally presented the radical opposition between artist and aesthete. Lucy, interested in the arts and musically talented, develops from being an uncertain girl into a woman capable of acknowledging her true feelings and acting upon them. Cyril, on the other hand, in spite of his unconventional pose, his contempt for the ordinary life of the Honeychurches and his claim to democratic tolerance is incapable of achieving true freedom. It is significant that he constantly sees Lucy in aesthetic terms, for as she discovers he has no genuine interest in others except as components of his imagined world. Both the characterisation of Lucy and Cecil are finely done, the novelist succeeding in suggesting their qualities without, on the one hand falling into idealization, or on the other into melodrama.

The former's inner life is captured well. Just before she goes to Rome there is this passage:

For a moment the original trouble was in the background. George would seem to have behaved like a cad throughout; perhaps that was the view one would take eventually. At present she neither disputed nor condemned him; she did not pass judgement. At the moment when she was about to judge him her cousin's voice had intervened, and, ever since, it was Miss Bartlett who had dominated; Miss Bartlett who, even now, could be heard sighing into a crack in the partition wall; Miss Bartlett who had really been neither pliable nor invisible nor inconsistent. She had worked like a great artist; for a time - indeed, for years - she had been meaningless, but at the end there was presented to the girl the complete picture of a cheerless, loveless world in which the young rush to their destruction until they learn better - a shame-faced world of precautions and barriers which may avert evil,

but which do not seem to bring good, if we may judge from those who have used them most. (7) 8

The poise of the writing - its delicate and easy rendering and comprehension of the girl's mind suggests Forster's willingness and ability, at this early stage of his career, not simply to deal with the development of character but to render its process; there is a Jamesian subtlety of imagination apparent in the paragraph's tone.

In A Room with a View the growth of an artistic temperament and the activity of an aesthetic one comment upon and deepen the meaning of each other, implying the sort of subtle discrimination Forster felt necessary in his treatment of the figure of the intellectual. In this, his first written novel, he was eager to indicate what a true dedication to the world of culture should and could mean. Above all, he considered it needed to involve a commitment to life and reality. Thus the scene in which the seeds of George's and Lucy's later love are sown has, in this context, a symbolic significance, for in it art is forced into contact with the actual and in the midst of that confrontation the two major protagonists truly meet. Human beings, the episode implies, reach their highest point when both areas - the refined and the real - are accepted and allowed to interact with each other. The true intellectual for Forster embodies this dialectical relationship.

In his next novel, Where Angels Fear to Tread, however, the difficulties of this interaction are treated more fundamentally, and the tone and texture of the work is a darker one. No longer is the social world allowed to offer

8. E.M. Forster, A Room with a View (1908). All references are to this edition.

a vital and human alternative to the rigidity of the aesthete, no longer can the possibility of culture be embodied in a character's talent for music; development and growth take place but they occur more uncertainly and fail to issue in a resolving solution. One central preoccupation of the work is with action. Harriet makes an unhappy and futile life for herself by marrying Gino and at the end she again takes rapid action, leading herself and her family into disaster; Caroline is tempted to act but her sensitivity to the reality of the situation she meets in Italy prevents her seeking to compensate for her previous passivity; and Philip, never favouring involvement, is compelled by the work to see his detached stance with an astringently critical eye and to recognise his own possibilities for participation.

The latter character, in certain respects, resembles Cecil. In this novel Forster, however, is concerned with suggesting the potentialities of development that the aesthetic perspective contains. Unlike Harriet, Philip feels an immense affinity for Italy and its romantic associations but at the beginning of the work this affinity is narrow and remote from reality, as his attitude to Gino demonstrates. Only during his second stay at Monteriano does he painfully come to integrate his earlier romanticism and later disillusionment into an inclusive outlook. Through meeting Gino at the theatre, where he is drawn into the enjoyment of the audience, in his growing appreciation of Caroline, he comes to acknowledge the real value of the society. The achievement, though, is no easy matter, for he has to accept the responsibility of his sister's action,

has to suffer the extreme violence Gino inflicts before there can be a true and genuine relationship to the Italian world. At the and he is able to befriend him and love Caroline. Whereas A Room with A View had dealt with the distance between the false and true intellectual, Where Angels Fear to Tread is concerned with the development of the fake into the true intellectual. The process suggests Forster's awareness that the intellectual's attitude to the world outside convention and business should neither be one of detached romanticism, an unthinking glamorisation and involvement nor a simple-minded hostility, but one based on a close knowledge and experience, one that seeks to be inclusive both of ordinary and cultural life.

Perhaps through exploring the possible failures of the intellectual, through dealing with possible lines of development, Forster in his next novel was able to present in the figure of Ansell a representative of him as an ideal. In his willingness to make discriminations between people, in the rigour of his devotion to learning, in his total avoidance of the superior stance his education might encourage, in his knowledge of when and when not to act, the philosopher possesses a combination of strength and sensitivity that the novelist much admires. In the context of the novel Ansell's lower middle-class home, its very faults, represents a significant positive. Rickie deplores the 'complete absence of taste' of the family:

And he wondered this again when he sat at tea opposite a long row of crayons - Stewart as a baby, Stewart as a small boy with large feet, Stewart as a larger boy with smaller feet, Mary reading a book whose leaves were as thick as eider-downs. And yet again did he wonder it when he woke with a gasp in the night to find a harp in luminous paint throbbing and glowering at him from the adjacent wall. "Watch and pray" was

written on the harp, and until Rickie hung a towel over it the exhortation was partially successful. (3) 9

The passage suggests that Forster shares his character's fastidiousness but to use a distinction that arises later in the work he believes it indicates coarseness rather than vulgarity and thus is able to accept that one of the implications of Mr. Ansell's generosity of attitude is a certain failure of discrimination. He does not ignore it but neither does he take up a stance of outraged sensitivity; taste is important but perhaps not that important; it is impolite of Stuart to be rude to Agnes but ultimately insignificant. Yet although the thematic significance of the bluntness is clear, Ansell does not really work as a character in the novel. His dedication to scholarship is not connected to the whole personality of the man; the emphasis on his directness of manner becomes a way of evading the difficult task of comprehending the lower-class intellectual.

The real attention of the book is obviously, concentrated upon Rickie. Here, once again, the writer attempts to delineate the development of an artist but the closeness and complexity of the characterisation is much greater than previously. There are various ways of regarding the hero's growth. Crucial to any account, though, must be the issue of responsibility. In the early stages of the work there is a good deal wrong with Rickie but he is a focus of the reader's sympathies, not simply because he is a victim-figure to be pitied but because he is intelligent

9. E.M.Forster, The Longest Journey (1967). All references are to this edition.

and perceptive. In that first scene in which the students discuss philosophy the common-sensical puzzlement of the hero, his slightly humorous attitude and his careful observation of the outside scene, makes him a significant point of identification. The trouble here is not that he is full of silly ideas but that it turns out that he has forgotten about the visit of Agnes and Herbert. In abstract terms the opening sets up the theme of illusion and reality but in concrete terms it reveals Rickie's carelessness. The fault is not presented as a serious one and in other early parts of the book it is his sense of responsibility that comes to the surface in his visit to Mrs. Failing for example, in his feeling that his wealth is based upon the unethical activities of his ancestors, in his willingness to help Agnes and Gerald financially, in his concern for Mrs. Aberdeen:

"Now what kind of life has Mrs. Aberdeen?" he exclaimed as he and Ansell pursued the Station Road. "Here these bedders come and make us comfortable. We owe an enormous amount to them, their wages are absurd, and we know nothing about them". (6)

There is an earnest humanism about Rickie which the more austere Ansell lacks.

In his marriage, however, the kind of absorption of attention which Cambridge could command, which made him forget his friend's visit, is transferred to his wife. The theme of the conventional and trivial woman is a common one in English fiction but Forster treats the subject with unclichéd intelligence, constantly modifying our attitude towards her so that it is only gradually that we come to realise her fundamental dishonesty and only quite near the



end, made to extend sympathy towards her when it is suggested that the loss of Gerald and her first real passion has blocked the growth of deep feeling. Yet the damage she and her brother do to Rickie is undeniable, for his submission to her is to a set of conventions that confine life to rigid channels and deny mutual responsibility.

He thus has no patience with Stephen and at the school where he teaches, he attempts simply to conform to Pemberton's instructions. At the close, however, he comes to realise that he must acknowledge his brother but the question is now what form that acknowledgement should take; and Rickie's struggle in the last part of the work is for a relationship that can accept Stephen for himself rather than as a token for his mother or as a heroic romantic figure. His understanding just before he dies that he must go back to Agnes is a realisation of his own need to face reality indirectly through some ideal or convention, but it is not a simple defeat, for he knows now the difference between the real and the illusory and knows that it is towards the latter he is ultimately responsible. In other words, Rickie never becomes Ansell. He is the artist rather than the philosopher, the intellectual finding it impossible to exist in the narrow world of imaginative romantic love and needing to accept the burden of responsibility for the wide life outside.

In comparison with A Room with a View and Where Angels fear to Tread, The Longest Journey lacks a shapeliness and grace of form. Large parts seem unfocused. The

presentation of the lengthy stay of the couple with Mrs. Failing for example is laboured and lacking in style; often it appears that Forster is as bored with Stephen and his soldier companion as Rickie is. Although it is fairly clear <sup>what</sup> the causes of the gradually increasing distance between the two<sup>are</sup>, the actuality of the process is not realised in a sustained way. And the final part of the novel, in its quickness of movement, has a jerking and unreal quality because of its melodramatic crudity. It is significant that the best part of the work is the early section concerned with Cambridge. In both his previous novels there had been a community present that could act as a centre for a set of positive values, which if not absolute, could at least serve to counter certain failures elsewhere. This is lacking in Where Angels fear to Tread for the division is between the isolated intellect and organised society; even Cambridge refuses a fellowship to Ansell. The attempt therefore to deal with radical alienation of the intellectual has meant that an earlier coherence of form has had to be sacrificed; whereas before the alienation could be implied by Lila's decision to marry Gino, it now is at the centre of attention.

Nor is the rebellion against convention as simple as it had been, for it does not take a romantic expression. Instead of love, responsibility is the major issue and that implies not simply a personal commitment to one person but the more general problem of a different sort of relationship to society itself. It is consequently a far more extreme type of revolt which is central, one that penetrates more deeply into the social world at the centre

of Forster's fiction and sets up more and deeper disturbing implications. The comic irony within which a figure like Mrs. Heriton had been created, is absent. Pemberton, in his representative significance, in the power he is able to exert is too serious to be presented through this mode; he has to be faced directly. Forster's willingness to do this suggests that he has fully accepted the nature of his insight into English society, fully understood the kind of stance that might be necessary to face it.

In Howards End, published three years later his feeling that he needed to go beyond his awareness of intellectual alienation to discover ways in which it might be ended is apparent; the motto of the novel is 'only connect'. On the surface this is achieved but perhaps Forster himself was aware of the inadequacy of his solution, for his next work, Maurice deals, in the characterisation of Clive, with the failure of the intellectual to maintain his integrity and independence and in the characterisation of the hero with the necessity of the ordinary man, if he is to live fully, to break away totally from the social conditioning that determines his behaviour and gain the kind of freedom that was normally the prerogative of the intellectual. In its broad structure and theme, Maurice most closely resembles The Longest Journey - there is the same lack of emphasis upon the contrast between two opposing sets of values and a concern rather with the development of a single individual; Cambridge figures largely in both books and the stories of both centre upon the separating path of two close friends - Stephen is paralleled by Alec. A reading of the later novel thus compels a re-reading of

the earlier, for it suggests the possible presence of a suppressed homosexual theme there. In addition, it is interesting to compare the tone of the two works; both lack the ironic humour, the intelligent warmth and sympathy of the rest of his major fiction. What had been a certain coldness and austerity of approach in The Longest Journey has become in Maurice an almost clinical abruptness; the distance between subject and narrator seems immense.

This most probably is caused by Forster's fear and unsureness in tackling the homosexual element directly but it is also perhaps an aspect of a more general problem, for the narrator's remoteness from his material is a reflection of his understanding that between succumbing to social convention in the way Clive does and absolutely abandoning it in the way the hero does, there is no longer a realistic alternative. His treatment of ordinary middle-class society is harsh and cold; there is the doctor and Maurice's mother it is true but ultimately both have to be patronised because both are totally limited by traditional attitudes. Only through a rejection of them can the main protagonist fulfil himself; the upper-class intellectual's collapse into the dull and the ordinary, forces him to turn to the lower-classes and embrace exile. It is significant that the novelist is at pains to emphasise the ordinary, unexceptional nature of his hero. Having created as an ideal a representative of an independent stance towards society he was interested in examining the process of development that could lead to it - interested in the growth of the not particularly clever or perceptive Rickie

and the rather slow and unimaginative Maurice.

The novelist, therefore, in his understanding of the intellectual reveals an uncertain and developing attitude. There is a tentative optimism in the two early books - in the distinction between Cecil and Lucy, and in the growth of Philip but in The Longest Journey the awareness of the immensity of Rickie's task makes for a darker, more difficult view. Howards End sought to offer an answer, to suggest a worthwhile role for the cultivated individual but the effort demanded an extreme straining and by the time of Maurice he seems to have resigned himself to disillusionment with the type and a compensating faith in the possibility of the ordinary individual. It is significant that Clive becomes normal when visiting Greece; the world of culture and the world of dull normality are then implicitly associated. Thus Lawrence's perception that Forster was strongly sensitive to the limitations of art seems right and suggestive. Yet his concentration upon the life of intellectuals suggests the extent to which he knew himself, in spite of doubts, ultimately committed to the values they could represent.

The liberalism of his stance has a negative impact upon the quality of his fiction finally, but the effort to explore the figure of the moneyed intellectual and to work out the possible failures, limitations and temptations he was involved in gives his work a significant relevance to the attempts of writers to deal imaginatively with the pressure of democratic tendencies upon cultural values. For the issues raised by that pressure, to do with the intellectual's attitude to his own class and to those

outside it, to art and to his own role are major ones in Forster's novels. His dissatisfaction with bourgeois assumptions and modes of life is clear but unlike Wells or Lawrence these modes and assumptions shape his consequent point of view. Thus his attraction to the natural and simple takes the form of a diluted and wavering romanticism; it is little more than an asserted gesture.

### Forster and the Lower-Class

One of the most unsatisfactory elements of Forster's fiction is the failure to realise credible alternatives to the upper-class world he presents. He saw in the lower-classes qualities and values he regarded very highly:

Uneducated people have a quantity of valuable resources which are denied to people like ourselves, on whom much money has been spent, but that is no reason why we should despise our proper stock in trade.<sup>10</sup>

However, his sympathy was complicated by his historical awareness that it was becoming increasingly difficult to view the proletariat with realism in these terms. The spread of democracy, education and urbanisation was transforming the nature of their life and although Forster, as a liberal, welcomed the improvements that were the consequence of these changes, he shared with many intellectuals, including Gissing and Lawrence, a deep anxiety about their implications.<sup>11</sup>

The kind of tension between nostalgic and romantic idealisation and unavoidable anxiety takes another form in the writer's uncertain attitude to the relationship

10. "A Note on the Way", Abinger Harvest, p.74.

11. See E.M.Forster, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (1934) in which the subject's snobberies resemble those involved in Forster's and Rickie's response to the Ansell household in The Longest Journey.

between class and education. That he was aware of the possible tension between them is apparent from his biography of Marianne Thornton where he deals with the two motives of her educational work - dislike of ignorance and need for good quality servants.<sup>12</sup> His knowledge that these two motives of his aunt are so deeply entangled - one of the ways by which children can fulfil themselves is by learning to accept their station in life - suggests his acute sense of the problems involved in working-class education. A review he wrote of a book on Cambridge illustrated this. It begins with him worrying about the author's suggestion that the University should be socially exclusive. After touching on the changing face of the place he returns directly to the class question:

Prig's feelings are mixed. He has enjoyed his conducted tour, and found himself more of a snob than he intended. The selective Cambridge he loved cannot possibly survive, except as a museum piece. But the Cambridge-open-to-all, the in-accordance-with national-needs -Cambridge will only be a technical finishing school, an educational crammery, a degree-monger not a university at all. I disliked Mr. Steegman's hopes, but I share his fears, and in this dilemma I proffer a third solution - that of razing the whole sacred area to the ground. The dons and other portable valuables could first be transplanted to a safer spot, and Hitler would do the rest free of charge. She would survive as a memory then. And a memory can do more than either a mummy or a travesty towards civilizing the world.

But if it came to a vote, I am against my Guide. I know so many elementary schoolmen who ought to have gone up twenty or thirty years ago, and who would have given as well as gained. <sup>13</sup>

- or rather he returns to the question indirectly, for the passage in its use of the third person, in its rapid movement from one position to another, indicates the

12. E.M.Forster, Marianne Thornton: a Domestic Biography (1956), pp. 224-240.

13. E.M.Forster, Two Cheers for Democracy (1951), p. 359.

unresolved difficulties implicit in his approach to the whole issue. Forster's attitude and relationship to the working-classes as an intellectual was, therefore, not an easy or simple one. He found positive values but they seemed to be threatened by the very improvements his sympathies promoted. He believed in the potentialities of the proletariat, but was worried that the traditional idea of education would be undermined by its wider distribution, and these tensions are in addition complicated even more by his homosexuality, which focused itself on individuals of a lower social status.

The lack of a coherent perspective makes itself felt in the fiction in an unsureness of intention and realization. There are, for example, George and his father in A Room with a View. That they are meant to be connected with the lower-classes in a fairly direct way is clear. Yet, the class element is present more as a gesture than an integrated element in the novel's rendering of experience. George, in his rather vague pessimism, in his impulsive nature, in his capacity for genuine and direct emotional relationships and in his intellectual ability recognised by Cecil, exists throughout the novel more as a set of positive components than an actual character. It is true that he is meant to be obscure and slightly mysterious but both his shrouded quality and his father's obvious transparency suggests a thinness of realisation; they both exist in a limbo of good intentions, and how exactly they should be placed is stated rather than felt.

In Where Angels Fear to Tread there is a more sustained



attempt to connect alternative values opposed to the bourgeois world to an actual foundation. Gino does in the work possess a representative significance, does seem to embody the spirit of a whole culture. Nor does Forster indulge in obvious idealisation; the violence, crudeness, trivial stupidity of the man are given their due. The vividness, though, with which his amoral, childlike personality is brought to life has a purely external resonance. Even during the scene in which Philip tells the Italian of the death of his son when the emotional centre should be Gino, the novelist is content with suggesting the intensity and quality of his pain more through the Englishman's fear than through direct internal realisation. Thus the *Herrens*' and Caroline's sense of Gino's foreignness is shared by the writer. It is as if he heeded that protective barrier to keep him from having to face dealing with the class issue directly.

The next stage in the development is Stephen in The Longest Journey. In this characterisation there is a greater intimacy than previously, a greater willingness, to give the figure an independent status apart from the other major protagonists, but again he seems the product of an evasive vision. An attempt is made to distinguish him from traditional pastoral associations, as his conversation with Mrs. Failing whilst awaiting the return of Flea Thompson makes clear. The eagerness, however, with which the novelist does this suggests his fear of possible confusion; and this fear is justified. The

meaning he is intended to signify dominates and overwhelms. A symbolic effect is tied uneasily to a realistic aim, creating an unsettling didacticism. Pemberton it is true has a similar uncomplicated meaning but there characterisation works accumulatively and tentatively, testing out the protagonist through his responses and attitudes in various scenes, so that in the breakfast quarrel of Rickie and Agnes his intervention, although his sympathies are predictable, feels that of an individual experiencing the emotional pressures of the situation rather than that of a stock figure enacting a fixed role. Agnes, for example, although she is sure of her brother's support -

... slurred a little over the incident of her treachery, for Herbert was sometimes clear-sighted over details, though easily muddled in a general survey. (25)

and when there is a moment of tenderness between them it achieves both a quality of unexpectedness and appropriateness. That kind of out-of-character incident would be impossible in the case of Stephen, who exists simply as the embodiment of a packaged idea.

Some of the same difficulty is present in the figure of Alec in Maurice. Again there is a stress on the man's rustic primitiveness, on the strong strain of coarseness in his nature but the class implications are more realistically drawn. Thus the hostile suspicion of the gamekeeper which expresses itself in the attempt to blackmail the hero, is seen as a product of his sense of inferiority and resentment in relationship to his upper-class lover. In the treatment of their whole friendship, in contrast to that between Rickie and Stephen in The Longest Journey, it is the issue of the

social divisions between them that dominates. In addition, Alec is very much involved in society; his sensitivity to the matter of status, his eagerness to better himself, his demands and needs for emotional loyalty all suggest that contrary to his predecessor he is a far more representative figure. Forster in his terminal note to the novel ~~indicates~~ this when he writes of Alec: "...though he might have met my own Stephen Wonham would they have had more in common than a mug of beer?" <sup>14</sup> The character, then, can be seen to embody a fusion of the symbolic intentions that shape the presentation of his counterpart in The Longest Journey and a more realistic approach to the treatment of the lower-classes which Forster had achieved in the Basts in Howards End.

These last two figures, taken together, sum up and root in a firmer foundation the various aspects of the novelist's comprehension of what can, for convenience, be called his proletarian figures, though they for the most part seem closer to the petit-bourgeoisie. The intellectual interests of George Emerson and the pastoral connection of Stephen are continued in the cultural aspirations and inclinations towards Nature of Leonard, and the coarse animality of Gino is deepened and modified in the characterisation of Jacky. The couple then are necessary complementary counterparts to each other. Forster was able to stress the human pathos of the situation of the one only because he could transfer other, less pleasant

14. E.M.Forster, "Terminal Note", Maurice (1971), p. 238.

and sympathetic elements, to the other. Thus, in an interview he gave to Angus Wilson, he is concerned to answer the charge that he had condemned Leonard in the novel. Wilson reports:

Perhaps he saw there was a suggestion in Leonard Bast that the rural can be saved but the urban not. He had no intention of condemning Leonard in any case. Leonard could develop well. I think he did probably. Circumstances were against him. Perhaps it's a failure in technique. 15

This failure of techniques, however, is closely bound up with the limits of understanding and perspective. The problem is that Bast is seen both as a victim and hero. That is to say the novelist wants to stress the extreme pressure of circumstances upon him, but also wants to give him qualities that the Wilcoxes and to a lesser degree the Sch<sup>1</sup>egel circle, lack - a closeness to the reality of experience revealed in his night walks, a rigorous sense of responsibility to others. These elements in his nature, however, are not significantly made to count, for Forster can only satisfactorily present Leonard in passive terms. He really only exists to the extent that the other protagonists of the novel take notice of him. They are allowed to meet and interact with one another in the normal course of daily life, to pay calls, go on visits, attend weddings and in so doing their natures gradually emerge. Bast, however, denied their opportunities, must inevitably exist on the work's periphery, making sudden and awkward intrusions into its centre. Thus contact between him and the Sch<sup>1</sup>egels sisters is resumed only through the rather

15. Angus Wilson, "A Conversation with E.M.Forster", Encounter (Nov.1957), p.359.

contrived device of Jacky's social blunder. The fact that when he does act, in making Helen pregnant and then in his decision to visit Howards End, there is an unlikely and strained quality and that the venture ends in disaster, indicates the novelist's difficulty in actively integrating Leonard into the total pattern of the novel. Bad writing like the following:- "Weeks afterwards, in the midst of other occupations, he would suddenly cry out, 'Brute - you brute, I couldn't have' - and he rent into two people who held dialogues." (41) 16, in the crudity of its effort to achieve dramatic effect suggests his unease in treating his character in any other way than as a victim. Therefore, when he writes about Helen's attitude to him-

A real man, who cared for adventure and beauty, who desired to live decently and pay his way, who could have travelled more gloriously through life than the Juggernaut that was crushing him. (41)

the emphasis on the positive here seems unsubstantiated; the heroic feels tacked on to the pathos.

Yet there are distinctions to the characterisation. There is, a penetration and hardness of insight involved in the creation of Bast that goes deeper than Gissing's almost total dependence upon the pathetic note. Whereas Grail's culture and intellectual ability is never put into question, Forster has no hesitation about indicating the weaknesses of his characters's capacities: "But he was inferior to most rich people, there is not the least doubt of it. He was not as courteous as the average rich man, nor as intelligent, nor as healthy, nor as lovable." (6)

16. E.M.Forster, Howards End (1910), All references are to this edition.

He recognises, in addition, the way in which literature and art, in spite of the attractions they offer for the intellectual proletarian, are necessarily distanced from him and his situation; Leonard's attempt to adapt the language of Ruskin to his daily life is unsuccessful. Culture cannot be disinterestedly held in awe. Inevitably an allegiance to it is connected with other experiences - with social ambition, with envy of others, with the psychological need to support identity. All these elements are included in Forster's characterisation. Bast cannot be regarded as the pure intellectual, yet, in spite of everything, he has worth - he has for one thing a certain degree of self-consciousness:

...it was not good, this continual aspiration. Some are born cultured; the rest had better go in for whatever comes easy. To see life steadily and see life whole was not for the likes of him. (6)

He shares here, momentarily, the novelist's understanding that the pursuit of culture demands a firm material base. Leonard's suffering from the absence of such a base is well comprehended; his unemployment causes him to see through his previous ideas and hopes with a sustained clear-sightedness.

The partial success, however, represented by the portrait of Leonard, is not repeated with Jacky. Here the novelist releases a crude reservoir of snobbery that had been kept in check in the presentation of her husband. There is for example the heavy irony of the following:

Take my word for it, that smile was simply stunning, and it is only you and I who will be fastidious, and complain that true joy begins in the eyes, and that the eyes of Jacky did not accord with her smile, but were anxious and hungry. (6)

and then there is an extensive description of her appearance.

She seemed all strings and bell-pulls-ribbons, chains, bead necklaces that clinked and caught - and a boa of feathers hung around her neck, with the ends uneven.  
(6)

as if such external details composed a characterisation.

An image of grossness and vulgarity, Jacky serves as a significant comment upon the novelist's fastidiousness in front of urban proletarian life. He could never come to terms with it, for he associated the lower class with certain positive romantic values that the world of culture excluded or as, in the case of Ansell and Leonard, with a strong commitment to that world from an alienated position. Without these two kinds of perspective, he was relatively helpless, for ultimately he had no real interest in the life of the majority of people but only in sorts of possible meanings that could be extracted. The failure to integrate the heroic and victim elements in Bast parallels a more general failure on the novelist's part to achieve a sustained coherence of attitude that would offer a genuine synthesis of his tendency to idealise the lower-classes and his anxieties about them. All he could do was to sense the entrappment of the thinking working-man but he could see no way, except an accidental death, of going beyond it. Thus the characterisation of Leonard enacts the limitations of a realistic liberalism that has been sapped of confidence.

Howards End

The uncertainty of perspective this implies, together with that present in his treatment of the intellectual runs through Forster's novels. Until Howards End, he was content to work within his doubts and questionings, content to test out ideas and opinions in the actual process of writing his fiction. There was a growing pessimism of vision, a growing awareness of the intractable difficulties of experience and a growing eagerness to discover possible solutions. With Howards End, however, the emphasis is much more on this latter aspect, so that the book is radically different from its predecessors. Its aim of showing what can and should be done, its aim of resolving conflicts and tensions is manifest and central, governing the shape and structure of the work. It is in the ending of the novel that this is most obvious. The problem is its lack of conviction. Bast's death at the hands of Charles is too crude a way of revealing the nature of the social relationship between them and it proves too convenient a means of disposing of the problem he represents.

Having ~~eliminated~~ the obstacle to connection presented by Leonard and Charles, Forster has only to bring Margaret and Henry together to achieve the final resolution. From the beginning a certain unsatisfactoriness prevails in the treatment of this relationship. A marriage that is intended to bear so much significance should, if it is to stand up to the test of realism, have a greater density of felt life about it. A couple of rather formal meetings and a sudden attack of jealousy on the part of Wilcox are taken as



sufficient preparation for the proposal and acceptance. And the reasons for that acceptance are left rather clouded; they seem to include fear of loneliness, genuine romance and a clinging need for strength.

Yet Forster is aware of the difficulties the differences of their temperaments involve; he allows them to quarrel. To forge a reconciliation is, however, more of a problem and he can only do it by almost completely destroying Wilcox as a human being. That last chapter with its overt and insistent pastoralism, with children promising hope of future life, with Helen's admission that she now likes Henry, with the preaching rhythms of Margaret's speeches has an insipid stiffness about it, because instead of the difficulties of resolution having been faced and incorporated, they have been evaded to achieve an image of complete harmony. The uncertainties and ambiguities that Forster had included in the conclusion to Where Angels fear to Tread and The Longest Journey have no place.<sup>17</sup>

Not only is Howards End a book self-consciously aimed at resolution; it is also very deliberately and plainly one about history, concerned with conveying a very specific sense of society and the process of change which it is undergoing. Throughout there are references to the impact of progress, often in spatial terms. Although Forster's historical intentions are observable in the work, he fails

17. See Malcolm Bradbury, "E.M. Forster as Victorian and Modern", Possibilities (1973), pp. 108-109 for a defence of the novel's conclusion. His point of view can only be supported if the close is seen out of key with what has gone before. Rather it seems as the culmination of the novelist's intense desire to provide solutions.

to embody the meaning of change in the lives of people. No sustained realisation of the subtle and tense interaction between private and public experience is present. A comparison of the work with George Eliot's Middlemarch or Lawrence's The Rainbow suggests the severe limitations of Forster's achievement. In an essay on the poet C.P. Cavafy he wrote:

History, too, is full of courage, cowardice, lust, and is to that extent domestic. But it is something more. It is an external inspiration. And he found in the expenses and recesses of the past, in the clash of great navies and the tinkle of small ones, in the certified victories and slurred defeats, in the jewels and the wounds, and the vast movements beginning out of nothing... something that transcended his local life and freshened and strengthened his art. 18

In these terms history is either a somewhat grander and expansive extension of the ordinary, a larger-than-life drama motivated by familiar human impulses or an impersonal panorama designed by mysterious forces. The sense of its complex working, within and without individuals, of its very particular significances and movements, of the way it is shaped and shapes people, is missing here.<sup>19</sup>

In Howards End the limitations of Forster's historical sense are felt in the way in which his concern with change has an almost entirely external emphasis. It is a question of being for or against it, or a victim of it. There is a recognition that civilisation and culture depends upon people like the Wilcoxes but this insight is not really made to count in terms of characterisation.

18. E.M.Forster, "The Complete Poems of C.P.Cavafy", Two Cheers for Democracy, p.248.

19. See E.M.Forster's "The Consolations of History", Abinger Harvest, p.163 for an example of Forster's sense of the remoteness of history from ordinary life and Aspects of the Novel (1927), pp. 25-26 and p. 171 for the way his view of history influences his approach to art. (Note 17, p.361 below)

As characters, and this applies to Bast as well, they do not seem to embody, to draw together and make concrete the values of a whole social group. They obviously stand for certain things but their general meaning exists as a badge upon them and does not issue from deeper sources. A comparison with Wells's Edward Ponderevo in Tono-Bungay suggests Forster's failure in this respect. Their history is part of people's lives, actively being made by them; in Howards End it is a kind of necessary background.

This in part accounts for the rather static nature of the novel, in spite of its overt concern with progress. There is, for example, the development of Margaret. She is obviously intended as the centre of the work, functioning in the action as the novelist's representative, but only at the close does she fully possess the knowledge and wisdom, learnt from experience, that Forster valued. The novel is concerned with her growth to a full maturity, through her encounter with Mrs. Wilcox and her experience of the realities of marriage which ultimately involves the rejection of the significance of the kind of life she had previously known.

Yet, although it is clear that Margaret is meant to develop, that development has small significance in the work. Occasionally one is conscious of her as an individual in the process of growth - when, for example, she changes her mind about Mrs. Wilcox's invitation to Howards End, when she agrees to marry Henry, when she takes her sister's side against him - but these are isolated incidents tending to jerk attention to the heroine as a

particular person rather than as a medium for good sense and right feeling. We know that she develops then but are not made to feel the process in any deep or dramatic way.

It could be said that this is a reflection of the subtlety and reticence of Forster's art. But it is not that change is shown as gradual, rather it is not comprehended, for the novelist has little genuine grasp of what his major protagonist's maturity really consists in. Certainly it implies tolerance and a desire to connect but does that really answer to the problems and difficulties the novel has raised. Thus there is something very unsatisfactory about Margaret's attitude to Bast. Perhaps she is right and Henry would help Leonard but he will only do so because appealed to by his wife and thus the issue of responsibility that the youth raises is not really dealt with. And once Margaret learns of the connection between Jacky and her husband, she completely abandons all concern for the couple. Forster is aware of this inadequacy; he is willing to place it but ultimately he has to assent to it, for it is the only alternative to the total indifference of Tibby or the total involvement of Helen. Thus the heroine's maturity does not issue in anything concrete. Similarly, when she has separated from Henry after having seen his hardness and inflexibility, the growth that that action signifies is suspended in terms of action, for she takes pity and returns to him. Margaret's development then has to be gestured at, for not to do so would be to severely inhibit the resolving intention of the book.

Whereas in the characterisation of his heroine the novelist is concerned primarily with growth, in the case

of Helen it is change in the shape of rebellion that he is most interested in. In certain respects she represents a finer achievement than her elder sister; we can react to her in a closer, more intimate way. Forster's difficulties with the figure emerge, however, early on, in her romance with Paul. In its abrupt ending it is clear that the needs of plot have come before an engagement with experience. Unconventional behaviour of a different sort also comes to a sudden close in Helen's involvement with Leonard Bast. Instead of following through the complications of this involvement attention is diverted to her situation as a fallen woman. In the last scene of the book she is seen as resigned to life having perhaps learnt humility through suffering. Forster's failure in the characterisation of Helen has profoundly to do with his inability to realise in his fiction the action of her revolt, to give it in other words a historic significance. This is not to say that he should have shown her joining a political party but that if her development was to connect with the wider social world, he needed to face the issue directly, explore the possibilities and tensions involved in her commitment and not be content with an unthinking act of passion that satisfies only Forster's didactic aims and not the real problems that his character raises.

The use of the device of the pregnancy also serves a similar function in the presentation of Bast, for it means that his economic and psychological decline which begins with his unemployment is not followed through by the novel; it becomes mixed up with the whole question of remorse. Finally the tangle of guilt, degeneracy and

poverty that he embodies has to be quickly unknotted if resolution is to be achieved; and thus Leonard is killed; once again expectations of development are blocked. The limits of <sup>novelist's</sup> ~~the~~ historical sense then, his failure to grasp the process of social change in its full concreteness means that his handling of his character's development is inadequate, for that development remains confined to a largely unexplored interior world and is not embodied through the way the characters inter-relate and act in society.

In previous novels this kind of weakness did not arise because the public world was of far less importance. Essentially, it was with the growth of <sup>the</sup> individual's inner moral and spiritual life that Forster was concerned and the shape of that growth if not the final direction was determined throughout by a fairly clear perspective - by George, or Gino, or Stephen. In Howards End this kind of figure is absent, although something of him remains to a small degree in Bast. Mrs. Wilcox is obviously an ideal figure but she dies and the main protagonists are left to find their own way. Thus part of the problem with Margaret is that she has both to function as a developing character and as a substitute for the dead wife.

There are however certain positives offered. There is art, Beethoven for example. Certain qualifications are ~~never-~~ ~~theless~~ made. Aunt Julia's interest in culture is satirised; it offers Tibby an opportunity to escape responsibility and it is at certain times associated with superficial accomplishment. Forster writes of Leonard listening to

Margaret:

Her speeches fluttered away from the young man like birds. If only he could talk thus, he would have caught the world. Oh, to acquire culture! Oh, to pronounce foreign names correctly! Oh, to be well informed, discoursing at ease on every subject that a lady started! ..... Yes, the umbrella was the real trouble. Behind M<sup>a</sup>net and Debussy the umbrella persisted, with the steady beat of a drum... There had always been something to worry him ever since he could remember, always something that distracted him in the pursuit of beauty. For he did pursue beauty, and therefore Margaret's speeches did flutter away from him like birds. (5)

This is a fine passage because in its formal ease it accomplishes so much. Ostensibly about Leonard, it is also concerned to indicate the kind of pressures that mould and distort culture - on the one hand from its association with leisure and amusement and on the other from poverty, so that Bast's frustration is not simply its lack but rather his failure to identify its true form. The passage ends where it begins with him pursuing beauty in the shape of Margaret's speeches; the image which originally suggested her twittering quality now suggests his poetic capacities and the connection between them indicates the degree to which Leonard's qualities and limitations are bound up with each other.

Property, in addition, serves as another possible positive in the novel. Most significantly there is Howard's End. Obvious symbolic implications are attached to the place, but it would be wrong to over-mystify them:

House and tree transcended any smiles of sex. Margaret thought of them now, and was to think of them through many a windy night and London day, but to compare either to man, to woman, always dwarfed the vision. Yet they kept within the limits of the human. Their message was not of eternity but of hope on this side of the grave. (24)

The emphasis here is upon the human values the house can

represent. It is its rootedness and permanence that enables it to have this kind of significance.

Connected is the world of Nature. Originally, the novelist intended that Bast's night-walk should be directly presented. His decision not to do so was the right one, for it would have reduced the character's significance as a realistic representative of the lower-classes, but the emphasis upon the natural cannot be ignored. It is there, however, in the midst of Leonard's cultural enthusiasms and emerges gradually and painfully as he talks. Stress is given to the unliterary, unaesthetic quality of his response to the natural. With Mrs. Wilcox the natural is something less earthy. She draws sustenance from the rural - when in London she is ill and seeks to return to the country - but it has a spiritual presence in her character. Trailing hay after her, there is a disembodied, almost inhuman feeling about how she is felt in the work. Although the pastoral motif is an important one in the work then, it has a certain thinness, due to the fact that the two levels - the earthy and the spiritual - are not integrated with each other. Thus the last chapter does not fulfil a coherently comprehended vision but is a gesture towards a rural idyll; labour occurs here but it is viewed from a distance, through a misty haze. A relaxed ease predominates. The episode represents a loophole in the inevitable advance of progress and thus fails to embody a unified and satisfying pastoral world.

Work is also a genuine positive in the work and Tibby's ennui and the Sch<sup>1</sup>egel sisters' aimlessness are implicitly



and explicitly criticised by contrast with the commitment to activity of the Wilcoxes. This commitment can be connected with irresponsibility but the attraction Henry has for Margaret suggests that it also can be associated with an efficient security able to reassure and strengthen. The trouble is that what <sup>work</sup> actually means in real life is left unrealised. The Wilcoxes remain rather sketchy and one-sided creations because a whole side of their life which has thematic significance is merely indicated rather than explored.

In Howards End then, the characters are tested and evaluated in terms of fairly clear positives; these act as co-ordinates in the work, making for judgments that have a wide and balanced quality. Through them the major theme of the work emerges. Centrally this has to do with communication and connection, for the social world that is embodied in the book is a fragmented one, composed of a variety of groups and individuals that have ceased talking and responding to each other. It is not simply that the Wilcoxes despise the Schlegels; it goes deeper. When Aunt Julia and Margaret converse early on, the main impression is of their failure to speak to each other. Lower down the social scale the situation is similar:

"Very serious thing this decline of the birth-rate in Manchester" repeated Mr. Cunningham, tapping the Sunday paper, in which the calamity in question had just been announced to him.  
 "Ah, yes", said Leonard, who was not going to let on that he had bought a Sunday paper. "If this kind of thing goes on the population of England will be stationary in 1960."  
 "You don't say so."  
 "I call it a very serious thing, eh?"  
 "Good evening, Mr. Bast." (6)

The misunderstanding of Aunt Julia and Charles about who

exactly Helen is engaged to, the concern with the process by which Mrs. Wilcox and Margaret became friends, the suspicious hostility of Bast's attitude to the Schlegels and the awkwardness that arises, the importance with which the real intimacy of the two sisters is regarded, Margaret's obsessive dwelling on the need to connect, all indicate Forster's preoccupation with the theme of communication.

In a society lacking unity the role of the intellectual is of crucial importance, for in his capacity to achieve a perspective outside the structure of class, he can offer wider, more disinterested insights than others and represent possible mediations between conflicting interests. Within this context the Schlegels should be seen. The three members of the family represent different possibilities of stance and action for the intellectual. It would be wrong to see the issue in terms of Helen's identity with the lower classes and Margaret's with the bourgeoisie although that element is present. Rather the question the novel raises concerns the nature of the position that should be adopted; and the choices are between the younger sister's enthusiastic involvement, Tibby's indifferent passivity and Margaret's attempt to tack between the various claims upon her sympathy and intelligence. It is clear of which stance Forster approved but his willingness to examine those other alternatives indicate how aware he was of the difficulties of his heroine's course. She follows it not simply from a sense of justice, a feeling that the Wilcoxes need the benefit of a more sensitive sensibility or that Bast has been ill-treated but also because of the pressures in society forcing the intellectual to face up to his own role

in the world. The need to move from Wickham Place suggests the extent to which the old stability of position can no longer be taken for granted and the growing consciousness of the dependence of culture upon exploitation and misery impels a reassessment of its worth. Independence of a genuine and creative kind, in these circumstances, becomes increasingly difficult to maintain and the need for commitment increases. Given this, the nature of this commitment is crucial and it is with this that Forster in Howards End is deeply concerned. The trouble is that in his eagerness to provide the ideal stance, he is too willing to simplify the difficulties and obstacles that work against it. A dead Bast and a broken Wilcox are the only ways in which Margaret can attain success. Culture survives, deepened and broadened but the problems of class, the challenges it makes, the immorality and irresponsibility it has to do with, the misery and frustration it implies, are swept aside too hastily for the novel to carry its meaning convincingly.

Such a failure is the result of the novelist's asserted faith in the possibilities represented by the intellectual's stance, his conviction that the developing social and political tendencies of the period would successfully be confronted by an honest disinterestedness and will to make humane values active. The position is worked for tentatively and painstakingly in the novels and it is always felt to be held precariously. It does, however, represent one crucial response to the tensions implicit in the relationship of class and culture and thus has to be set beside that of

Wells and Lawrence in the delineation of a context within which Gissing's fiction can be placed.

PART TWO

A COMMON THEME

## CHAPTER 5

### THE WORKING-CLASS INTELLECTUAL IN THREE NOVELS

A literary context within which Gissing's fiction can be set may be more tightly formed through an examination of his work in relation to two novelists more exactly contemporary to him than Wells, Lawrence and Forster. The themes and experiences these latter writers dealt with were, in part, anticipated and prepared for by James and Hardy, working in the 1880s and early 1890s. Through a discussion of The Princess Casamassima, Jude the Obscure and Born in Exile, a novel of Gissing's most mature phase, his distinctive comprehension and achievement is graspable.

Initially, however, it will be useful to make reference to an extremely influential predecessor. In Great Expectations Joe visits Pip in his London rooms. Sitting, conversing, his attention is attracted by his hat:

Indeed, it demanded from him a constant attention, and a quickness of eye and hand, very like that exacted by wicket-keeping. He made extraordinary play with it, and showed the greatest skill; now, rushing at it and catching it neatly as it dropped; now, merely stopping it midway, beating it up, and humouring it in various

parts of the room and against a good deal of the pattern of the paper on the wall, before he felt safe to close with it; finally, splashing it into the slop-basin, where I took the liberty of laying hands upon it.  
(11,8) 1

Compare this scene with another millinery episode in Gissing's Born in Exile. Godwin Peak is visiting Sidwell Warricombe, preparing to declare his love:

Though he had unbuttoned his overcoat, and seated himself as easily as he could, the absurd tall hat which he held embarrassed him; to deposit it on the floor demanded an effort of which he was yet incapable... Every moment increased his uneasiness; the hat weighed in his hands like a lump of lead and he was convinced he had never looked so clownish. Did her smile signify criticism of his attitude? With decision which came he knew not how, he let his hat drop to the floor and pushed it aside. There, that was better; he felt less of a simpkin. (v,2) 2

The first passage delicately registers one character's social embarrassment, the second registers another's painful self-consciousness and intense awkwardness. Such a distinction clearly has wider implications. Dickens treats the relationship between Pip and Joe through the comic mode. Difficulties are admitted as the hero seeks to adjust the claims of his conflicting worlds but they are kept firmly under control. By seeing Gargery in nostalgically pastoral terms, the necessity for breaking away from him into a more complex existence is totally recognised without the possible pains and losses the process can involve needing to be examined. In Born in Exile Peak's background isn't treated in this way; it has to be dealt with head on, in its full harshness. The central pattern, is not the comic encounter of a virtuous simplicity and a growing maturity but the more uneasy tensions created by a highly intellectual

1. Charles Dickens, Great Expectations (1861).

2. George Gissing, Born in Exile (1892). All references are to this edition.

and sensitive individual living in a class society. Clearly the differences between Great Expectations and Born in Exile express the differences between Dickens and Gissing as novelists, but they also suggest the changes in the significance of education and social mobility that occurred between the mid and late nineteenth century.

In the latter period this experience is sensed and situated in the midst of complex and altering tensions. Central to the fiction of Gissing, Hardy and James is the effort to come to terms with the relationship between a working-class, becoming increasingly self-conscious and articulate and a society, willing to make certain concessions but not yet able to go the whole way. Born in Exile, Jude the Obscure, and The Princess Casamassima are written not in the repressive atmosphere of the 1840s or in the relatively liberal atmosphere of the post-war world but in the ambiguous, shifting political and social life of a period of transition. There can be no simple polarisations or reconciliations, no simple attitudes of cynicism and innocence. Together these novels can help to crystallise understanding of the concerns that were to preoccupy writers such as Wells, Lawrence and Forster.

The three works offer three versions of the intellectual's worker's situation. In the early parts of James's the emphasis is upon the way Hyacinth is trapped by forces and people of which he has little comprehension and control. Miss Pynsent is required to find the boy, Millicent Henning is accused of constantly interfering with him and Mrs. Bowerbank presents a looming threat to his delicacy. He tends to become an object as she and his guardian regard him. It is the



prison scene, however, which articulates most clearly the hero's situation. The way his and Miss Pynsent's entry is described has a nightmarish quality:

She had only had meanwhile a confused impression of being surrounded with high black walls, whose inner face was more dreadful than the other, the one that overlooked the river; of passing through grey stony courts, in some of which dreadful figures, scarcely female, in hideous brown misfitting uniforms and perfect frights of hoods, were marching round in a circle; of squeezing up steep unlighted staircases at the heels of a woman who had taken possession of her at the first stage and who made incomprehensible remarks to other women, of lumpish aspect, as she saw them erect themselves, suddenly and spectrally with dowdy untied bonnets, in uncanny corners and recesses of the draughty labyrinth. (i,3) 3

The horror to which they are being exposed here is the product of an implicating security: "She never had felt so immured, so made sure of; there were walls within walls and galleries on top of galleries; even the daylight lost its colour and you couldn't imagine what o'clock it was." (i,3) What emerges is a terror of enclosure and entrapment, with an intensity which impinges upon the rest of the work. Inside the prison the feeling is repeated when Hyacinth meets his mother: "It was a terrible, irresistible embrace, to which Hyacinth submitted with instant patience." (i,3) In the early sections of the novel the hero is thus placed in the tensions and conflicts that are to involve him for the rest of his life, and from the start he is seen as living through and with his predicament - having to encounter, in the shape of his mother, the ambiguity of his background.

Whereas, in the opening pages of The Princess Casamassima it is the fact that Hyacinth is wanted so much that is

3. Henry James, The Princess Casamassima (1886). All references are to this edition.

important, in Jude the Obscure it is the dispensability of the child which is felt most strongly. The aunt who is looking after him says: "It would ha' been a blessing if Goddy-mighty had took thee too, wi'thy mother and father, poor useless boy!" (i,2) <sup>4</sup> The isolation and loneliness of the boy defines most accurately our sense of his situation, but that separation he suffers also contains his more positive feelings of distinction and aspiration ; it is both an imposed and cultivated apartness. It is the boy who is able to advise where the departing school-master's piano can be stored. Fetching some water he gazes into a well - "...his face wearing the fixity of a thoughtful child's who has felt the pricks of life somewhat before his time." (i,1)

The precocity implied is significantly different from Hyacinth's in whom it takes the form of a rather brittle sophistication. Here, it suggests depths of feeling that can't be fully absorbed, and articulated; the image of the well implies desires and hopes unfathomed and unfulfilled. Jude identifies with the birds he is meant to scare away: "They seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them. Why should he frighten them away?" (i,2) They are pitiful but can fly, they are subject to attack but form a type of community. They offer him, a symbol not only of his own isolation but also of his ambitions. A moment later he is dismissed by the farmer - the first of a series of rejections and refusals. In an epiphanic moment the child sees his changing relationship with the world:

As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre

4. Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (1895). All references are to this edition.

of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noise and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and scorched it. (i,2)

Unlike Hyacinth, Jude is not happy at the centre of things. He lacks the completeness and definiteness of identity of the former. In the attempt to find his bearings he focuses upon Christminster; the image of the well is complemented by the image of the ladder. Jude, then, is the intellectual worker as pursuer of self-fulfilment. The learning he wants he fights for, reading whilst driving his van, writing off for the books he needs, studying in his free time. Only through education, he believes, is his true self to be realised.

Godwin Peak in Born in Exile is also partly self-educated. Learning offers him a way out of an uncongenial routine. Although Godwin has a genuine love of the academic world, the idealisation of that world which is characteristic of Jude, is absent. When Peak hears of his failure to come first in the examination he sits, his disappointment is described in the following way:

To come so near success exasperated his impatient temperament, and for a few days his bondage at the chemical works was intolerable; he was ready for almost any new venture that promised release and new scope for his fretting energies. (i,2)

The fact that he hasn't been able to escape from the monotony of his occupation most distresses him, rather than the sense that his ability has proved to be less than he hoped. From the beginning education is viewed in terms of what it can mean socially as the scene in which the citizens of Kingsmill gather around the statue of Sir Job Whitelaw, the self-made millionaire, indicates. The stress is constantly on the way

Peak doesn't quite fit in; his prizes are for the most part second rather than first and beyond the hall he is observed as slightly detached from the rest of the students. It's not a case of his being an outsider in a straight-forward way but of his being on the border-line, on the edge - wary, afraid, scornful.

Peak is the worker as social climber, as the man who recognises that he can only be at ease in a higher social class<sup>but</sup> to achieve that has to suffer the tortures of uneasiness. This is how he is described:

No common lad. A youth whose brain glowed like a furnace, whose heart throbbed with tumult of high ambitions, of inchoate desires, endowed with knowledge altogether exceptional for his years; a nature essentially militant, displaying itself in innumerable forms of callow intolerance - apt, assuredly, for some vigorous part in life, but as likely as not to rush headlong on traverse roads if no judicious mind assumed control of him. (1,2)

The metaphors - 'glow', 'throb', 'militant', 'rush', - are those suggestive of action. Peak, although highly sensitive, has none of Hyacinth's contented passivity, none of Jude's dreaming vagueness. He is a youth with energy and determination but unlike Alton Locke it is the energy and determination of the nervous, unstable personality; it is not drive but a frantic discontent seeking repose. If James's hero is dangerously involved and Hardy's remote and isolated what characterises Gissing's is his situation in a limbo area in which he struggles for success. All three figures have a central similarity. They convey a strongly autobiographical significance which comes from their embodiment of values that,

though criticised, do play a positive role in the fiction; their destiny is to discover a community in which they can feel at home.

The Princess Casamassina is the most directly political of the novels. It was written in the mid-1880s, at a time when working-class political activity was felt as a serious danger, with marches and riots occurring in London. James, having come to England to embrace the old values and sense of life, faced the phenomenon of demonstrations in London with a puzzled resentment. He recognised the corrupt condition of the aristocracy.<sup>5</sup> However, it was the only element to which he could cling, even though he had to do so aesthetically:

... I can imagine no spectacle more touching, more thrilling and even more dramatic than to see this great precarious, artificial empire on behalf of which, nevertheless, so much of the strongest and finest stuff of the greatest race (for such they are) has been expended, struggling with forces which perhaps, in the long run, will prove too much for it.<sup>6</sup>

The striking thing about his remarks in his letters concerning the social and political issues of the day, taken together, is their uncertainty. He seems to be wavering between the delights of an impersonal detachment and the need to adopt some sort of position. Although enjoying the spectacle of the struggle, faced with violence in the streets he is compelled to attribute it entirely to 'roughs and thieves'<sup>7</sup> English life might require 'blood letting'<sup>8</sup> but the proletarian forces are described as 'Huns and Vandals'.<sup>9</sup> The imagination

5. See Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock (1920), i, 125.

6. Letters of Henry James, i, 114.

7. Letters of Henry James, i, 125.

8. Letters of Henry James, i, 125.

9. Letters of Henry James, i, 125.

of James inclines to see everything in terms of the drama it affords, the effects it can produce but that stance in relation to the reality of the political and social conflicts of the eighties, cannot be held absolutely, for the pressures to take up a position, to articulate a commitment to the values and beliefs he maintains, are too great. In 1884 he writes, after reading about a bomb-throwing incident: "I wondered as I looked through (the newspapers) whether I was losing all my radicalism; and then I wondered whether I had any to lose." <sup>10</sup> The comedy here disguises a real unsureness; first the clear statement of an attitude and then the worry about whether such a stand confirms to his image of the aloof artist. Of James's profound conservatism there can be little doubt but the form of that conservatism is far from simple and is significantly different from that of someone like W.H. Mallock. The novelist had less complacency about the worth of the aristocracy, a greater sense of the changes that were occurring and threatened to occur, and, inevitably, a more complex awareness of the meaning of culture.

The difficulties of his position emerge very clearly in The Princess Casamassima. Writing from an assumed position of detachment, ironically distancing himself from his hero, he is constantly being tempted to forgo his apartness. Thus in the 'Sun and Moon' scene, James, in describing the attitudes of the 'malcontents' to Hyacinth, writes:

He was ab ovo a revolutionist, and that balanced against his smart neckties, a certain suspicious security that was perceived in him as to the h (he had had from his

10. Henry James, A Little Tour in France, Boston, (1884), p.238.

earliest years a natural command of it), and the fact that he possessed the sort of hand on which there is always a premium - an accident somehow to be guarded against in a thorough-going system of equality. (ii,21)

A crudity of attitude is present here; it's a cheap sort of satire, a breakdown in irony which reveals the fact that the author has interests other than the aesthetic. Something of the same revelation occurs when Hyacinth has returned from his European vacation to the shop where he works: "He got off on the whole easily enough to feel a little ashamed, and he reflected that the man at old Crook's showed at any rate no symptoms of the social jealousy lying at the bottom of the desire for a fresh deal." (ii,31) That thought could, of course, only be Hyacinth's but the tone suggests that it is more likely the novelist's or at least that he is in agreement. It is the simplicity of these brief interpolations that most stands out, their bareness as it were; they have no shell of Jamesian artistry to protect and place them.

Part of the same lapse into mere opinion is at work in his presentation of the aristocracy. In many respects the characterisation of the Princess is a superb one - delicate and subtle, including both an appreciation of her qualities and profound insight into what those qualities can, in certain contexts, mean for others. It would be mistaken to claim James is as enchanted with Christina Light as Hyacinth is. He might enjoy the illusion but he recognises it for what it is in a way his hero never does. There is, however, a sense in which the aesthetic awareness of the Princess he attempts, cannot be sustained. Although Hyacinth is dropped, the Princess's indifference isn't maintained, for

when she visits her protégé and finds his door locked she feels a genuine desperation; she realises how much he means to her. If that is the case, though, the inhumanity which James had detected in her character, is shown to lack real substance. There is a softness of centre finally to the novelist's treatment of the aristocratic world. What's at fault is not that James's attitudes are crude or wrong but that they exist in an uneasy alliance with an awareness which seeks to surmount mere opinion.

This confusion inevitably effects the characterisation of Hyacinth himself. He is the focus of consciousness in the work. The trouble is that the novelist makes him both a highly complex character and a simple-minded mouthpiece for various ideas. Jamesian aesthetic comprehension disintegrates into something narrower and more naïve. In the second half of the book Hyacinth is the only figure capable of defending and articulating the cultural values so precious to the author; the victim in the realm of plot and theme becomes heroic in the realm of attitude, thus anticipating a similar split in the characterisation of Leonard Bast, although in Howards End there is no question of the heroism having a cultural significance or being the product of a tension between detachment and commitment. The division between Robinson's status as worker and his status as intellectual is reflected in the fact that the novelist can finely portray his aesthetic sensibility but is unable to make us understand his political involvement. There is very little feeling of the urgency and force, the motivating



compulsion behind it. His moment of commitment occurs suddenly, almost arbitrarily, in the midst of his resentment of the accusation that he and his conspirators are cowards; the scene is self-consciously dramatic, with Hyacinth playing his part to perfection. In the novel, therefore, the hero's identity with the proletarian cause, although a significant projection of his inheritance and his background, has a token significance; it's mainly there to represent one pole of a tension. He feels the misery of the London poor, or rather feels the misery through the highly-wrought prose of James's impressionistic rendering, but the dedication to action liberates him to indulge in contemplation. It's as if not only Hyacinth but James himself is freed by the pledge he makes; having got<sup>it</sup> out of the way both can concentrate their attention in the aesthetic field.

Yet, it would be mistaken to underestimate the strength of the hero's political dedication. If one of the dominant features of The Princess Casamassima is the theme of betrayal, this is because real and specific commitments are made. Words such as 'betrayal' and 'treachery' are in constant use, either in a straight-forward or metaphoric way, and the motif is continually present in a minor key. In this landscape of Hyacinth is placed. His birth occurs in its midst, for he is the son of a mother deserted by a nobleman she thought had loved her; illusion, then, enables treachery. One of the strongest emphases in the portrayal of the relationship of Hyacinth and Christina is precisely on illusion; the theatre is an important metaphor in this context.

At Medley, the most sustained sense of Hyacinth's escapist response to the aristocratic world is articulated; after

reading a novel the Princess seems to him to be a character out of fiction. He is not simply deceived, failing to recognise a darker reality under the surface, for the actuality of Christina partakes of the illusory. She is seen as an actor: "Her performance of the part she had undertaken to play was certainly complete, and everything lay before him but the reason she might have for playing it." (i,22) Both share the fantasy except that the heroine is aware of it as fantasy, is self-conscious and Hyacinth takes it literally. James writes at one point: "It was not so much that he wanted to enjoy as that he wanted to know..." (i,11) and it is that absence of knowledge which leads him to regard the aristocratic world in the way he does. The failure is that of the stereotype intellectual working man, the man who is educated and sensitive enough to appreciate the value of culture, to become enamoured of it but insufficiently mature and civilised to be able to discriminate between true and false versions of the product. Thus in Captain Sholto's room he is taken in by the romance and is reminded of Bulwer's novels. Part of his education is his growing ability to understand what Lady Aurora had meant when she had called Sholto vulgar.

He responds to the cultivated world with the appetite of a gourmet; there is no fine discrimination. Everything, from bad romance to great pictures, is pushed together in his novel experience of culture. He is first pictured sitting in a café:

He had seen so much, felt so much, learnt so much, thrilled and throbbed and laughed and sighed so much during the past several days that he was conscious at last of the danger of becoming incoherent to himself and of the need of balancing his accounts. (ii,29)

There is something here of the legendary American tourist

in Europe - an element of vulgarity about it all. Thus, in spite of the expense, he determines to order an exotic drink, because he thinks it the superior thing to do. Although James shares Hyacinth's regard for the cultivated world, the particular kind of failure, that his protagonist's response represents, is well placed.

It is placed essentially by a tone of patronage which the novelist adopts towards him; he is 'our little hero' and 'our friend'. The fact that James constantly assumes the role of kindly father, demonstrates the sense in which the characterisation can be called brilliant in only certain respects. What the novelist was unable to do was to explore the situation of the working-class intellectual with sufficient insight into the difficulties of such an individual's approach to the world of culture, to enable a sympathetic understanding as opposed to an easy condescension. He gets close to the issue - seeing the tendency to romanticise that world, recognising that it might not be worth striving for anyway, describing the eagerness with which it is grasped when the opportunity arises; but what its complexity might be is not really comprehended, there being little notion of the sorts of strengths and values a working-class background might encourage, of the mixture of hostility, suspicion and admiration with which the life of the arts and the mind is likely to be regarded.

The hero's conception of the world of political subversives also participates of illusion. But that emphasis is not prominent. More significantly, the proletarian commitment provides an area of safety and certainty. For Hyacinth, sensitive and delicate, the revolutionary representa

a strength and conviction he lacks; for the revolutionary, Hyacinth represents a useful tool. Audley Court and the entry to it is described in an imagery of darkness and confinement: "...and it had the further drawback that you had to penetrate a narrow alley, a passage between high black walls, to enter it." (i,7) and later: "The landing on the top of the stairs at Audley Court was always dark; but it seemed darker than ever..." (ii,32) The similarity with the entry into the prison, ~~in the early~~ part of the novel, is a haunting one. And in that room, of which the invalid girl is the centre, the conflict which, in the external world is so deeply embedded into Hyacinth's personality, is played out, for fun, as it were, between the fiercely aristocratic sister and the fiercely radical brother; here Lady Aurora can reconcile the strains of aristocratic dignity and philanthropic concern.

In another way, the other plebe<sup>e</sup>ian character who takes up Hyacinth, also offers security. Millicent seems like an elder sister, almost a maternal figure. The characterisation has often been praised by critics, used to indicate James's ability to present the vulgarity and vitality of ordinary people. However, there is something distasteful about it, due to the fact that the girl seems too much a summing up, is too obviously and baldly put forward as the quintessence of one part of the novelist's apprehension of the London streets. For Hyacinth, Millicent comes to represent the life of the proletariat - the hedonism, the unthinking good nature, the utter philistinism and inevitably such a representation must force a whole series of possible complexities into a fairly narrow channel. Ordinary human

reality cannot be satisfactorily incorporated into such a transparent vessel, however large and magnificent the vessel might be. Millicent's strength of presence does though with Muniment's strength of grasp provide the hero with the anchor he need to hold on to.

For him the working-class cause enables him to give himself away and thus lose the difficulties he faces. His vision of action denies the human; it is a natural, uncontrollable phenomenon:

If he had a definite wish as he stood there it was that that exalted deluded company should pour itself with Muniment at its head and surge through the sleeping world and gather the myriad miserable out of their slums and burrows, should roll into the selfish square and lift a tremendous hungry voice and awaken the gorged indifferent to a terror that would bring them down. (i,21)

Words such as 'pour', 'surge', 'roll', suggest his excitement at the feeling of being carried along, of being part of a movement of which he is only a helpless component. And this sense is emphasised by the fact that the cause is seen in hierarchical terms.

Hoffendahl had exactly the same mastery of them that a great musician - that the Princess herself - had of the keyboard of the piano; he treated all things, persons, institutions, ideas, as so many notes in his great symphonic revolt. (ii,24)

Within this sort of impersonal structure, Hyacinth can feel secure.

That security turns out to be false, for Muniment instead of remaining firm in his revolutionary position starts to fraternise with the aristocracy to the extent that he can no longer embody a definite, independent alternative. And on the other side the illusions surrounding the Princess break down as she comes to be less of a lady playing at politics, and more a member of the bourgeoisie striving in earnest

to actually take part in the political activity of the day. The two worlds of the novel turn out after all to be one, and it is ~~that~~ discovery which leads Hyacinth to suicide. The central betrayal is the failure of the external world to reflect his own individual being. It is not that he is torn by tensions which he is unable to reconcile that is ultimately significant but the realisation that those tensions are of little importance anyway. The intellectual working-man in other words, discovers that his identification of culture with a certain class has been without foundation, that in English society culture has no real social basis. He had feared the democratic movement as a threat but the final meaning of the novel is that democracy has already arrived, has already sapped the basis of the cultural world. Arnold had looked to people he called aliens to keep alive values; James recognises that without some kind of historical foundation those aliens could not survive. Critics have seen the suicide as the result of a pathetic mistake and as an affirmation of a tragic destiny. In actual fact Hyacinth dies as a victim and a hero - heroic in his knowledge that he could only live as a victim.

In very many respects Thomas Hardy seems the antithesis of James. Neither writer had much regard for the other. Yet in spite of the wide differences both novelists can be seen as part of the beginnings of modernism for both can no longer take for granted the essential adjustment between the individual and society that had been available before; it is isolation and the sense of exile that is necessarily fundamental. These experiences in Hardy are centrally a matter of class and education. He has no use for any attempt

to devalue the former, to underestimate its importance. As is the case for Wells the necessity for maintaining distinctions and standards is clear:

I find that my politics are really neither Tory nor Radical. I may be called an Intrinsicist. I am against privilege derived from accident of any kind, and am equally opposed to aristocratic privileges and democratic privilege... 11

Democracy is fine then providing it does not lead to a levelling down. The lower-classes might have many values but they are not attributed with any great capacity for aesthetic appreciation.

The extent to which Jude the Obscure is primarily concerned with the connection of class and education is a debatable matter.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless at the heart of the novel is not just a criticism of the exclusiveness of the major English universities but a deeply felt rage at the way the lives of individuals can be frustrated and wasted by the connections between class and education, which seemed so strong in the late nineteenth century, partly because there were developments at the time which seemed to suggest the possibilities that these connections might be broken. The anger perhaps is similar to that of William Morris who in a letter writes:

The present theory of the use to which Oxford should be put appears to be that it should be used as a huge upper public school for fitting lads of the upper and middle-classes for their laborious future of living on other people's labour. 13

11. Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (1928) p. 268.
12. See A. Alvarez, "Jude the Obscure" in Alber Guerard, ed., Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays New Jersey (1963), pp. 113-22 for an attempt to diminish the elementary social purpose of the novel; but also The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 272.
13. The Letters of William Morris, ed. Philip Henderson (1950), p. 243.

One of the dominant features of the period seems to have been a lack of intellectual culture and interest amongst the higher echelons of British society.<sup>14</sup> In such a context the conflict between aspiring intellect and educational institutions would be extreme, the bitterness of a very deep nature. There were attempts at improving the situation and life at the universities did become more rigorous in the last two decades, but things happened slowly and piecemeal

In spite of the necessity, however, to stress where Hardy's major social concern lies, there does seem to be some unclarity about the themes. John Paterson, in his examination of the genesis of the novel, has concentrated upon the alterations Hardy made to his early drafts<sup>15</sup>; in the original version, Sue was to have been an orphan adopted by the provost of a college at Christminster, she was to have been introduced very early on and was to have provided one of the major causes of Christminster's hold on the boy as opposed to the school-master who was only to enter the work later on. All of these facts suggest that the first

14. See Henry Salt, "Confessions of an Eton Master", Nineteenth Century, XV11 1885, 178-179; Esme Wingfield-Stratford, Before the Lamps Went Out (1948), pp.95-129; D.A.Winstanley, Late Victorian Cambridge, Cambridge (1947), p.147; Leonard Woolf, Sowing (1960), pp.87-90.

15. John Paterson, "The Genesis of *Jude the Obscure*", Studies in Philology, 57 (1960), pp. 87-98.



conception of the novel placed a more concentrated emphasis on the university theme. In his article, Paterson accounts for the change by suggesting that the 'dynamics of the author's imagination' transformed his central concern to an attack on the stringency of the marriage laws and on the Christian responsibility for them. In a letter to a reviewer, though, the novelist explicitly denied he was at all interested in this issue:

The only remarks which can be said to bear on the general marriage question occur in dialogue, and comprise no more than half-a-dozen pages in a book of 500. And of these remarks I state (p.362) that my own views are not expressed therein. 16

Nothing can be plainer than this, although it is true he claims an interest in the tragic issues of two bad marriages. It seems likely then that the revisions were motivated by different reasons. According to Henry Harper who published the story in installments:

Hardy regretted that it was not the story he originally had in mind, when he approached us, but that the characters had taken things into their own hands and were doing better work than he had anticipated. 17

This indicates that the novelist was conscious of the way his original conception was, in the process of fictional realisation, altering and expanding; his characters were becoming fuller, more independent beings. Sue, who in the unaltered manuscript, was to be seen merely as part of the wider Christminster theme, was taking on a life beyond that; in the author's mind, she could not be confined to a merely reflective figure he realised. Thus Hardy separates her from

16. See Florence Emily Hardy, ed., The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (1930) pp. 40-41.

17. Quoted in "The Genesis of *Jude the Obscure*", p.98.

any direct connection with the city, gives her an independent status. That change does not mean that it was the marriage issue which now primarily occupied him but that in writing he was seeing Jude's aspirations in a wider, more complex way, that they were not simply a matter of his obtaining a university education but involved his whole self.

Whereas, the major meanings of The Princess Casamassima revolve around the issue of betrayal, in Jude the Obscure they centre upon the experience of disillusionment. The distinction is significant. In the former work the hero is placed in a world that makes various commitments to him and offers the possibility of commitment on his part; it is a world that entangles him in its meshes, seems to conform to his preoccupation about things, and then, in an abrupt manner, turns its back on him; in Jude the Obscure, however, whereas Hyacinth is involved, Jude is detached, excluded. This is the working-class intellectual seen at an earlier stage, as it were, before the tensions arising from his success have arisen. There are no serious promises made to him and therefore no serious treacheries; there is instead the lengthier, more torturous process, of disillusionment and frustration. This more precisely can be illustrated by the episode dealing with Vilbert's failure to keep his word. The immediate feeling the boy undergoes is that of betrayal - but a betrayal that is the consequence of neglect rather than falsehood. And the sharp pain caused by the broken promise shortly modifies itself into something related, but significantly different:

Jude dropped behind. He was an unsophisticated boy, but the gift of sudden insight which is sometimes vouchsafed to children showed him all at once what shoddy humanity

the quack was made of. There was to be no intellectual light from this source. The leaves dropped from his imaginary crown of laurel; he turned to a gate, leant against it, and cried bitterly. (1,4)

This is less the hurt caused by a broken promise and more a loss of faith in other people. Jude had hoped the quack was better than this and he turns out to be decidedly inferior to his idea about him. The central emotion, in other words, is disillusionment, a collapse of ideals.

That emotion is present in one of the major relationships of the novel - between Jude and Arabella. The possibility that she might disappoint him is present from the start when he thinks before his marriage that: "His idea of her was the thing of most consequence, not Arabella herself, he sometimes said laconically." (1,9) and events prove this to be the case.

The experience is realised again in Jude's relationships with Christminster and the academic world. His first exploration of the city is described brilliantly, suggesting the mingling of the imaginary and the fantastic with the real in his response. He walks about in a dream but part of that disassociation of reality is forced upon him by his sense of isolation there:

Knowing not a human being here, Jude began to be impressed with the isolation of his own personality, as with a self-spectre, the sensation being that of one who walked but could not make himself seen or heard. (11,1)

As he wanders a voice interrupts him, as Arabella before had done. The figure of the policeman, representing the force of authority and order in the academic city, will reappear frequently. On the following day the colleges of Christminster have come to seem hostile. This pattern is repeated. Jude is not subject to a permanent illusion about the world

represented in the city which is suddenly shattered; from the start the actuality of disillusion is implied:

For a moment there fell on Jude a true illumination, that here on the stone yard was a centre of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of the colleges. But he lost it under the stress of the old idea. (ii,2)

The insight is repeated later with greater intensity and permanence; after his application is rejected, the image of a wall is used to suggest the nature of his separation.

Whereas then, Hyacinth finds that the world of culture is not grounded in the historical actuality of his time, Jude discovers it is the nature of the actuality which deprives the working-classes of the experience: education and culture can offer. In his long speech, towards the end of the novel, to the people of Christminster he recognises that to achieve that experience it is necessary to act as if the values of humaneness it embodies were of no account:

It takes two or three generations to do what I tried to do in one; and my impulses - affections - vices perhaps they should be called - were too strong not to hamper a man without advantages; who should be as cold-blooded as a fish and as selfish as a pig to have a really good chance of being one of the county's worthies. (vi,1)

Only those without culture can hope to gain it. The recognition of the paradox is the ultimate expression of Jude's disillusionment with the life of the mind and the arts as it is concretely embodied in society. The recognition is underlined by the hero's encounter with the composer of a piece of music which has had a great impact on him, who compels him to see that beauty and intelligence are founded in very ugly economic realities.

Although Christminster represents a very important aspect of Jude's aspirations, there is also the figure of Sue

Bridehead. She is quite closely associated with the place; not only does she live there, she also has had a close relationship with one of its students. The hero's feeling of being disregarded is caused both by the undergraduates and his cousin. Although Sue is extremely intelligent and cultured, perhaps her chief characteristic is the intensity of her emotional life - "She was so vibrant that everything she did seemed to have its sources in feeling..." (i,4) For her, thought exists mainly in emotion; her inner being is very much exposed, near the surface. When her adopted son begins crying Hardy writes:

Then a yearning look came over the child and he began to cry. Sue thereupon could not refrain from instantly doing likewise, being a harp which the least wind of emotion from another's heart could make to vibrate as readily as a radical stir in her own. (iv,3)

This quality of personality is allied to a very manifest spirituality. Jude looking at her, sees "...so ethereal a creature that her spirit could be seen trembling through her limbs." For him Sue embodies an ideal of culture made human and personal. When he hears of his rejection by Christminster, he thinks that "With Sue as sompanion he could have renounced his ambitions with a smile". (ii,6) D.H. Lawrence wrote about the relationship:

She did for him (Jude) quickly what he would have done for himself slowly, through study. By patient, diligent study, he would have used up the surplus of that turgid energy in him, and would, by long contact with old truths, have arrived at the form of truth which was in him. What he indeed wanted to get from study was not a store of learning, nor the vanity of education, a sort of superiority of educational wealth, though this also gave him pleasure. He wanted, through familiarity with the true thinkers and poets, particularly with the classics and theological thinkers, because of their comparative sensuousness, to find conscious expression for the

for what he held in his blood. 18

For Jude, his cousin is an alternative focus for his highest aspirations. However, although she is willing to befriend him, and allow him to help her when she is in difficulties, although she is strongly drawn to him, she is never willing to ~~make~~ that absolute commitment which would raise Jude's hopes. Finally she rejects him out of a sense of traditional morality and a feeling that she has no right to happiness. The ideal of liberation and freedom, of intellectual superiority she had seemed to embody, collapses under the pressure of extreme circumstances and forces her back on the support of conventionality. In a world of pain and suffering that have a very clear historical and social foundation, culture cannot bear the strain.

Jude's experience of disillusionment thus has two aspects. It involves both a loss of faith in culture as it is embodied in institutions and a loss of faith in culture as it is embodied in actual people, who in spite of a seeming emotional intensity and enlightenment, are compelled to behave as if these qualities did not exist. The twin themes mutually support each other, grounding the meaning of the novel in both a public and private significance.

As the novel develops those two significances merge closer and closer creating in the closing stages a deep and universal sense of frustration and disappointment. Finally, Jude's child commits both murder and suicide. This last episode is a terrifying one, bordering on the melodramatic. The fact that it occurs in a context that has been so

18. D.H. Lawrence, "Study of Thomas Hardy", Phoenix ed. E.D. McDonald (1936), pp. 499-500.

laboriously prepared for, so profoundly created, the fact that it embodies a central meaning of the whole work, gives it a genuine symbolic power. As a consequence of the way the world has been apprehended in the fiction, a place in which the sensitive and humane have no chance of fulfilment, in which people need the protection of tradition and convention to shield them from the implications of a true commitment to culture, the decision to prefer death to life seems appropriate, for life is only another form of death. Father Time's preoccupation with the thought of being unwanted suggests powerfully the state of Jude himself, the deepness of his own recognition of evil. His final surrender to the reality of his situation is a type of suicide. James's hero dies because his vision is betrayed by actuality; Hardy's hero dies because the actuality has turned out to be less worthy than he had imagined. The one's death occurs in the midst of complications and people; the other's alone, in exile, while his wife enjoys herself on the river.

Exile was also a preoccupation of Gissing. For him the issues involved in the connection between culture and democracy had an almost obsessional importance. Constantly he harped on the danger to culture from the masses, constantly defended the values of the intellect. And this sort of awareness was allied with an intense knowledge of solitude. He writes to Bertz: "In London, the solitude soon becomes intolerable, solitude as complete as it was when I published my first book."<sup>19</sup> It is the feeling of threat from the forces of modern philistinism, together with the personal

19. The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, ed. A.C. Young (1961), p.104.

loneliness he suffered, which largely shaped the way he responded to the relationship of culture and democracy. The tone of his remarks is intensely personal, almost slightly hysterical. He defends the position of art and culture with a fierceness which suggests a fear that the democratic world that had implicated him in marriage, might also implicate him in a more general way, tempt him to alter his values and lower his standards. He writes in 1892:

Impossible to take up a newspaper without being impressed with this fact of extending and deepening vulgarity. It seems to be greatly due to American influence, but there can be no doubt that the ground is prepared for it by the pretence of education afforded by our School Board system, Society is being levelled down, and with strange rapidity. Democracy scarcely pretends to a noble aim; it is triumphing by the force of its appeal to lower motives. Thus I am convinced the gulf between the really refined and the masses grows, and will grow, constantly wider. Before long we shall have an Aristocracy of mind and manners more distinct from the vast majority of the population than the Aristocracy has ever been in England. It will not be a fighting Aristocracy, but a retiring and reticent one; scornful, hopeless. 20

The position articulated here could be termed Jamesian but Gissing is more historically specific in his response than James would be, pinning things down to the new educational developments. They do however share a sense of the inevitability of change. In a letter to his sister he says:

I fear we shall live through great troubles yet, owing to the social revolution that is in progress. You will have understood in part my attitude to this revolution. We cannot resist it, but I throw in what weight I may have on the side of those who believe in an aristocracy of brains, as against the brute domination of the quarter educated mob. 21

The man of culture in these circumstances becomes a bastion against a swelling tide of mediocrity; it's a stance of resigned defiance.

Part of the reasons for Gissing's lack of tonal poise is

20. Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, pp.151-152.

21. Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, eds. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (1927), pp.326-327.



his uncertainty about what he is supposed to be defending. In James the meaning of culture is present in the actual texture of the prose - in the fineness of the surface, the subtlety of the discrimination, the air of cultivated leisure; the language is an embodiment of its relevant actuality. No similar confidence and security is possible for the English writer; his assertions remain rather awkward and self-conscious. The danger is to condescend<sup>to</sup> him, to dismiss his fears as the intolerance of the bigot, to see him as part of the development he condemned - the coming to authority of the half-educated. What should be recognised are the difficulties and pressures he wrote out of, the fact that he did, in spite of temptations, remain a deeply responsible and concerned artist. He needed to articulate his views so strongly, so baldly because he felt the seductions of conformist escapism or simple-minded democratic sentiment to such a degree. Taken in isolation his comments appear obvious, taken in the context of the fiction, their value emerges more clearly.

In Born in Exile what Gissing's attitudes could imply is clear, for that novel, steeped as it is in a sense of class, committed as it is to an attack on the false versions of culture to be found in society, concerned as it is to explore the mind and the feelings of the rebel against the conventional divisions of the world, suggests how radical, iconoclastic and urgent his imagination was. Whereas in actual life he might express his disgust at the vulgarity of the masses, when that attitude is transposed into fiction, made part of the character of Godwin Peak, it becomes a component of a general response to society.<sup>22</sup> Through Peak the writer opens himself

22. See Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, pp.152-153, for Gissing's comments on his relationship to Peak.

to the pressures of the complex relations between culture, democracy and class, and allows those pressures to be openly felt rather than repressed by the adoption of an attitude. It is this fact which partly accounts for the book's strangeness, the bareness of its texture, the astringency of its tone, and the nature of the hero's characterisation. Although the narrator is distanced from him, we are brought into contact with the movement of his mind and feeling in a way that is absent from the portrayal of Hyacinth and Jude. Peak is not suffering, as the other two are, from illusions which the writer is able to penetrate. Rather we respond to the world through him, at the same time as being able to recognise the limitations of that response. The similarity is with Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment in which Raskolnikov provides both a meditation on life, a way of looking at life, as well as being deeply involved in its flux. That there is this absence of separation between protagonist and narrator indicates that the major experience of Born in Exile is not betrayal or disillusionment. Godwin it might be said was mistaken in his belief that he needed to disguise his real opinion in order to gain entry into a higher rank but that is left in some doubt and would any way be more a confirmation of his ironic fate than an illustration of his illusory perception of reality. There being no idealisation or romanticism to start with the fundamental meaning of the experience contained by the story is that of failure.

The failure occurs in a world that emerges fragmentarily and rather thinly. Its core is that group of characters who exist between Peak's roots and his aspirations - slightly Bohemian, highly articulate, very sympathetic people. They

are intellectuals somewhat detached from society, able to absorb into their ranks individuals from various classes. Earwaker is potentially an immensely interesting figure. In many respects similar to the major protagonist, he is capable of remaining content with the role his talent and education have fitted him for. Coming from a proletarian background, knowing the realities of human behaviour, yet he is able to maintain a reasonable faith in democracy. In comparison to Peak he might appear rather ordinary and insignificant but Gissing does not underestimate his qualities. He has a responsible courage, a flexibility and honesty which contrasts with that of his friend; his decision to surrender the editorship of a political journal is marked by a calm reasonableness. Earwaker is, however, a still point in a moving world.

Malkin is a comic character but his continual restlessness, his pathetic matrimonial ventures create around him an atmosphere of unsettlement and brashness. Always liable to blunders, he represents the man of action without the discipline of intelligence.

And it is a lack of intelligent control which also characterises Christian and Marcella Moxey. The former with his pitiful delusions, the latter with a hopeless and suppressed passion for Peak. Both spend much of their lives in a wasteland of frustrated desire, making desperate and humiliating efforts to obtain the happiness they so badly want. Amongst all the talk there is thus the reality of unfulfilled emotion, just as behind the expected unconventionality of Miss Walworth's household, instead of there being the Bohemian freedom of the artist, there is a petty respectability; Miss Moorhouse, for example, has a

certain independence of mind, but lacks a true greatness of soul; her letter to Sidwell, which compares man to the ants suggests how limited her view of life is.

Partly against this landscape of frustration and sham freedom, of futile thought and futile energies Peak revolts. As an intellectual from the working-class he has a much surer grasp than Hyacinth or Jude on the idea of culture, recognising more precisely where to look for it - in the midst of wealth and leisure. It becomes embodied for him in the image of an ideal woman, but that ideal is not vague or nebulous. It is grounded in the actual, in his experience at the prize-winning ceremony, for example:

On the seat behind him were two girls whose intermittent talk held him with irresistible charm throughout the whole ceremony. He had not imagined that girls could display such intelligence, and the sweet clearness of their intonation, the purity of their accent and the grace of their habitual phrases, were things altogether beyond his experience... (i,2)

There is an undeniable snobbishness about this and one of the features of Born in Exile is the way the world of culture does become a matter of good manners. Whereas in The Princess Casamassima and Jude it could be regarded as a whole way of responding to life, including both a deepness of intelligence as well as a fineness of surface, in Gissing's work a division exists between culture as etiquette and culture as a quality of awareness. The shallowness of Mr. and Mrs. Warricombe (especially the latter), of Chilvers is paralleled by the posturings and uncultivated feelings of the metropolitan group. The working-class intellectual possessed of these two versions of the superior life, attempts through the pretended sacrifice of one of them to bring them into unity.

There is, in addition, however, another kind of world - that of his origins. Although, deserving of respect, Peak has a contemptuous attitude towards his family, struggling as it does to make ends meet. His father is described in the following way:

Picture the man. Tall, gaunt, with sharp intellectual features, and eyes of singular beauty, the face of an enthusiast - under given circumstances, of a hero. Poorly clad, of course, but with rigorous self-respect; his boots polished, *propria mano*, to the point of perfection; his linen washed and ironed by ~~him~~ his indefatigable wife. Of simplest tastes, of most frugal habits, a few books the only luxury he deemed indispensable yet a most difficult man to live with, for to him applied the description which Robert Burns gave of his own father; he was of stubborn, ungainly integrity and headlong irascibility. (i,2)

The most striking thing here is his dignity. Instead of attempting to be different, he lives out the pressures involved in his class situation: "Ungainly, for his strong impulses towards culture were powerless to obliterate the traces of his rude origin." (i,2) One of the central meanings of the novel as a whole is the impossibility of denying one's background; the effort to escape, as Peak tries to do is futile. And this is not just a matter of accent or bearing but has to do with the individual's very identity. At one point Godwin wonders if his plot to ingratiate himself was not the result of his rude origins. The point is not a social but a psychological one, for it suggests the way a consciousness of background is an ever-present element in the mind's moral thinking about life.

Born in Exile's most interesting aspect, then, lies in the way in which the social issues it raises are felt within the fabric of the self, registered directly on the personality. The fierceness with which the hero rejects the social world

of his youth, the almost physical repulsion he experiences, suggests the degree to which his whole identity is implicated. Nor is it simply a matter of feeling superior. He resents above all what others will label him as, fears their attempt to impose an identity upon him. He is waiting to go into a Theatre:

To stand thus, expectant of the opening doors, troubled him with a sense of shame. To be sure he was in the spiritual company of Charles Lamb, and of many another man of brains who has waited under the lamp. But contact with the pittites of Kingsmill offended his instincts, he resented their appearance of inferiority to people who came at their leisure, and took seats in the better part of the house. (i,3)

A degree of psychological instability is involved here. Always on the edge of our sense of Peak's character there is this suggestion of mental insecurity, a feeling that at times he is living on the borderland between sanity and madness. Inevitably, to take on the role of an actor in life, not only to be hypocritical as Pecksniff is but to play being a hypocrite is to risk confusion of self and reality, to risk, in other words, the coherence of the personality. Hyacinth, at one point sees himself in theatrical terms, but his self-consciousness is not presented with the same kind of exposed inwardness as Peak's. Far more of The Princess Casamassima belongs to the narrator and his attempts to modulate our responses to his protagonist than is the case in Born in Exile, where the protagonist is left largely, as it were, to dramatise himself.

Crucial in that self-determination is the view of himself as exile. This is the end of Part One:

He hardened himself against the ties of blood, and kept repeating to himself a phrase in which of late he had summed up his miseries: "I was born in exile - born in exile." Now at length had he set forth on a voyage of

discovery, to end perchance in some unknown land among his spiritual kith and kin. (i,5)

And in London on the edge of a crowd he watches two ladies in a carriage:

Close in front of him an open carriage came to a stop, in it sat, or rather reclined, two ladies, old and young. Upon this picture Godwin fixed his eyes with the intensity of fascination; his memory never lost the impress of these ladies' faces. Nothing very noteworthy about them; but to Godwin they conveyed a passionate perception of all that is implied in social superiority. Here he stood, one of the multitude, of the herd; shoulder to shoulder with boars and pickpockets; and within reach of his hand reposed those two ladies, in Olympian calm, seeming unaware even of the existence of the throng. Now they exchanged a word; now they smiled to each other. How delicate was the moving of their lips! How fine must be their enunciation! On the box sat an old coachman and a young footman; they too were splendidly impassive, scornful of the multitudinous gaze. The block was relieved, and on the carriage rolled.

They were his equals, those ladies; merely his equals. With such as they he should by right of nature associate.

In his rebellion he could not hate them. He hated the rabble who stared insolently at them and who envied their immeasurable remoteness. Of mere wealth he thought not; might he only be recognised by the gentle of birth and breeding for what he really was, and be rescued from the promiscuity of the vulgar. (ii,2)

The important thing here is that the sight of the aristocracy, the feeling of not belonging and not being recognised for what he imagines himself to be, leads to an increasing sense of separation from those around him; the experience of exile is intensified. There is a very similar scene in The Princess Casamassima, in which Hyacinth, with Millicent, watches the carriages in Hyde Park:

He wanted to drive in every carriage, to mount on every horse, to feel on his arm the hand of every pretty woman in the place. In the midst of this his sense was vivid that he belonged to the class whom the upper ten thousand, as they passed, didn't so much as rest their eyes on for a quarter of a second. They looked at Millicent, who was safe to be looked at anywhere and was one of the handsomest girls in any company, but they only reminded him of high human walls, the deep gulf

of tradition, the steep embankments of privilege and dense layers of stupidity, which fenced him off from social recognition. (↑,11)

Here the sight of wealth parading itself leads Hyacinth to identify closer with the lower-classes; the main focus is on what the youth wants rather than his feeling of not-belonging. It is also significant that both novelists emphasise the fact that it is not envy or hatred which is the motivating force behind their character's feelings, both are anxious to distinguish their heroes from what they consider to be the psychological basis of the democratic sentiment. Yet Gissing is more aware of the fact that negative emotions are an aspect of his protagonist's sense of exile, of his nature in fact; he is portrayed, for example, as envious of Earwaker. The most significant passage, however, occurs when he sees the country-home of a local aristocrat:

The house had no architectural beauty, but its solitary hardship amid green pastures and tracts of thick wood declared the graces and privileges of ancestral wealth. Standing here alone, Godwin would have surveyed these possessions of an English aristocrat with more of less bitterness; envy would for a moment at all events, have perturbed his pleasure in the natural scene. Accompanied as he was, his emotion took a form which indeed was allied to envy, but had nothing painful. He exulted in the prerogatives of birth and opulence, felt proud of hereditary pride, gloried that his mind was capable of appreciating to the full those distinctions which, by the vulgar, are not much suspected. Admitted to equal converse with men and women who represented the best in English society, he could cast away the evil grudge, the fierce spirit of self-assertion, and be what nature had proposed in endowing him with large brain, generous blood, delicate tissues. What room for malignancy? (↑↑,3)

The difference from the sense conveyed in James is again noticeable. Hyacinth is an aesthete - he can enjoy the spectacle of wealth and culture and desire possession of the pleasures they offer as one might desire a beautiful object but for Peak the spectacle, the desire, even possession, are not sufficient; he would not be satisfied in being the



Princess's puppet, he would be compelled to marry her, to secure himself and end his vulnerability. His feelings towards Sidwell thus develop into a powerful passion. The intensity of his sense of exile compels him to assume the role of one who belongs; it is as if he cannot bear not belonging any longer. And it is that element of extremity which raises the question of identity.

Peak's whole self-hood is involved in the pretence of being a hypocrite. At certain moments in the novel the issue is made explicit. There is the occasion when Godwin is dining with the Moxey family and Gissing comments:

Such play of the imaginative and speculative faculties accounts for the common awkwardness of intelligent young men in society that is strange to them. Only the cultivation of a double-consciousness puts them finally at ease. Impossible to converse with suavity, and to head the forms of ordinary good-breeding, when the brain is absorbed in all manner of new problems; one must learn to act a part, to control the facial mechanism, to observe and anticipate, even whilst the intellect is spending its sincere energy on subjects unavowed. (i,3)

In the Warricombe household he does manage to cultivate this double-consciousness to the extent that one part dominates and represses the other. But at certain moments the mask is pierced and Peak finds himself adrift:

The profound stillness was oppressive to him; he started nervously at an undefined object in a dim corner, and went nearer to examine it; he was irritable, vaguely disconnected, and had even a moment of nausea, perhaps the result of tobacco stronger than he was accustomed to smoke. After leaning for five minutes at the open window, he felt a soothing effect from the air, and could think consecutively of the day's events. What had happened seemed to him incredible, it was as though he revived a mad dream, of ludicrous coherence. Since his display of rhetoric at luncheon all was downright somnambulism. (ii,4)

The modernity of the feeling here is obvious. Things have become detached from meaningful contexts; reality, because it has lost its normal relationship to the personality, has become

a nightmare. Peak experiences himself as an object, as if sleep-walking. At a later stage, his commitment to his role much deeper, he looks back with regret at his past identity; it now seems remote. In playing his part he has only his present to work with - it is as if he exists in a temporal limbo.

In that limbo an extreme scepticism of his own reality besets him. Whilst speaking to Mr. Warricombe of opinions he only pretends to hold to there comes upon him -

...an uncomfortable dreaminess which he had already once or twice experienced when in colloquy with Mr. Warricombe; a tormenting metaphysical doubt of his own identity beset him. With involuntary attempt to recover the familiar self he grasped his own wrist and, then, before he was aware, a laugh escaped him, an all but mocking laugh, unsuitable enough to the spirit of the moment. (iii,4)

That degree of self-criticism which exists as an undercurrent to the protagonist's thought constantly, has here reached such an extremity as to threaten to undermine his very existence; the resort to the physical suggests the depth of the experience. Things are made worse by the re-appearance of Bruno Chilvers in his life. Here his genuine hatred of the individual is in conflict with his need to play the part of a man of religion, and ironically that hatred is based on his sense that Chilvers is a hypocrite; in other words it is an aspect of self-contempt. The feeling of enervation which results, in which thoughts seem to take on a life of their own, is a common one in the novel. Less frequently but very powerful is the desire to take advantage of his deception, to reveal himself as a poseur and expose his friends as dupes. His love comes into radical conflict

with his compulsion to keep his true self hidden. Again the image of the mirror is used:

He dreaded the looking-glass, consciously avoided it;  
and a like disparagement of his inner being tortured  
him through the endless labyrinths of erotic reverie.  
(iv,3)

One of the consequences of the undermining of the self is a tendency to abdicate responsibility for what happens - a tendency to see himself as merely a puppet in the hands of fate.

The final culmination of his crisis of identity is his death; rejected by Sidwell, who like Sue Bridehead has not the courage of her love, he has nothing to fall back on and decides to go abroad. Such a decision has long been prepared for by the frequency with which the idea of emigration has entered his mind. To leave England is to escape from his predicament, to go to an environment in which class does not count. For Hyacinth as well, as he feels his position becoming increasingly impossible, the prospect of running away offers itself, although there the move is more away from the situation the plot has placed the hero in than from a constant awareness of the difficulties of living in England. Release, however, comes too late, for Peak, when his identity has already been sapped. Abroad he finds only an image of his internal meaninglessness<sup>ness</sup> and solitude. As a foreigner he becomes what he fundamentally is, and that final reconciliation means his death.

In this treatment of the theme of identity, Gissing shows himself to be a very fine psychological realist. His language has the capacity to penetrate into the mind and evoke the emotional quality of thought; and yet there is not that depth of penetration which would mean a loss of grip on the external

which is perhaps one of the weaknesses of the first person narrative of Alton Locke. Born in Exile despite its many faults - its long-windedness, its frequent lapse into aridity, its self-conscious discussion of ideas - is in its ability to explore and dramatise the internal self of the working-class intellectual an extremely effective work. Whereas, Hyacinth discovers the absence of a social reality for culture and Jude the alliance between class and culture, Peak comes to recognise the way the link between class and culture ~~and~~ prevents him from achieving either because to do so would be to deny his past and to do that is to risk the coherence of the personality. The way this risk is presented suggests the kind of understanding of mental states which R.D.Laing in The Divided Self revealed.<sup>23</sup>

Hardy, James and Gissing then shared certain obvious concerns. The tension between an educational system that seemed to be becoming more democratic and the reality of class which lay behind appearances, comes out in the way the story of defeated hopes is present in all three works, in the way the pattern of possibilities destroyed repeatedly occurs as the truth of things emerges. Yet, although the writers can be grouped together, their apprehension of the meaning of class for the individual significantly differed. For Gissing it is essentially a subjective, psychological matter; people carry around their social position with them. The way class is expressed comes out for example in that meeting at the railway station of Buckland and Peak, when they renew their acquaintance; it is a matter of tone and implied attitude, a form of speech that is carried on beneath the surface of ordinary conversation. For Hardy, on the other hand, class is essentially something out there in the external

23. R.D.Laing, The Divided Self (1960). His discussion of the disassociation of inner and outer selves and of ontological uncertainty seems particularly relevant to the characterisation of Peak.

world, a question of walls and prejudices and institutions. What the implications are for the individual is obviously important but it is a matter of dealing with the internal consequences of the hostilities and exclusions of the outside world. With James, perhaps inevitably, the sense of class is fundamentally an aesthetic one. He liked to be thought of as belonging to no rank, and as a result treated things very much from a detached point of view. The central issue is one of taste and capacity of appreciation. Wealth is clearly important but it is wealth felt as possessions that have artistic value (part of their artistic value in fact is almost the price they can command). How he treats poverty both in The Princess Casamassima and in his documentary sketches of English life, reveals the extent to which aesthetic criteria are crucial to his imagination.

The novelists' three comprehensions of class are part of three differing perspectives on society - perspectives which can be related to the work of Wells, Forster and Lawrence. Thus, <sup>for</sup> Gissing and Forster their lower-class protagonists' identities, formed by their early experience, prevents them from ultimately being accepted by the social milieu they aspire to. The novelists then, are connected by a tragic liberalism.

Hardy and Lawrence, alternatively, share an emphasis which recognises the profound barriers that class sets up but which also acknowledges the possibility of the individual self sustaining significant values outside those barriers. Jude dies, it is true, but he realises that his identification of culture with cultural institutions had been mistaken and thus achieves a heroic understanding, and Ursula is able to make that knowledge into creative experience and vision. The two

novelists in their faith in the self against society, represent what can be called a post-liberal stance.

Whereas they are sustained by an individualistic ethic, James and Wells are compelled to see their protagonists, at a certain stage in their development, as victims. They perceive no true location of cultural values in the social world, neither in the aristocracy or in the masses but they are also unable to imagine that the single figure can in spite of a vital and free consciousness embody these values alone. Thus Hyacinth is forced to commit suicide and Polly to choose an unreal world of romance. The view~~p~~oint is best defined by its pessimism.

The Princess Casamassima, Jude the Obscure and Born in Exile should then, be seen as works central to an understanding of the response of fiction to the ~~p~~roblem of the place and significance of culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

PART THREE

GISSING

## CHAPTER 6

### GISSING'S FICTION OF THE 1880s.

Born in Exile was written at the end of a period in which Gissing had explored, from a variety of angles and with a variety of emphases, the intellectual's relationship to his social environment. The novel's perceptive penetration into the inner life of its hero was made possible by the writer's effort in the 1880s to understand through his fiction his own personal situation and attitudes, and to give his understanding a satisfactory artistic embodiment. He repeatedly reworked his position in his books as he sought to come to terms with his own changing opinions and the changing society within which he was living.

### The Early Novels of the 1880s

#### Workers in the Dawn

Workers in the Dawn, Gissing's first novel, reveals the writer seeking comprehension through tracing his hero's encounter with a divided social world. It is the most diffuse



and raw of his works. Contemporary reviewers commonly stressed its redeeming vigour to offset their criticism of its form and understanding.<sup>1</sup>

Central to the world of the novel is the separation of the classes that exists. Philanthropy is one of the areas in which this separation makes itself felt. Helen's good intentions are resisted repeatedly throughout her life. The beggar she helps steals from her and much later on: "She found at the very entrance to her work how terribly deep and wide was the gulf set between the class to which she belonged by birth and these poor wretches whom her heart was set on benefiting". (iv,5)<sup>2</sup> and:

That is what I want, their confidence. They will not trust me. My speech, my dress, perhaps, revolts them. They think that I do not belong to their class, and, though they take my money it is with suspicion of my motives. I have made my dress as plain as it possibly can be, to be respectable. If I could, I would even speak in their uncouth tongue. There is always that horrible distance of caste between us. Can it ever be removed? Will they ever learn to look upon me as a human being like themselves?". (iv,5)

An absence of common values and distrust on the part of the poor are, then fundamental elements of the division of the classes. Helen, inevitably towards the close, succumbs to disillusion.

If there is suspicion on the one side there is contempt and lack of concern on the other. As a result Mr. Tollady's situation steadily worsens and Arthur has to face the reality of exploitation and unemployment. Indifference is crucial to the outlook of the middle-class. Whiffle, when asked if

1. See Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge, eds; Gissing: The Critical Heritage (1972), p.57.
2. George Gissing, Workers in the Dawn (1880). All references are to this edition.

he has ever walked through Whitecross Street, admits its appalling condition. Ignorance isn't, then, at the root of the negligence of the social problem but rather an incapacity to face and accept poverty with the kind of anger and pity that can make for action.

In a world so divided by class there are clearly various possible stances the individual can adopt. Part of the meaning of Workers in the Dawn lies in Gissing's implicit understanding and presentation of these possibilities. One of them is retreat. Gresham through his art achieves an irresponsible detachment from social reality. His sense of superiority enables him to regard the poor as little more than animals. This projection of contempt is, however, the reflection of a lack of inner wholeness and significance. He becomes subject to a corrosive passion, which on its frustration, modifies into a scepticism that verges on the nihilistic. His daughter's cynical egoism that brings her close to breakdown is the logical consequence of her father's form of withdrawal.

Retreat, though, can have a positive value. Venning, for example, in his attempt to construct an ideal world, touched with the pastoral, is enabled to resist to some extent the pressures of the world. A self-indulgent sentimentality is present in the characterisation but the real worth of the strategy, in the context of the novel, must be acknowledged.

Between Venning's private goodness and organised philanthropy there is the alternative represented by such figures as Edward Norman and Mr. Tollady. The former is characterised with gentle irony, by an innocent conscientiousness that makes for a degree of remoteness in his response to others. Wanting to help them, he hasn't the

energy to turn this desire into reality; thus he instructs Gresham in his will to discover the whereabouts of Artgur and provide him with a legacy. Tollady shares Norman's inclination towards introspection but he is motivated to benevolence by his remorse for past lapses. Although, considerable idealisation is involved in his presentation, his dignity emerges strongly. The way the neighbourhood mourns his death convincingly suggests both the ordinary and the exceptional nature of the man.

Sympathy for the poor takes another form in those who have succeeded in organising their own feelings into a coherent mode of response and action. Connected across barriers by an earnestness of purpose, which yet hasn't become rigid, Heatherly and Noble, in their different ways, regard the social world through an ideological perspective. For the former it is primarily religion that compels his effort to relieve the misery of the deprived. Gissing is plainly sympathetic to the figure but believes that it is a sort of 'prosaic' quality which is dominant:

The man who convinces himself that he has ever at his elbow the key to the mystery of the universe, whose profession it is to make manifest to the world that he has this key, and apply it for everyone's behoof, who conceives that the great laws of duty have long ago been written down in black and white for the use of man cannot but regard the world in a more or less prosaic light. (ii,2)

'Prosaic', here, seems to suggest a too great eagerness for explanation and system; it is associated with the scientific mind. In Noble too, there are similar limitations of perception; he is unable, for example, to comprehend Golding's devotion to art. Although idealistic early on, he finally abandons the idea that the working man can act unselfishly

and sets up in consequence a benefit society. His and Heatherly's earnestness is, then, placed in a critical perspective at the same time that it is valued highly.

Earnestness turns into fanaticism in two other characters who are widely separated by class and sensibility. Pether's past of violence and poverty causes him to be obsessed by the horror he observes around him. The case is similar to one described by D.H. Lawrence:

For him the world was all East End, and all the East End was a pool from which the waters are drained off, leaving the water-things to wrestle in the wet mud under the sun, till the whole city seems a heaving, shuddering struggle of black-mudded objects deprived of the elements of life. (i, 5) 3

In the power of his prophetic visions, he dies in a fire, symbolic of his apoclyptical hopes and of his complete loss of control and intelligence; the scene has a Dostoevskian intensity. A further version of the fanatic is represented by Helen. The motives of her decision to devote her whole life to philanthropy are not explored in depth. Guilt is clearly basic, for she sees her work in terms of justice rather than charity.<sup>4</sup> "Charity! I hate the word! It is justice to these poor sufferers to share my wealth with them! What right have I to such superfluity?" (ii, 2) In spite of physical weakness, disappointment and the opportunity of love, she is unable to abandon her original commitment and is forced to reject Arthur because not to do so would

3. D.H. Lawrence, The White Peacock (1911). All references are to this edition.

4. Helen's feelings seem to have been shared by a considerable number in this period. See Herbert Bland's essay in Bernard Shaw, ed., Fabian Essays (1889), p. 219 and Arnold Toynbee's comments quoted by E.T. Ashton and A.F. Young, British Social Work in the Nineteenth Century (1956), p. 225. (Note 13, p. 361 below).

be to injure Carrie and thus act against her principles. Both, then, in the portraits of Helen and Pether the anti-human implications of fanaticism are examined.

Workers in the Dawn, thus considers various alternatives the intellectual can adopt in a class society. The hero's development is essentially a matter of negotiating a path through the pressures they exert. During his early years his experience is that of alienation, poverty and loneliness. A central tension between class and culture provides a constant thread throughout. In the Norman household he resists the attempt to educate him and absorb him into the middle-class and decides to run away to the world he knows in London. However, later on a serious interest in art and learning is awakened by the daughter of the owner of the shop, where he works, a concerned teacher and by an old pavement artist. Culture is thus associated both with a higher class and with the ordinary life of the streets. At this stage the resulting tensions are implicit and unarticulated.

Under pressure of his experience of a class society and Mr. Tollady's concept of the involved artist, Golding comes to sense that art and social commitment are necessarily divided:

These two distinct impulses seemed to grow within Arthur's mind with equal force and rigidity; he experienced neither of them any the less for being more and more convinced, as he grew in self-knowledge, that their co-existence was incompatible with the perfection of either. (i,11)

At this period he tends to oscillate between these contradictory impulses in his nature, identifying most closely with his background when near Gresham and least when near Helen. He sees her as <sup>a</sup> goddess: "And she is as far superior to me as a 'Madonna' of Raphael is to this miserable smudge

which I call a picture." (1,16) The art image identifies the heroine with the aesthetic realm. Only there can Arthur hope to possess her. As was the case with the earlier picture-book episode when they were children, there is a strong sense of culture's complicated position - both tightly bound up with a class structure and offering a way that structure can be transcended.

Whilst Mr. Tollady continues to live an internal balance is maintained within the hero. After his death, however, the conflicting impulses separate out, compelling choices. He is cast adrift to make his way through the various possible alternatives available. First of all there is Carrie. Out of pity and a belief he can respect the girl, he marries her, but as he realises her true nature, disillusion sets in - a disillusion that implicates the working-class as a whole and the hope that education can significantly improve them. Yet, it is a mistake to identify Carrie too closely with the proletariat. She frequently opposes Golding's interest in political activities and he considers she would be antagonistic to his philanthropic plans for his legacy. The conflict he faces isn't, then, simply one between middle-class art and working-class politics. Also involved is the opposition between private and public interests, between the kind of safety even a miserable home life can offer and the experience of solitude and anonymity in the city, an experience Arthur undergoes after Carrie leaves him.

He is rescued from exposure by Noble, the first of a long line of exceptional working men in Gissing's fiction. Although

the hero is drawn towards him, he is forced to resist the demands his friends make on him, for not to do so would be to totally surrender his aesthetic pursuits. A fixed posture has to be assumed against political engagement. to protect against its potentially immense influence. The stance repeats Gissing's own, for his need of a clear and strong position issues from his realisation that anything less involves the risk of complete abdication to those areas of reality to which he was hostile.

After the end of the friendship of Golding and Noble, the choice of alternatives narrows to one between Helen and Carrie, for the dismissal of the political option is also the dismissal of the possibility of class reconciliation. Helen embodies the best qualities of the upper class; she is highly cultured and accomplished, with a passionate devotion to benevolence. For her, art is the supreme glory of the world:

"Do you think it is to the benevolent monks of the Christian church, to the army of unknown philanthropists toiling through ages, to the host of men who have struggled throughout history for justice and freedom, that the highest praise is due for our highest state of civilization? These have only followed the spirit of the age; that spirit itself was created by the great men whose works, howsoever performed, direct the history of the world." (iii,7)

Through this sort of surity about the worth of the aesthetic, she gives Golding the confidence to dedicate himself entirely to it; what he has long suspected she confirms.

After Arthur's failure to win Helen and to live with Carrie again he emigrates to America. Bewilderment -

After a long straying about pitch dark and narrow passages, after ascending and descending innumerable almost perpendicular stairs, after endless collisions with wanderers like himself, after repeated questionings,

to which unintelligible answers were returned, he at last found himself at the door of his own state room where he was glad enough to throw down his burden and rest. (iii,16)

and energy define the original action, which is followed by a gradual realisation that his decision to escape represents a surrender of his responsibility to others . With Helen's death, the only significant other <sup>disappears</sup> now<sub>p</sub> his life ceases to have meaning.

His suicide is the culmination of the pattern of event and response which compose the crucial significance of Workers in the Dawn. The working-class artist, having discovered that culture in his society is closely connected with an upper-class world, makes a commitment to that world, believing that it offers him the only opportunity for realising his whole self. His acceptance, however, proves to be of a very limited nature, for only to the extent that he can free himself from his background is the idea of a relationship with him taken seriously. Once it becomes obvious that there are connections and loyalties that bind him to his origins there is no question of ignoring the distinctions of rank. Helen's rejection of Arthur represents then, the refusal of the upper-class to accept the aspiring working-man on his own terms.

This comprehension is pursued with an honesty that enables Gissing to work through the implications of his hero's situation to the end. He does so in a novel that is fully open to reality, which is dense with human variety and development. Together with this openness, however, there is an important identification with certain fixed values.



Thus, for example, although the presentation of the Pettidunds at their Christmas party is vital with felt life, the novelist's absolute hostility to them is also apparent; description and judgement exist side by side, unintegrated. In Workers in the Dawn then, Gissing had to write from within a position composed of both exposure to the world and a commitment to certain attitudes, his art emerging from their unresolved tension.

### The Unclassed

In his next novel, concerned with the condition of being an artist rather than with the process of becoming one, there is a full acceptance of that tension. It is present in the novel's world. Characters, without the padding of money or ideology, stand on the edge of the abyss of poverty, having constantly to resist its pull. There is little sentimentality, for the emphasis is on the efforts of the figures to comprehend and improve their situation; Ida's struggle with bewilderment in the opening pages and Lotty's clinging to the hope of future respectability are good examples. A further form of resistance to the perils of exposure to an inhuman reality is marriage. Through wedlock Harriet seeks to survive without succumbing to degradation and on a more minor level, both Sally and O'Gree find in it an escape from the work they so intensely dislike. Drink is yet another solution. Slimey's choice of this option is taken with a deliberate self-consciousness of what it signifies. Through, then, respectability, marriage or alcohol individuals can find some protection against their environment.

The idea of exposure is also explored thematically in the characterisation of two major protagonists - Waymark and Casti. Through them Gissing offers two perspectives on art and the role of the artist. Both are isolated from their society by a superior sensitivity and a search for a form of genuine community. However, Osmond is much more implicated in the ordinary than his friend. Central to his nature is a conflict between the spiritual and the physical - a conflict dramatised in his relations with Maud and Ida.

The former is associated with a release from the mundane. Her environment is leisured and relatively luxurious:

It was a new sensation for Waymark as he sank into a soft chair, and, in speaking, lowered his voice, to suit the quietness of the room. The soft lamp-light spreading through the coloured shade, the just perceptible odour of scent when Mrs. Enderby stirred, the crackling of the welcome fire, filled him with a sense of luxury to which he was not accustomed. (iii,4)

and she herself has an artist's soul; it is not accidental that he remeets her after long separation in an Art Gallery. In his friendship with her, Waymark comes under the influence of a calm and relaxed detachment, is able to find a focus for what he believes to be his ideal. Given this he has no choice but to propose marriage; the decision's involuntary nature is stressed.

However, the hero's character is a developing one and he succeeds in freeing himself from his illusion. That this is the case means that his comments on life and art shouldn't be taken as objective pronouncements but placed in context. Thus his growing tolerance of Woodstock's activities and his growing aesthetic of detachment, can't be viewed as the simple expression of Gissing's own opinions, for an

5. George Gissing, The Unclassed (1884). All references are to this edition.

increasing disenchantment with Maud and a slowly mounting realisation that his true self finds its most fitting reflection in Ida, qualifies to a considerable extent these tendencies.

Waymark's relationship with her is a complicated one, for she is unable to represent an ideal. Rather she is the location of all his ambivalent feelings towards the common world and its inhabitants, feelings which necessarily implicate his aesthetic ideas. As, therefore, he begins to admit Ida's attractions for him, he comes to recognise that art must concentrate upon the miseries of life, so that when he seeks to separate himself from her he loses interest in realistic literature. In this light his marriage to her represents, in the most unmistakable way, Osmond's acceptance of the inadequacy of the totally detached stance.

The acceptance is not an absolute one. Rather his marital choice tips an uneasy balance one way. Gissing, Schopenhaurian in his letters,<sup>6</sup> succeeds in his fiction in facing up to the complex nature of his aesthetic position, admitting tensions and contradictions, and seeking to work through them. Waymark at the close tells Ida of his dislike of philanthropy and attempts to retain a distanced attitude to his job as a rent collector but in his union with the socially concerned working-girl the necessity for exposure is admitted both by him and the novelist.

At the same time as Waymark proposes marriage, Casti dies. As a result of his early commitment to Harriet, Julian's misery is acutely internalised. Art provides in this context a consoling world, an alternative past which is finished

6. See The Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, eds. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (1927) pp. 128-129 and pp. 138-139.

and complete and is incapable of implicating the individual in the problems that a real personal history does. Under pressure the split between the reality of his situation and his artistic impulses widens, forcing him to acknowledge, as creative sterility sets in, that literature cannot easily survive in total apartness from the actual. Waymark tells him to derive his art from contemporary experience rather than from isolated imagining. Yet this requires a Promethean capacity to face and challenge life through self-consciousness. For Casti there can only be submission or escape from that life. He gains a slight remission and then dies.

Thus through examining his development, Gissing reinforces the main significance of Waymark's history. The writer, it is seen, must live with exposure, for to avoid it, to deny social commitment is to risk a more dangerous, more uncontrolled and more damaging exposure. The perception is not easily won and there are many qualifications and reservations embedded in the novel. In addition just what exposure implies is not a simple matter because the artist must maintain towards his fictional material an aloof perspective. In spite of this the central meaning is clear; there can be no isolation.

For some though, there is little choice. The major example is Maud. Divided between a religious hostility to life instilled by Miss Bygrave and a growing interest in it, she lives in a profoundly tense and difficult relation to the actual. When she decides to encounter it directly by a visit to Litany Lane she collapses before the mob. Waymark's rescue is part of the original experience, for he in this context belongs to the world of the slums. Her desire for marriage and to confront reality are thus closely connected. Just as Maud faints in the crowd, so she will become faint-hearted

before her wedding as a consequence of the impact of her mother's infidelity, of an insight into the possible horror of life. She is compelled to withdraw and join a religious order. This character's history, then, represents the perils of exposure, the way it can undermine the self. For Maud, to live in absolute detachment is the only possibility.

This meaning is reinforced by the history of Woodstock. Here, once again a complete apartness, this time based on an allegiance to the ideology of capitalism, weakens whilst the desire for a closer and more personal relationship with others, emerges. However, the more humane outlook which Woodstock comes to possess, causes him to catch small-pox and die. Plainly Gissing doesn't intend to condemn him for his new sympathetic attitude to his tenants, but once again he is pointing out the dangers of confronting the world directly. For those middle-class individuals, protected most of their lives from its harshness, to attempt to move closer to it, is to undergo major risks. Their alienation cannot be ended simply; it is too deep rooted, involves to too great an extent, their identity.

The problems but also the value of exposure, when it can be achieved, are presented through the characterisation of Ida Starr. Although, clearly the heroine is intended to contrast strongly with Maud, there are links between these two figures. At school they are close friends, they both have cause to feel ashamed of their parents and they both need to come to terms with their relationship to them. To differing degrees they share contemplative temperaments; the image of the sea is associated with both. Yet the major distinctions are more important. The crucial problem for

Ida is the need to work out a way of coming to terms with her experience as a member of the working-class. After the death of her mother she refuses Woodstock's offer of escape and instead finds herself having to face the solitude and poverty of the city; prostitution is the ultimate threat to her integrity. Her purity is emphasised frequently, climaxing in the rather obviously symbolic bathing scene, which marks her new life, a life which is, however, still subject to earlier pressures, for she has to face imprisonment. It is when, though, Ida is living in security and leisure as a result of Woodstock's adoption of her that the need to confront her previous history emerges with real urgency:

When she found herself comparing her position now with that of former days, it excited in her a restive mood to think that chance alone had raised her out of misery, that the conscious strength and purity of her soul would never have availed to help her to things which were now within her grasp. The old sense of the world's injustice excited anger and revolt in her heart. Chance, chance alone befriended her, and the reflection injured her pride. (vi,1)

The stress here upon accident means that the device of the will, which turns the heroine overnight into a gentlewoman can be defended against criticism of its mechanical and arbitrary nature; for that arbitrariness is incorporated into the theme. Ida in the passage recognises that, although, in one respect, she can and has escaped from her old self and class, in a profounder way such an escape is out of the question. As in the first stages of the book, when she rejects Woodstock's offer of help, so she now understands that the life of the slums cannot be ignored; her own self is too much bound up with it. In spite of Waymark's disapproval she is compelled to engage in philanthropic work, compelled

to relate her past and present selves.

Ida's history represents then, a movement from and through exposure to the achievement of a real and substantial identity capable of encountering reality without succumbing to it in the way that Casti does or needing to withdraw from it in the way that Maud does. The main impression of Ida in the closing section of the book is of the maturity and dignity she has gained. Her early loyalties, first to her own class and then to the ideals of the class above her, have not become rigid but have been shaped by her encounter with reality.

A fundamental thematic element of The Unclassed revolves, thus, around the novel's deep awareness of the value of exposure. There is a separation between such an awareness and the actual quality of the fiction. Gissing realises that the world has to be confronted directly but finds this, in the context of his art, acutely difficult. By 1884, his attitudes and positions are becoming set, forcing the tension between his comprehension of the worth of exposure and his own commitment to certain fixed responses to society, to intensify. In consequence, whilst there is an appreciation of the former there is no satisfactory realisation of it. The work's direct presentation of the working-class is not extensive or substantial; Waymark's only contact with the proletariat comes in his relation with Slimey. Similarly Maud's awakened interest in the world isn't presented fully; one journey to the East End cannot really stand for any genuine process of engagement. The handling of Ida's exposure, although well done, demonstrates Gissing's reserved

reserved approach; it's a distanced treatment, relying upon retrospection. Nor is her development worked out in any great detail. She disappears suddenly after her holiday to return as the domesticated, loving girl of the novelist's ideal imagining. And the same failure to attend to the felt life of individual growth is observed in the figure of Woodstock, whose radical change of outlook is stated rather than explored. The characters of The Unclassed, in spite of the fact that the meaning and pattern of the novel demands they be in constant change, have a somewhat static presence. Gissing is incapable of identifying himself with the flux of their experience, to expose himself to it, as he believes Ida should be exposed.

#### A Life's Morning

The difficulty Gissing had in fictionally realising his characters' development was faced by the novelist directly in Isabel Charendon and A Life's Morning, the novels, he wrote next. Here he explored the inner history of protagonists living through the reality formed by their social situation.

Gissing wrote of the latter in 1888, the year of its publication: "I implore you not to speak about it. It's trash." <sup>7</sup> and while he was writing it: "But the Cornhill's story( A Life's Morning) is disgusting me, and I feel it gets poorer and poorer; I can only hope that it will soon be forgotten." <sup>8</sup> Such a force of revulsion might suggest that the work had a particularly personal significance for the author. Certainly he is dealing with issues very close to him, centring upon the relation of the intellectual and his

7. The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, ed. A.C. Young (1961), p.19.

8. Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, p.209.



class, and the associated complex problems. The overall sense is of a self-conscious literary and aesthetic awareness being brought to bear on areas of experience especially relevant to the novelist.

A major achievement of A Life's Morning is the characterisation of Emily. Gissing succeeds in closely registering her personality without succumbing to a debilitating identification, in suggesting the particular blend of grace and awkwardness she has, and in realising the complex nature of her temperament. Essential to the presentation of the heroine is the matter of class.

It shapes, firstly, her relationship with the Athel family. Although she is treated well, both she and they know that the kindness exists within very definite limits. Thus the governess is unable to be completely herself in their company and finds release from the tensions she faces in withdrawing to her room and the private pursuit of culture. Those tensions become explicit when Mr. Athel is told of his son's marital aims; the tolerance and breadth of mind he possesses, his liberalism, disintegrates revealing more class prejudice. In spite of the internal difficulties Emily faces in the world of the middle-classes, she is strongly attracted to it:

Thus it was with a sense of well-being that she stepped on rich carpets, let her eyes wander over the light and dark of rooms where wealth had done the bidding of taste, watched the neat and silent ministering of servants, These things to her meant priceless opportunity, the facilitating of self-culture. Even the little room in which she sat by herself of evenings was daintily furnished; when weary with reading, it eased and delighted her merely to gaze at the soft colours of the wall paper, the vases with their growing flowers, the well-chosen pictures, the graceful shape of a chair; she nursed her appreciation of these joys, resisted the ingress of a familiarity, sought daily for novel aspects of things

become intimately known. (i,3) 9

Property, taste and culture are associated here, giving the passage a Jamesian quality. The emphasis upon objects, the intense aestheticism of her attitudes, is the result of the fact that no other response to this life is possible for Emily.<sup>10</sup> Her complex relation: to the middle-class world is made up then of her sense of being an outsider, a sense she embraces, from a social class she cannot help admiring because many of the most vital elements of her nature are inextricably connected with it.

The full meaning of this emerges in the heroine's friendship with Wilfred, who, in his questioning mind, his delight in study and passion for life, represents the finest qualities of his leisured milieu. Before, however, their love can be realised the tensions produced by their differing social positions have to be met. These are subtly presented, implicit in tones and gestures. A crucial section of the novel is the conversation the couple have after Wilf's ride. The young man's easy confidence is based on their knowledge of each other's role; his desire for intimacy which could result in greater mutual understanding, can only be attained if he relies upon his rights as one of her employer's family to shape the relationship; and then there is Emily's automatic reserve, her puzzlement and pleasure at the youth's talk, the suspicion that he might be taking advantage of her position. At the start of the scene the following passage of dialogue occurs:

9. George Gissing, A Life's Morning (1888). All references are to this edition.
10. Similarly the aestheticism of James's hero, Hyacinth Robinson in The Princess Casamassima, is the product of his social separation from the environment to which his aestheticism is directed.

"I saw you as I rode past," he said in a friendly way.

"I suppose the twins are staying?"

"They are at the Greenhaws", was the reply. "Mrs Winter called for them immediately after lunch. She will bring them back early in the evening."

"Ah!"

He plucked sprigs of heather. Miss Hood turned to her book.

"I've had a magnificent ride". Wilfred began again.

"Surely there's no county of England as glorious as this. Don't you enjoy it?"... (1,1)

The hesitancy and awkwardness conveyed here in the rhythms of the speakers' speech and the pauses between them indicates precisely the difficulties and stresses that are at work.

Gissing, then, in the first part of A Life's Morning reveals a profound sensitivity to the human implications of class, registering the complexity and nuances of feeling involved through a close attention to the felt life of his characters. It is clear that he is fully exposed to the subject, dealing with it from inside his own experience.

This quality of intimacy continues into the middle section of the work, which deal with Emily's return to her lower-class world. That world primarily impresses with its ugliness of landscape and human society. There is the crude actuality of exploitation, there are the superficial and pretentious Cartwrights and further down the social scale there are the Hoods, defined by their desire for respectability and their frustration. When Emily goes home the sense, as for Fanny in Mansfield Park on her journey back to Portsmouth, is of the losses and limitations involved.

Not only Jane Austen, but Lawrence too, is brought to mind by the way in which the family is felt as the location of intense social tensions. The daughter is separated from her roots by her education and occupations. Mrs. Hood's attitude towards her is composed of a mixture of emotions -

grievance at the departure of her own possibilities, pride in her child's superiority and a feeling that shame at her own situation is the most appropriate feeling to have:

Emily protested that it was needless to get unusual things on her account. "We must do what we can to make you comfortable, my dear. I can't keep a table like you are accustomed to, but that I know you don't expect." (1,5)

Emily's attempt to establish a close relationship is confronted by a fixed response that rests upon assumptions about their mutual social position and the behaviour expected. Matters are less constrained with her father. An emphasis upon the pathetic distinguishes the portrait but he is not a mere object of pity, for an intelligent self-consciousness and a powerful love for his child testifies to a basic strength and prevents the emergence of a self-pitying bitterness.

In returning to her original environment the heroine and the novelist encounter the issue of her identity. Past tensions are seen dramatically alive in her present life, for her distance from her parents has its source in the education she has received, in the fact that she has been compelled to make her separation from them through learning in order to please them. To go back to Bambrigg is to return home and to face her own isolation, to meet affection and remoteness.

That remoteness extends to the whole community - to the Cartwrights, for example and Dagworthy. The latter figure represents the underlying reality of provincial society, its basis in an inhuman work relationship - a relationship that extends beyond the office and factory into the men's lives, as the meeting between Hood and his employer indicates. In spite of Dagworthy's primitiveness, he is, not simply an ogreish

villain. He has a sensitivity which enables him to appreciate architecture and feel his loneliness, and Gissing seeks to suggest, in exploring his inner life, a Lawrentian connection between his socio-economic role and his sexuality. By returning home, then, Emily confronts not only her separation from her parents but also the social world underlying the class structure - a structure which remained hidden in the south of England.<sup>11</sup> The tensions of her situation are complex and inter-locking, and are worked out with understanding and subtlety by Gissing. Once again the writing has the intimacy and realism, the openness to experience which indicates the novelist's radical exposure to the particular feel of the issues that are central in his fiction.

Those issues obviously centre around the problem faced by Emily as a result of Dagworthy's attempt to pressurise her into marriage and secondly of the consequences that follow upon her refusal. At the heart of the matter is the conflict between pity and love which the heroine experiences, the conflict between the pull of her past responsibilities and the attractions of future possibilities, between, in other words, the moral and aesthetic elements of her nature. Gissing views the matter in these latter terms when he writes about Emily's desire to be an artist in life and her inability to mentally detach herself from her earlier life:

The misery of her parents' home haunted her, and by no effort could she expel the superstition that she had only escaped from that for a time, that its claws would surely overtake her and fix themselves again in her flesh. (i,5)

The intense imagery, touched with horror, suggests both the depth of the pull it makes and the depth of her resistance. Under the pressure of Dagworthy's blackmailing the conflict intensifies and alters in form. Her aesthetic interests

11. Similarly in Mrs. Gaskell's North and South Margaret is forced to face up to the harsh realities of industrialism when she goes north.

become associated with the idea of purity:

The development of beauty in the soul would mean a life of ideal purity; all her instincts pointed to such a life; her passionate motives converged to the one end of spiritual chastity. (i,5)

The defence of her virginity is also the defence of that area of her nature drawn towards the cultural.

However, although Emily can resist this kind of assault, she is not able to offer the same degree of resistance to her parent's death. The world of the Athels comes to seem as alien and her attachment to it a precarious one:

She had presumptuously taken to herself the religion of her superiors, of those to whom fate allowed the assurance of peace, of guarded leisure wherein to cultivate the richer and sweeter flowers of her nature. How artificial had been the delights with which she had soothed herself. (iii,16)

Her decision to leave Wilfred and live in relative poverty and isolation suggests the extent to which her ideal is inextricably bound up with her roots; she needs to make those roots a creative element of her character rather than a threat, needs to fully undergo an exposure to her lower-class background before any alternative commitment can be made. Thus, although the last part of the novel can be criticised for contrivance, it possesses a significant meaning in relation to what has preceded it, that reduces its unsatisfactory nature.

Both A Life's Morning and Isabel Clarendon, are important works for understanding Gissing's fictional development, for they show him exploring the personal conditions for a mature position and thus enable their successor, Demos, to embody both an ideological stance of increased inflexibility and a more controlled insight into the distinctiv<sup>e</sup> actuality of working-class life.

Gissing's Politics and Demos

Gissing's political perspective was formulated within complex pressures. Growing up in a Liberal environment, in contact with the Party through his early radical activities, he was compelled to face both its internal conflicts and his own disillusionment with working-class politics. His development was, consequently, not a simple or dramatic one; the seeds of his later attitudes were present from the start. Although, his youthful radical views were strong, making for a passionate concern with freedom of speech, his conviction of the value and power of reason led to the following comment upon a meeting in England:

In the quality of the speaking a fastidious taste will find little to approve, save in the case of a few leaders, who possess striking powers of emotional oratory, and might well be conceived firing the populace ere they rushed to the barricades. But the majority it must be confessed, are given to ranting at the expense of good German as well as of good sense, and the debates, at times prolonged till almost dawn, have seldom any result save that of confirming the speaker in his prejudices. 12

He is not simply opposed to proletarian political activity, for he agrees with Lord Derby's high opinion of the masses' use of power but is highly critical of loose emotionalism. On the latter's departure from the Conservative Party, he therefore says:

Possessing a rare sensibility he cannot bear the overstatement which is common to the mind of the political agitator. He sees clearly that people who participate in political struggle do not consider questions honestly and without prejudice. 13

He stands apart then, from early on, seeking to apply criteria of balance and intelligence to the reality of politics. His

12. George Gissing, Notes on Social Democracy, ed. Jacob Korg (1968), p.4.

13. "Gissing's Articles for 'Vvestnick Europy'", ed. Harry H. Preble, Victorian Newsletter (Spring 1963), p.13

disillusionment takes the form of a growing dissatisfaction with the state of political conduct, a dissatisfaction shared by William Morris.<sup>14</sup> The radicalism of his youth - his antagonism towards capitalism, his sympathy with the underdog, his belief in collectivism<sup>15</sup> - continued, but he was compelled to withdraw from politics by his disgust at cliché and slogan and the pat simplicities and compromises which were increasingly attractive to middle-class intellectuals.<sup>16</sup> Necessarily involved in the complexity of Gissing's stance is a degree of confusion.

John Goode has stressed this latter aspect in his discussion of Demos - the mixture of an orthodox conservatism, Spencerian Social Darwinism and aestheticism.<sup>17</sup> Certainly the novel is a crucial one for understanding the elements of the writer's political imagination in the 1880's. At its heart there is the land question. This was a major focus of debate during the period. Proposals for its nationalisation were central to the radical critique of society,<sup>18</sup> and an important section of the Liberal Party aimed at its wider distribution.<sup>19</sup> To those who opposed such ideas, with the knowledge of the

14. See Letters of William Morris, ed. Philip Henderson (1958), p.170 (Note 19, p.362 below).

15. See Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, eds. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (1927), p.332.

16. Gissing's critical attitude to political life finds expression in Denzil Quarrier and Our Friend the Charlatan.

17. John Goode, "Gissing, Morris and English Socialism", Victorian Studies, xii, 1968, 208-24.

18. See, for example, Henry George's very influential Progress and Poverty (1881) and the Manifesto of the S.D.F. "Socialism Made Plain", Socialist Tracts 1883-1894 (1894), p.4.

19. See "The Radical Programme" of 1885, of which Chamberlain was the leading inspiration, and Harold Perkins, "Land Reform and Class Conflict in Victorian Britain" in J. Butt and I. Clarke, eds., The Victorians and Social Protest (1973), pp. 177-217



gentry's decline in Ireland as a result of legislation, it seemed that not only the traditional authority of the aristocracy was under attack but also its very existence:

He has given up his deer and dismissed his servants, has laid down his kitchen-garden in grass; he is advertising his house for a Grammar school or as a Lunatic Asylum..<sup>20</sup>

and Gladstone spoke of the fate of the younger son, remarking on

...the growth of a new class - a class unknown in the past and one whose existence the future will have cause to deplore. It is the class of hybrid or bastard men of business, men of family, men of titles, men gallant by courtesy and perhaps by nature, country gentlemen, members of both Houses of Parliament... giving their name to speculation which they neither understand or examine, as Directors or Trustees. <sup>21</sup>

The conflict of attitudes in this area also involved matters of morality. For W.H.Mallock, in Property and Progress, for example, the main motive of the assault on the country's landed interests was 'covetousness',<sup>22</sup> and thus those defending these interests became the upholders of conventional moral virtues. Such questions of value are central to literature's treatment of the issue.<sup>23</sup> For Jane Austen in Mansfield Park, Sir<sup>Thomas</sup> Bertram's house is the location of a significant order, although internal stresses and failings are admitted, which exists in opposition to the sophisticated Crawfords, drawing their ethics from the town. The country-house continued to occupy the English imagination, providing a complex symbolism for James, a generalising image for Wells

20. Quoted by O.F.Christie, The Transition to Democracy 1867-1914 (1934), p.16.

21. Quoted in The Transition to Democracy, p.166.

22. W.H.Mallock, Property and Progress (1884), pp.1-81.

23. See Richard Gill, Happy Rural Seat: The English Country House and the Literary Imagination (1972) and Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (1974)

in Tono-Bungay that could be placed in parallel and contrast to the emerging capitalism the novel depicts and for Forster a set of associations which stand against the 'civilisation of luggage!'

Demos, which is also concerned with the threats to land and property, should be seen in the context of these novels. Gissing's treatment of the conflict is, however, complicated by the fact that, although he is convinced of the limitations of his earlier involvement in radical politics and believes he can recognise the severe weaknesses of the Socialist movement, he really has no coherent position with which to cope with the new understanding he has achieved. His attitudes may be described as conservative but it is a conservatism, in contrast to James's, that seems nervous and mechanical.

The absence of surity is reflected in the portrayal of the aristocracy in the work. There is Mrs. Eldon - humane and liberal, willing to recognise nobility irrespective of class, fiercely devoted to the honour of her family and capable of an impersonal forgiveness - who throughout the book is ailing:

Though not yet fifty, she looked at least ten years older; her hair had streaks of white, and her thin, delicate features were much lined and wasted. (i,2) 24

and again on her return to the manor:

Through the summer her strength had failed rapidly; it was her own conviction that she could live but a short time longer. (iii,104)

In many ways the characterisation of Mrs. Eldon, sketchy as it is, is a fine one, suggesting the hard dignity of the woman. Her similarity to Mrs. Mutimer is unmistakeable. Both figures are studies of the effects of new tendencies on an older generation, attempting to maintain an allegiance to

24. George Gissing, Demos (1886). All references are to this edition.

traditional certainties. However, that the finest qualities Gissing perceives in the aristocracy, should be embodied in such a feeble form, suggests the difficulties he had in presenting a strong positive force in the novel.

Clearly, Mrs. Eldon's son, the other major representative of the landed classes in Demos, does, in compensation embody a position of strength. He is a rebel against his background, a man of passion who has lived fully without fear of conventionalities. Essentially he is viewed as a type of artist, a Byronic figure, drawing inspiration from his experience.

These two characterisations then, of son and mother, demonstrate the writer's difficulties in creating a convincing portrait of the aristocracy. In the early 1880's he, with other radicals, had attacked its privileges and corruptions, together with the private ownership of land:

The possession of land is only a sacred trust, no man can 'own' land like he owns his watch, for instance, seeing that land is not a human production made for the individual, but the common and indispensable basis of life. 25

and this critical attitude is still present at the time of Demos. Its lingering influence makes it impossible for Gissing to activate the values he wanted to defend in the work in a single individual; virtue and strength are separated out.

It is with a commitment really only to romantic individualism and art that he confronts the forces of socialism and progress. Gissing recognised the weaknesses of this stance and sought to suggest the limitations of Hubert. His arrogance, prejudices and narrowness are all acknowledged but in the absence of anything more satisfactory the novelist has little else to offer; Wyvern is presented

25. Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, p.84.

as nothing much more than a mild mannered relativist. Thus the novelist is compelled to an almost total identification with Eldon. His stiffness and inflexibility, although admitted, also echo the brittle quality of Gissing's own position.

This quality is embedded in the novel as a whole. Compared with the undisciplined intensity of Workers in the Dawn or the relative lyricism of Thyrza, the tone of Demos lacks warmth, is more suited to the task of judgement than to evocation; and the structure, based as it is on the Disraelian two nation division, together with the mechanical nature of the plot, continues the curious impression of externality the book makes.

In the three major female characters - Emma, Alice and Adela - the emphasis upon fixity, present in formal terms, is thematically expressed. All, having a strong sense of their vulnerability, cling to a force more powerful than themselves. Their types of weakness and dependence are very markedly different but the want of a husband to give protection and support, provides a common bond between them. The desire to escape from exposure is characteristic of Gissing too. He required the defence of a fixed position to cope with reality, and it is the intensity of desperation with which he does this in Demos that distinguishes the novel.

Fundamental to the work is the novelist's intention to confront certain significant tendencies of the modern world. There is centrally what can be called the threat of history. From the beginning industrialism is seen as encroaching upon the rural landscape; it exists before Mutimer's arrival:

Climb Stanbury Hill at nightfall, and, looking eastwards

you beheld far off a dusky ruddiness in the sky, like the last of an angry sunset; with a glass you can catch a glimpse of little tongues of flame, leaping and quivering on the horizon. That is Belwick. The good abbots who were wont to come out in the summer time to Wanley, would be at a loss to recognise their consecrated home in these sooty relics. Belwick, with its hundred and fifty fire vomiting blast furnaces, would in their eyes more nearly resemble a certain igneous realm of which they thought much in their sojourn upon earth, and which, we may assure ourselves, they dream not of in the quietness of their last long sleep. (1,1)

The implications here are not merely visual, As with Disraeli the destruction of the old order involves the dispossession of the traditional religion and values associated with the place; the Hell which the departed monks believe to be the result of wickedness, is realised in Belwick.

The difficulty of the effort to resist can be gauged from the way the new developments are described:

Beyond was to be seen the commencement of a street of small houses, promising infinite ugliness in a little space; the soil over a considerable area was torn up and trodden into mud. A number of men were at work; carts and wagons and trucks were moving about. (1,7)

A mechanical prose rhythm here, imitates the nature of the changes that are occurring. More significantly there is the following passage:

Belwick, roaring a few miles away ~~was~~ but an isolated black patch on the earth's beauty, not, as he now understood it, a malignant cancer-spot spreading day by day, corrupting, an augury of death. (1,7)

The image of the fatal disease, the slow, cumulative effect of the rhythms, suggests the inevitability of the historical process. It's a language reminiscent of Lawrence. In the next extract the scene is of a different sort but the feeling is similar:

When I looked back, out of the clearness of the open evening, at this Littlehampton, dark and amorphous like a bad eruption on the edge of the land, I was so sick I felt I could not come back; all these amorphous houses like an eruption, a disease on the clean earth;

and all of them full of such a diseased spirit...26

And in Lady Chatterley's Lover the kind of world Gissing sees in the immediate future has arrived, complete and absolute:

And when the wind was that way, which was often, the house was full of the stench of this sulphurous combustion of the earth's excrement. But even on windless days the air always smelt of something under-earth; sulphur, iron, coal or acid. And even on Christmas roses the smuts settled persistently, incredible like black manna from the skies of doom. (2)  
27

The perception is more intense, more fully worked out than in Gissing but plainly there is a fundamental connection between the novelists in their response to industrialism. Both sense a life and soul destroying influence in it, feel that it represents a total and corrupting ugliness. Only rarely, however, does Gissing approach a Lawrentian intensity. Thus:

It was more than a year since she had seen the spot, and on reaching it today it seemed to her less beautiful than formerly, the leafage to her eyes was thinner and less warm of hue than in earlier years, the grass had a coarser look and did not cloathe the soil so completely. (11,7)

The appearance of things predominates here in a rather narrowly aesthetic way.

This is part of a general weakness of the novel. There is a failure to establish a strong and <sup>vital</sup> pastoral world; the old order remains a fairly limited and artificial conception associated with the childhoods of Adela and Hubert, and their love, it lacks a secure social basis in the present; birds and trees rather than human relationships define it. In Wanley Mrs. Waltham is the embodiment of a small-minded and self-interested pragmatism, Miss Mewling of gossipy bitchiness and Letty of a vapid domesticity and gentleness. Thus Eldon's

26. Letters of D.H. Lawrence, ed. Aldous Huxley (1932), p.245.

27. D.H. Lawrence, Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928). All references are to this edition.

defence of the traditional is essentially the defence of an idea and a landscape rather than of a realistically sensed community.

Gissing seems aware of the limitations of Hubert's position. At the political meeting described early on he satirises one of the working men's vision of a rural utopia:

'Imagine wuch a happy land, my friends: a land, I say, which nobody has ever thought of 'developing the resources' of, - that's the proper phrase I believe... All are equal, my friends. Up an' down the field they goes, all day long, arm in arm...' (i,6)

This attacks a Socialist simplicity and impracticability of outlook but it also brings into question Eldon's own attempt to abolish industrialism. Both his and the agitator's intentions partake of a similar unreality. Gissing is unwilling to accept the implications of his insight however. Only the language used to describe Hubert's activity betrays its fantastic nature:

A deep breath of country air. It is springtime and the valley of Wanley is bursting into green and flowery life, peacefully glad as if the foot of Ozymos had never come that way. Incredible that the fume of furnaces ever desecrated that fleece-sown sky of tenderest blue, that hammers clanged and engines roared where now the thrush utters his song so joyously. (iii,13)

The conventional triteness denotes the quality of wish-fulfilment in the hero's purposes. These purposes are all, however, the novelist has to cling to against the pressing actuality of history because only outside the historical process, in a pastoral idyll, can any hope and strength be discovered. A comparison with Lawrence is again helpful here. He shares an uncompromising desire to eradicate the ugly:

"Do it place by place. Make a new England. Away with little homes! Away with scrabbling pettiness and paltriness..."<sup>28</sup>

but in The Rainbow the closing vision of destruction and

28. D.H. Lawrence, "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside" (1930) reprinted in D.H. Lawrence: A Selection from Phoenix ed. A.A.H. Inglis (1971), pp. 103-111.

recreation is recognised as a vision; the transcendence of history is, in contrast to Demos, taken for what it is.

Allied to the threat of industrialism is the threat posed by the working-class! Gissing's views are expressed succinctly by the crippled old man who speaks at an early political meeting:

He cries vanity upon all the detailed schemes of social representation. Are we ready for it? he wails. Could we bear it, if they granted it to us. It is all right and good, but hadn't we better make ourselves worthy of such freedom? (i,6)

These opinions gain their persuasive force from the characters' involved situation. Judgement, the novelist seems aware, if it is to be worthwhile, must issue from an intense engagement and concern. His strong sense of responsibility towards the lower-class figures of Demos is clearly present in the work; there is a real effort to convey the feeling of common people's lives. The intimate presentation of the Mutimer family early on in the book, for example, reveals a significant attempt to encounter working-class life without the barriers of fixed attitudes. Obviously, Gissing isn't the neutral observer, obviously his portrayals of Alice and 'Arry are intended to display their vulgarity, but the vulgarity doesn't subsume them; they possess a distinctive identity.

A similar quality lies behind the characterisation of the other proletarian figures in Demos. Gissing's satiric attack on the Socialist gathering in Chapter Six is one-sided and narrow but it has a vigour and humour that enforces conviction:

His vein is King Cambyse's; he tears passions to tatters; he roars leonine; he is your man to have at the pauper'd jades of Asia! He has got hold of a new word, and that's the verb to 'exploit' ! I am exploited, thou



art exploited, he exploits! (†,6)

The radical activists of the working-class, lacking the education or native sensitivity to engage in serious debate, are in the power of their own eloquence of intellectual and emotional cliché. And if the quality of their commitment is attacked, so also is their motivation; after the meeting, Cowan and Cullen are thus observed talking over Mutimer's inheritance, anxious about its direct benefit to them.

Against this background the particular studies of lower-class characters should be placed. There is Danial Dabbs. He is offered as the typical proletarian; he is passively clumsy, brutish in his whole physique, his interest in the Socialist movement springing from the pleasure he can extract from it. When he inherits money the self-interested elements of his nature come to the surface. He could have been a figure of pathos, disappointed in love twice but his comic simplicity prevents us taking him seriously. When Wyvern talks about happiness among the poor the mind automatically turns to Dabbs as an instance of what he means.

Danial is confined to his own class: the type of threat he represents is transmitted through the Mutimers. Here, the primitive animality that Gissing sees as basic to the proletariat has merged with education and ambition, to pose a far more difficult problem. On the one hand there is 'Arry, the pure hedonist:

For 'Arry represented a very large section of Demos, alike in his natural characteristics and in the circumstances of his position; 'Arry being 'Arry was on the threshold of emancipation, and without the smallest likelihood that the event would change his nature. (†,9)

On the other hand there is Alice. Whereas Dabbs's rather staid

coarseness has in the boy degenerated into a crude sensuality, his good humoured capacity for enjoyment, has in the girl become a shallow sophistication based on pleasure seeking. Without work she lives in a world of cheap romance, her potential for genuine feeling transformed into a self-centred, possessive passion. Near the end, deserted by her husband, sick of the superficial bourgeois domesticity she enjoys, her mind breaks under the strain. The force of the characterisation lies in the sense communicated of an individual half understanding what is happening to her. Her anger when her brother tells her of his betrayal of Emma suggests a fineness of moral sensibility, capable of judging her own decline.

Both the portraits of 'Arry and Alice serve to reinforce and generalise the significances Richard embodies. His brother's sensuality and his sister's social ambitions are combined and transmitted in him, for it is through Mutimer that Gissing primarily seeks to come to terms with the threat of the working-class; in him their qualities and values have become active and challenging. The novelist is anxious to avoid making him an averagely typical figure, as to do so would be to weaken his case; it is precisely because Richard represents the best features of his class that the dangers he poses are so acute. His vigour and resilience are the aspects of his character stressed first. The strength of his will, which Gissing with his Schopenhaurian outlook,<sup>29</sup> would obviously regard with hostility, expresses itself in a desire for fame; his own sense of superiority has to be reinforced

29. For a discussion of Schopenhauer's influence on Gissing see C.J. Francis, "Gissing and Schopenhauer" in Pierre Coustillas, ed. Collected Articles on George Gissing (1968), pp. 106-116.

by the approval of others. Thus, a major impulse dissuading him from betraying Emma, is the fear of how he would appear and at the ceremonial closing of his enterprise, he is unable to resist the dramatic gesture - the surrender of his small legacy to the cause.

The particular nature of his egoism shapes the quality of his Socialist commitment. He is sincere in his attitudes but having little inner self-sufficiency he holds them with an abstract impersonality, so that he is unconcerned by Emma's sister's illness and acts towards his family pragmatically rather than according to his principles. The insight into this kind of personality, in which a mechanical and rigid surface disguises an absence of internal wholeness, is similar to Lawrence's in Lady Chatterley's Lover:

But now that Clifford was drifting off to this other weirdness of industrial activity, becoming almost a creature, with a hard, efficient shell of an exterior and a pulpy interior, one of the amazing crabs and lobsters of the modern, industrial and financial world, invertebrates of the crustacean order, with shells of steel, like machines, and inner bodies of soft pulp...(10)

Socialism, as it exists in Mutimer, represents a comparable fixity to industrialism; it offers no inner human responsiveness and strength.

The nature of the threat it constitutes is felt in Richard's relationship to Adela. Whereas Eldon shares with Richard a rebelliousness and stiffness of temperament, the latter character can be seen as his direct opposite. Through her Gissing confronts the working-class threat head-on. The emphasis in her portrait is on order and purity, and the danger of contamination to her nature. Through the image of Eden: "Guarded jealousy at every moment of her life, the world had made no blur on the fair tablet of her mind; her Eden had

suffered no invasion".<sup>#</sup> (i,12) the novelist connects her inner life with the fate of the valley; paradise is being destroyed in both worlds.

The main source of destruction in the two cases is Mutimer. Adela is set apart from him not only by intellectual differences but by feelings rooted in the instinctual and physical. These come to the fore at certain times in the book when the couple's sexual relationship is touched upon. There is the scene just before their wedding: "As if in a sudden gloom before her eyes Adela saw his face draw nearer. It was a moments loss of consciousness, in which a ghastly fear flashed upon her soul." (ii,2) or there is the time when Richard returns home after his humiliating election defeat:

Then she saw the expression on his face change; there came upon it a smile such as she had never seen or imagined, a hideous smile that made her blood run cold. Without speaking, he threw himself forwards and came towards her. For an instant she was powerless, paralysed with terror; but happily she found utterance for a cry, and that released her limbs. Before he could reach her, she had darted out of the room, and fled to another chamber, that which Alice had formerly occupied, where she locked herself against him. (ii,9)

He has become simply an animal. The perspective is totally Adela's, for he threatens Gissing as well as his heroine. Unable to encounter the dangers the proletariat contain with a coherent ideology, her integrity serves as a substitute. Socialism is felt to challenge all the associations that can be grouped around the idea of purity; it relies on the basest instincts and reveals the most uncivilized emotions.

In the image of the crowd the dangers represented by Richard's sexuality find their social equivalent. Although he is an opponent of violence, he is inseparably connected with the mob. On his departure from Wanley the workers attack

the Eldons' manor, killing the old woman; and Mutimer is himself killed by them. This latter event occurs at a time when he is becoming a humaner, a more liberal man, capable of recognising his own limitations. It thus signifies the futility of attempting to escape the crowd's power. Only a stance of total detachment can resist the masses' animality; Adela, trying to make compromises with Socialism through her marriage and reading, declines and weakens. The possible positions are signified by Eldon's contempt of Stella Westlake's remote idealism.

A third major concern of Demos is with social mobility. P.M. Blau sees the process in terms of the necessity of choosing between different sets of values and the difficulties of relationship caused by the choices made.<sup>30</sup> This analysis is useful for grasping Gissing's treatment of the theme. Mutimer, having inherited wealth and a new social position, has to decide the extent to which he will allow his past life to impinge upon his new one. The problems of adjustment are considerable and are carefully registered by the novelist through reference to the character's difficulties with etiquette through a sensitivity to his occasional awkwardness and a dramatisation of both his growing shame of his family and his growing willingness to desert Emma.

The betrayal of Emma is perhaps the central feature of the novel, for its implications and consequences radiate out in various directions. Its importance lies in the fact that it destroys Mutimer's claim to represent a genuine source of authority. Once he has fallen so low, neither Harry or Alice can look to him for moral support or guidance. In

30. P.M. Blau, "Social Mobility and Inter-Personal Relationships" American Sociological Review, 21 (June 1956), 290-295.

identifying himself totally with the upper-classes he undermines his capacity to be an effective leader of the lower-classes. William Morris touched on the wider issues this raises in the following passage:

What we want is real leaders themselves working-men, and content to be so till classes are abolished. But you see when a man has gifts for that kind of thing he finds himself tending to rise out of his class before he's begun to think of class politics as a matter of principle.  
31

and the problem was, in various forms to reappear constantly in the history of proletarian political and educational movements. Fundamentally the question was how to give working men the benefit of culture and power without detaching them from their roots. Mutimer's action cuts those roots completely.

A result is his mother's decision to end all relations with him. In the characterisation of Mrs. Mutimer, Gissing reveals a profound understanding of the meaning of mobility. Imbued with an intense conservatism, the changes that follow the family's inheritance of their fortune, disrupt her identity and way of life, causing her to seek isolation and fixity in one room. Out of this experience, in a language distorted by the deepness of her feelings, a mixture of pain and anger, she delivers her denunciation of money; it is the personal note that dominates because she realises the irony that it is she rather than her children who has the right to be ashamed.

Mutimer's treachery, or rather his rise in the social scale, threatens very deeply then the integrity of the family, not only his own but the Vines also. He, himself, towards the close acknowledges with nostalgia the value of stability it

31. Letters of William Morris, p.181.

represents:

Mutimer sat listening to the tick of the familiar clock. That and the smell of the fresh linen made his old life very present to him; there arose in his heart a longing for the past, it seemed peaceful and fuller of genuine interests than the life he now led. (111,8)

This longing for fixity is shared by Gissing, who in his novel enacts a defence of traditional ways of living against the effects of social mobility. Democracy is felt as a process which contributes to the fragmentation of conventional structures, leaving individuals to cope alone and estranged with the new open society. This is the significance of Adela's epiphanic vision at the railway station:

In the station was a constant roaring and hissing, bell-ringing and the shriek of whistles, the heavy trundling of barrows, the slamming of carriage doors; everywhere a smell of smoke. It impressed her as though all the world had become homeless, and had nothing to do but journey hither and thither in vain search of a resting place... (111,3)

The old woman who approaches her, desperate for someone to talk to, symbolises the type of perception Gissing was working towards and exploring in Demos.

The work, then, is essentially one of resistance. It comes mid-way in the 1880's and reveals the fragility and uncertainty which characterises Gissing's position. Its major weaknesses result from the way it is polarised between the actuality of experience and the posture of a writer who is seeking to defend particular values against that actuality. For this reason the book is necessarily a static one, for the novelist isn't able to identify himself with the flux of fictional life sufficiently to embody the reality of the characters' development. Adela becomes more humane and tolerant, Eldon gentler, with greater powers of understanding,

Mutimer less shallow and blind but all this is stated rather than closely realised.

The division in Demos between experience and attitude is very central to Gissing's work in the 1880's. His imagination, it seems, was structured between the stances of exposure and commitment, and his fiction can be regarded as the embodiment of that tension. He will adopt, he has to adopt, fairly rigid positions - towards the working-class or art, - but the quality of rigidity is the result of the difficulty and self-consciousness involved in the maintenance of these positions. In consequence that area of knowledge and sympathy which lies outside them, has to be intellectually rejected because its alien nature appears as a threat.

This is not, however, a description of a cowardly response to the real; the need for some kind of defensive stance issues from the degree to which exposure to it has to be made. Gissing's approach to life was not of a narrow and closed nature. His early years, for example, show that he was a youth unbounded by conventionality, with a mind open and exploring, deeply interested in contemporary matters. The letters of the period are full of energy and the delight of involvement, expressing the appeal of working-class radicalism, of the strong personality of Frederic Harrison and of the friendship of Bertz. William is constantly telling his brother to cultivate a more prudent and long-sighted view of life.

Together, however, with an idealistic pleasure in the world, there is a strong grain of scepticism, a particularising realism, which forces Gissing to face the



implications of his own intellectual stance, in relation to the actuality of life. It becomes more pronounced as he develops, as in the political world lines become more rigid and as the need to identify himself with the image of the artist becomes more urgent. It is in the fiction that the significance of this can be grasped. There the division between experience and commitment, as well as the consciousness of what the division means, is present.

### The Final Novels of the 1880's

The fiction of the 1880's culminates in Thyrza and The Nether World, in which instead of a division between exposure and commitment, they are combined; that is to say the worlds of these novels embody the novelist's perceptions and attitudes, together with his full sense of reality: there is a total matching.

### Thyrza

The meanings of Thyrza are felt to a gr<sup>a</sup>ter extent than previously, being formulated in the movement of the actual fiction, rather than as being externally adopted.<sup>32</sup> The new quality is a matter of structure and texture. Instead of the concern of the earlier novels with characters choosing between rival loyalties and values in their attempted approach to an ideal position, represented by the potential love of the main

32. See Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, p. 184 and p. 186 for Gissing's excited sense of Thyrza's novelty; and p. 172 for the way, in contrast, he viewed Demos.

couples, there is only a set of complex tensions that have to be lived with. Whilst it is possible to recognise that the marriages of Golding and Helen, Waymark and Ida, and Eldon and Adela would be positive achievements in their fictional contexts, this wouldn't be the case with either Thyrza and Egremont or Thyrza and Grail: the losses and injuries would be too immense.

Related to this is the fact that there is an altered relationship between the author and his protagonists. The heroes of Workers in the Dawn and The Unclassed can be identified fairly closely with their creator, and Mutimer in Demos can be regarded as an object of his creator's animosity. In Thyrza, on the other hand, there is no single figure who has such a directly personal function. The focus of interest has become more diffuse, has become separated out between the three major characters. Thus the working-class, which had previously existed in terms of the exceptional individual, is now realised as a community. In consequence the fictional life presented possesses a coherence of its own; it no longer represents an intractable threat to the author's position.

The sense of community is felt in quite simple ways - through the neighbourliness of Mrs. Grail for example or the feelings of responsibility for others of Thyrza and Lydia, through the petty grievances of Bower or the shared experience of work. Throughout meetings and visits are common. Thus in introducing his lower-class figures, Gissing first follows Grail and then after his encounter with Ackroyd takes the latter up as he calls on the Bowers. By such a strategy a closely knit, vital common life is given concrete expression.

The fact that the meanings of Thyrza are embedded within the actual relationships that compose the world of the novel and are not the product of the dilemmas and choices of a single dominating individual who is seeking to understand his true nature and ~~make~~ the necessary commitment, means that there is a strong feeling in the novel of issues still at stake; there is no ideal destiny available to condition the nature of the outcome. The interest, therefore, is much more centred on the texture of the actual, on rendering the changing details of emotional life and the subtle movement of mood and atmosphere. Through suggestion and impression Gissing evokes a city that, in its mirroring of the internal life of the characters, reinforces the sense of unity and fluidity the novel possesses. Thus for Grail the girl on crutches, trying to dance, becomes a reflective symbol of his own inability to participate in the normal life of his class, and for Egremont London echoes his own state of feeling:

To Egremont the darkening scene was in accord with the wearied misery which made his life one dull pain. London lay beneath the night like a city of hopeless toil, of aimless conflict, of frustration and barrenness.  
(*it*, 8) 33

These two examples point to the fact that it isn't possible to talk of community in Thyrza in any reassuring or cosy way, for it is through the wholeness of the social reality Gissing has fictionalised that a context is created in which the themes of alienation and frustration are given significance; a landscape of unfulfilment and separation exists within the shared life of the novel's characters.

The present in this world is almost non-existent. There are moments of happiness and beauty - at the 'inn' for example

33. George Gissing, Thyrza (1887). All references are to this edition.

in which the heroine sings but the knowledge that they are transient is explicitly expressed by Gissing. For most of the time <sup>the</sup> characters' living essentially takes place in the past or the future. For Lydia, Mr. Boddy and Mrs. Grail their memories provide a consolation and joy denied in the present:

Is it not the best of life, that involuntary flash of memory upon instants of the eager past? Better than present joy, in which there is ever a core of disappointment; better, far better, than hope, which cannot warm without burning. (i,14)

But hope in the novel does offer a release from the immediate, so Annabel continues to wait for the love that could fulfil her, Ackroyd keeps on wishing that Thyrza might change her mind and Grail rests in the illusion that after his new appointment and his marriage he will find at last happiness. For him, as for Newthorpe, there is the painful consciousness of waste and frustration. Even for Tatty, embodiment of cheerfulness, there is the problem of her marital promise. And reinforcing this awareness there are the illnesses of Mr. Newthorpe, of the heroine and of Bessie - old before her time. The sense then of possibilities that cannot be realised, of decay and the effort to avoid reality is a powerful one.

It is closely related to the more general atmosphere of the novel, one created to a large extent by the constant references to the natural world, especially the weather. As Blench has shown these references either reflect or ironically comment upon human activity;<sup>34</sup> they provide a setting in which man's aspirations and activities become diminished in importance and indicate Gissing's attempt to universalise

34. J.W.Blench, "George Gissing's Thyrza", Durham University Journal, LXIV (March 1972), 93-95.

his themes, to inject into the fictional work a spiritual dimension. However, it would be wrong to concentrate the emphasis here, for that dimension exists as a supporting background, as part of that landscape of frustration within which the major concerns are worked out. The human and social meaning of the work predominates, and though there is a sense in which the characters are felt to be moved by forces over which they have little or no control, the significance of those forces is only realised, only has an impact in terms of a particular historical context; thus the various loves of the major protagonists gain importance within this setting. Without doubt a quality of decadent world-weariness exists in the work, expressed often by the quiet sadness of the narrative voice or by the pervasive ironies of the work - causing Mrs. Ormonde in her efforts to help to destroy, allowing the growth of love between Lydia and Ackroyd to take place only in the midst of other troubles or leading Egremont to injure rather than benefit the workers - but the pessimism, whilst it generates an atmosphere is also a function of Gissing's exploration of those three central relationships which embody the crucial connections and tensions, the crucial vision, at work in the theme.

A dominant aspect of this vision lies in the treatment of Egremont. Basic to his character is his alienation. His father began life as a house-painter. Thus, although now wealthy, educated and cultured the roots of his inability to completely identify with the middle-classes lie very deep in his background. This failure to identify expresses itself early on in his wanderings which become a substitute for action. The opening chapter of the novel establishes Egremont's separation from the normal values and activities

of his class. His cool attitude to Paula who represents the norm of trivial London drawing-room society expresses his wider hostility to that life. But neither can the remote, still and aesthetic existence of the intellectual Newthorpes completely satisfy; there is a quality of passivity and sterility about existence at the Lakes. It is true Egremont proposes to Annabel but her rejection of him and his later admission that his love for her involved only one part of his nature would suggest that the attachment to her should be seen as an expression of that search for purpose and meaning which characterises his early history.

The attempt to relate to the working-class is prompted not simply by a desire to help but the desire to discover a substitute home, to discover an alternative source of sustaining values. To some extent the world of drawing-rooms and dinner parties is his true milieu:

In withdrawing himself from the sphere of these amenities he was opposing the free growth of his character, which in consequence suffered. He was cognisant of that; he knew he was more himself tonight than he had been for some months. (1,11)

However, that world can only provide opportunity for a fairly simple self to develop, cannot satisfy the full complexity of his nature. As he enters more and more deeply into the reality of the working-class that more complex self becomes increasingly into play. The reality of his identity, containing both his past and his present, becomes more available to him, so that in Grail's house Gissing writes:

He knew that it was one of the very few houses in Lambeth in which he could have been at his ease; perhaps there was no other. It seemed to him that he had thrown off a great deal that was artificial in his behaviour and in habits of speech, that he had reverted to that self which came to him from his parents, and

he felt better for the change. (ii,1)

The actual nature of the relation he can establish with the world of Lambeth is crucial then, for the possibility exists through this of his finding and realising a more real and more complex self-hood.

This desire, on the part of Egremont, to end his alienated state, to discover a social community to which he can attach himself, can be seen in a sociological perspective. Perhaps the most directly relevant analysis is provided by Karl Mannheim in Ideology and Utopia who believes that intellectual activity is carried on by a social stratum which is to a large degree unattached to any social class:

There are two courses of action which the unattached intellectuals have actually taken as ways out of this middle-of-the-road position; first what amounts to a largely voluntary affiliation with one or other of the various antagonistic classes; second scrutiny of their own social moorings and the quest for the fulfilment of their mission as the predestined advocate of the intellectual interests of the whole. 35

From this point of view Egremont first adopts the second alternative and tries to become the disinterested bearer of an Arnoldian culture, to spread 'sweetness and light'. But with the growth of his love for Thyrza and the recognition he is involved in a more direct way with the workers, the first of the two possible strategies open to him, becomes his own. In the effort of the intellectual to affiliate himself, Mannheim also recognises the difficulties involved - the distrust of the workers and the social and psychic character of his own personality. Again, the hostility of Ackroyd, his suspicion that the education Egremont offers is only another sop to his class and the aggressiveness of Bruce, 35. Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia (1936), p.140.

testify to Gissing's similar sensitivity to the problem. There is also the possibility raised by Mannheim's analysis that the kind of political fanaticism which he sees as a compensating function of the intellectual's <sup>in</sup>ability to merge himself satisfactorily in the social group to which he has attached himself, has an analogy in the strength of Egremont's passion for Thyrza, that that passion unconsciously becomes a way of achieving a desired relationship which is denied in other ways; there is here, perhaps, a parallel to Helen's involvement with Bast in Howards End. The conjecture is rather fanciful but does provide a way of seeing the love affair in terms of Egremont's search for a substitute community of values and relationships. That passage quoted earlier in which he talks about his feeling at home in Grail's room and about his real self, continues with him day-dreaming about himself being brought up in a working-class environment and the chance he would have had of meeting and marrying Thyrza. The association between the possibility of a complete integration into the working-class world and the heroine is significant, for it suggests the extent to which his passion for the girl can be seen as an aspect of his desired assimilation.<sup>36</sup>

The characterisation also enables the novelist to express some of his own concerns as artist. For Egremont, in his effort to achieve the necessary poise to prevent a damaging involvement with the people of Lambeth offers a parallel to the writer's attempt to find the right stance towards the

36. It is important to note that Egremont directs his attention to the 'respectable' working class and not the 'residuum'. See Gareth Stedman-Jones, Outcast London, Oxford (1971), pp. 271-314 for the historical significance of this distinction.



working-class, one that will be both intimate and knowledgeable. Scenes like that in which Totty follows Ackroyd home after his arrest and characterisations such as that of the Pooles, in which a Dickensian kindliness is evoked and criticised, and of Mr. Boddy, testify to Gissing's relative success. This last figure has an immensely powerful impact on the book. Poverty has seeped into his being:

His face was parched, his cheeks sunken, his lips compressed into a long, straight line; his small grey eyes had an anxious look, yet were ever ready to twinkle into a smile. (i,3)

In Mrs. Gaskell, hardship is seen within the context of the whole society, is presented to indicate the failings of responsibility and charity on the part of the middle-classes; it is a component of a general social and moral awareness. In Thyrza, Mr. Boddy stands alone, not as part of a wider judgement; the middle-class characters are not understood in any relation to him. This is what old age humanly means - the fierce independence, the dislike of charity, the effort not to succumb to hopelessness, the humiliation and loss of reason for living. He pawns his violin and dies:

He had only to go the length of Hercules Buildings, and then he would be close to the end of Paradise Street. He reached the grave-yard, walking for the most part as in a terrible dream, among strange distorted shapes of men and women, the houses tottering black on either hand, and ever that anvil beat of the blood at his temples. Then of a sudden his wooden limbs slipped, and he fell to the ground. (iii,3)

In its precision of definition, in its feel for the dramatic and significant detail, in the position it occupies between a resigned despair and a bitter protest, in the quality of pain rendered, the account of Mr. Boddy has an Orwellian note. Essentially the similarity is a matter of control -

that capacity to vividly render experience, to give it a felt life and yet to stay detached, so that its meaning can be made explicit. As with the woman seen from the train in A Road to Wigan Pier the response demanded is a shocked realisation of a harsh actuality that is made all the more dispiriting by the fact that Thryza's world is not one of extreme hardship in the main.

The inhabitants of this world enjoy themselves - buying from the Bowers' shop, offering friends hospitality, drinking and listening to music, courting, reading popular literature, dancing in the streets and going to the park. These activities are shown to offer very real fulfilments and opportunities. And yet there is a suggestion of irony here. It is present more explicitly in the description of the gathering in Totty's room, but it is an irony restrained and gentle, not undermining the real pleasure and values asserted but embodying an awareness of their limits and weaknesses. The criticism is not simply destructive but is able to add to our knowledge, to deepen an awareness of the distinctive qualities present. The cosiness which sometimes makes itself felt in Mary Barton, in the home of Job Leigh for example, is not allowed realisation here.

That kind of critical stance is also involved in the treatment of the attitudes of the working people. Religious feeling is a strong presence in the book. Although Gissing is hostile to both Mary's and Bunce's rigidity of position, as he is to Ackroyd's socialistic politics, these points of view are placed to such an extent, are made <sup>so completely</sup> to be part of a much wider understanding of their lives in society that they

cannot be used by the novelist as an instrument of attack. That ability of the writer to articulate his characters' selves qualifies his intellectual stance towards them.

If Gissing, however, does not share Egremont's alienation, Grail does. The novelist was extremely sensitive to the possible harmful effects of education - it could create a false sense of superiority, disguise the reality of an individual's nature, make for a self-consciousness capable of undermining happiness. In the characterisation of Grail there is a powerful representation of the ways intellectual superiority separate and isolate; studious and quiet, he finds it difficult to form relationships with his work-mates. Interested mainly in literature he is forced to work long hours at menial tasks. The sense of frustration and despair, of a hopelessness which is of his own making but which it is impossible to end, the constant nagging pain of disappointment and discontent is intensely rendered; it is the knowledge of distinctiveness combined with the wish to belong that is central:

At such times he would gladly have changed beings with the idlest and emptiest of his fellow-workmen; their life might be ignoble but it had abundance of enjoyment. To him there came no joy or ever would. Only when he lay in his last sleep would it be truly said of him that he rested. (1,6)

Grail lives in a society that has a relatively high educational standard - there is literacy, there is an interest in political and religious issues, but what is lacking is the life of culture. In a sense then, he does, in his apartness, in the fact that only he of his contemporaries seems uncommitted to dogma but committed to something above the ordinary, in that he ~~he is willing to discriminate~~ and judge, in that he can

appreciate the highest in art, embody an Arnoldian ideal in a philistine world.<sup>37</sup>

Part of the significance of the characterisation of Grail lies in the fact that it represents an approach to the problem of the tension between minority artistic values and the pressures of mass culture upon them. The loneliness, fragility and vulnerability of Gissing's protagonist suggests the extent to which the kinds of strengths he embodies were under assault during the period, although that assault was to come most strongly from a culture that was not to take significant shape until the next decade. However, although the life of the Lambeth working-class belongs more to the Victorian than to the modern age, the issues at stake are ones that were to increasingly preoccupy serious artists and intellectuals; the proletarian characters of Thyrza would become the readers of the Northcliffe Press and Grail is, in part, a predecessor of Reardon.

Lines are not as definitely drawn as they were to become in New Grub Street, for one of Thyrza's aims is to bring the two cultures - the high and low - into relationship. That attempt is part of the very aesthetic of the book. The novel was in the nineteenth century primarily occupied with the aristocracy and upper-middle classes and gained much of its interest and attractiveness from a reliance on this social group's manners and styles of living; art was, as it were, already present in the subject before the artist set to work. One of the difficulties about treating the working-classes was

37. See B. Seebohm Rowntree, Poverty: A Study of Town Life (1901) p.75 for a description of the kind of milieu Grail inhabits. (Note 20, p.362 below)

the need to confront the myth and truth of its ordinariness and sordidity, its ugliness. The debate about Naturalism in the late nineteenth century had this issue central to it.<sup>38</sup> Gissing in Thyrza attempts to deal with proletarian life artistically, that is to say he is not afraid of using traditional techniques; the lyrical prose, the dramatic recreation of dialogue able to communicate subtleties and undertones of feeling, the serious handling of romantic relationships among his characters, the significant concern with balance and structure evident in the careful parallels and contrasts drawn between figures, suggest this. The connection made between Thyrza and Annabel through the symbolic association with images of water, nature and music shows that the novelist was employing the full resources of his art in his encounter with his working-class theme. Present then in the actual texture of the work is the attempt to close the gap between the different cultures. The effort is also reflected in the vivid and appreciative recreation of certain elements of working-class life; the singing in the pub must be given due weight in our attitude to Grail.

Although he is idealised, the fundamental impossibility of his position is present in the total painful history of his experience. He places his trust and faith in Egremont, sees him as a representative of disinterestedness, only to find that there can be no detachment of culture from its context of class-conflict, that Egremont is ultimately his enemy. This meaning is not explicit, indeed there is an attempt to avoid its recognition. The scene in which Grail

38. See Ian Gregor and Brian Nicholls, The Moral and The Story (1962), pp.98-122.

and Egremont confront each other after the heroine's flight, is weakened by softening the former's feelings or rather expressing them in terms of a passive physical suffering that reduces the element of active hostility. This is part of a general failure in the realisation of Grail, for he exists far more as an object of pathos than as a complex character. The trouble is that he is not allowed to embody in any way the class conflict which is an explicit part of the novel. Although Gissing attempts to see a way through this conflict, throughout the fact of separation remains fundamental, in, for example, Totty's loyalty to her background or Lydia's suspicion of those outside her social group. Grail has to remain purely a victim figure because the alternative values he is meant to represent can, only, in the divided social world of the book, be on the losing side. The possibility of them having a significant meaning, glimpsed in the potentially idyllic relationship of the three main protagonists, collapses when the reality of the class situation is realised in the actuality of the plot.

Yet, though the characterisation of Grail is seriously flawed, the type of experience he represents emerges powerfully. There is the following passage, symbolic in its overtones, nightmarish in its quality, suggesting the depersonalisation engrained in the industrial and commercial system:

The next morning he went to his work through a fog so dense that it was with difficulty he followed the familiar way. Lamps were mere livid blotches in the foul air perceptible only when close at hand; the footfall of invisible men and women hurrying to factories made a muffled, ghastly sound; harsh bells summoned through the darkness, the voice of pitiless taskmasters to whom all was indifferent save the hour of toil. Gilbert was racked with headache. (i,9)

The feeling of claustrophobia, of living in a dark and inhuman

wasteland, is here very finely rendered. The culmination is found in The Nether World, in which the irony of Grail making candles whilst living in a state of illusion has become the wider irony of individuals making goods which they cannot use; the very personal alienation of Grail as an intellectual working man has become a fact of social existence.

Alienation is also a fundamental aspect of the characterisation of Thyrsa herself. Her nature expresses itself in an impulsiveness of action - her agreement to sing in the pub, or marry Grail, in the quality of her voice, in her responsiveness to the mysteries of life. Her sense of difference, however, remains fairly vague and nebulous until the visit to Eastbourne. The experience of refinement and wealth, the suggestion of possibilities imaged in the infinity of the sea, changes her. It is important that the encounter with the world of the upper-class comes before her discovery of her love for Egremont, for it suggests the extent to which that love cannot be abstracted from its context of class. This is not to say that the heroine falls in love because Egremont is from a higher social rank but to suggest the extent to which her emotional state is part of a wider consciousness of her position in society. In her attachment to him the experience of alienation which previously had been implicit becomes marked and obvious. Her isolation from the common life around her becomes extreme as she finds that she cannot communicate her deepest feelings even to those closest to her.

The difficulty is that in spite of the upper-class world's kindness and concern, she cannot enter into it. Fundamental to the novel is the question of betrayal. It is the knowledge

of what is involved in her admitting her love for Egremont, the knowledge of the consequences to Grail which creates her dilemma. But there is also another and perhaps deeper betrayal- that of Mrs. Ormonde who, whilst seeming to reduce the differences separating the classes through her philanthropy, in the last resort, finds it necessary to defend her class-interests in face of an actual threat from an intruder. The theme is a very Jamesian one, being central to The Princess Casamassima and in certain respects Mrs. Ormonde is a Jamesian figure - the aristocratic niceness disguising a hard sense of the actuality of the world. It might seem that in Thyrza the question of betrayal does not really arise because Gissing is not concerned with judging his character and it is true that explicit judgement is not present; she remains a fairly idealised figure. However what counts are the implications of her actions - the fact that they lead to the gradual decline of Egremont into ordinariness and to the misery and death of Thyrza herself. Those occurrences are seen to be the direct result of that eagerness on the part of Mrs. Ormonde to promote her views, though in actuality they are only made possible by the accidents and mistakes which take place. In this way the novelist expresses his understanding of the dangers implicit in charity; help can easily become interference.

His awareness of the limitations of middle-class philanthropy is reinforced by his knowledge of the scepticism<sup>si</sup>, hostility and evil to be found in the working-class. One of the most important characters in this context is Mrs. Butterfield, the caretaker of the school Egremont hopes to convert into a library. She is dirty, ill and repulsive. Throughout the



scene of inspection she is a constant presence, mostly silent but sinister and inhuman; the figure is Dostoevskian, representing an extremity of bitterness. In spite of the fact that she plays a minor role in the novel (though it is she who is the direct cause of Thyrza and Egremont meeting) her blankness in front of kindness has a general significance in the context of the book, for she stands opposed to everything the two idealists stand for, represents a reality which their good intentions are powerless to alter. Connected with Bower, the two articulate attitudes that the novel's world cannot suppress and which work towards the undermining of the reconciliation embodied in the potentiality of the central relationships.

That undermining is not simply however, the result of working-class hostility but is more fundamentally a recognition of the fact that there can be no disinterested point of view above and beyond class. Mrs. Ormonde towards the end becomes, as it were, the initiator of the plot, finding and hiding Thyrza, persuading Egremont to go to America, convincing him that the girl no longer loves him. She becomes, in fact, an authorial presence and Gissing apparently surrenders his authority to her. That surrender is a form of abdication of the novelist's ideal position of responsible detachment and itself represents the recognition that the position is no longer possible, that the best perhaps, most honest stance, is that of the man of culture and refinement secure in his middle-class values writing about a working-class primarily characterised by ignorance, brutality and vulgarity. The Nether World contains no attempt to understand the two classes in relationship; the gulf is from the start admitted.

The fundamental concerns at Thyrza's heart have to do centrally with Gissing's sense of the fictional issues he faced as a novelist. There is the difficulty he encountered as a middle-class writer of relating to the working-class, there is the problem of art and culture in an alien environment, there is the awareness of the way the writer can be a traitor and expose himself to betrayal in a class society. Such issues are not raised explicitly but are part of the significance of the major thematic concerns, giving to the work a personal tone which is different from the more autobiographical interest of some of the earlier novels. There certain elements of Gissing's experience were being treated from a position of detachment. In Thyrza the comprehension is being achieved in the actual writing of the fiction.

A more complex and subtle relationship between writer and subject is achieved as a result, a relationship that leads to a greater naturalness of realisation and a greater capacity to comprehend and describe the ordinary life of the working-classes in fictional language. In the novel the ordinary is seriously explored without losing its qualities of ordinariness. The characterisation of Ackroyd, for example, as Keating<sup>39</sup> has shown, in its emphasis on his aimlessness, illustrates the ability of the novelist to achieve a significant meaning without simplifying or reducing the fullness and naturalness of the individual's fictional actuality. That is perhaps the main achievement of Thyrza.

In many ways it might seem of small significance but given the difficulties and temptations, given the nature of the other novels of the decade, it is an important one. There are obvious

39. P.J.Keating, The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction (1971) pp. 80-81.

failings in form and response, in the intrusive portrait of the Emersons, for example, or the occasional over-fulsome prose. There is the central evasion at the heart of the book, involved in releasing the tension between the private and public aspects of Egremont's dilemma by the plot mechanism revolving around the activities of Mrs. Ormonde, so that the hero's problem is effectively solved for him. However, within these limitations, given the fact that Gissing is still writing out of a developing position, the achievement of Thyrza is a considerable one.<sup>40</sup>

Of the novels of the 1880's, it is the most sustained and serious examination of the experience of alienation, providing three major versions of the theme which in their close inter-relationship create a profound sense of what it can mean in human terms. To call Egremont, Grail and Thyrza types of intellectuals is perhaps to confuse the term but the three protagonists do have in common a nature which tends to assign low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in a given society.<sup>41</sup> and in that light the novel can be seen as an exploration of the meaning of intellectual alienation in a working-class context. At the end that alienation has become final and rigid but the deepness of the separation is only felt to such a degree because of the sense of what has been lost that is also present in the book; the ultimate position only comes after other possibilities have been tested. Gissing writes to his sister: "Thyrza herself is one

40. J.W. Blench in "George Gissing's Thyrza", claims that Thyrza is the finest of Gissing's working-class novels.

41. Melvin Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation", in Lewis Coser and Bernard Rosenberg, eds., Sociological Theory: a Book of Readings, New York (1957), pp. 510-521.

of the most beautiful dreams I ever had or shall have..."<sup>42</sup>

The word 'dream', implying both the unreality and potentialities of the character, suggests both the disillusion and hope contained in the novel. Such a balanced comprehension and art emerged from the uncertainties and conflicts which had earlier beset him as he sought to fictionally confront the social world and the intellectual's relationship to it.

### The Nether World

Having reached balance, however, Gissing was able to go beyond it. His understanding of society is finely expressed in the fictional world of Thyrza but this achievement was only available because of a certain restraint and moderation. His pessimistic conclusions about the possibility of connection with the working-class are admitted with resignation; Mrs. Ormãnde's tone of voice belongs in part to the novelist. And in his presentation of Lambeth his response to waste and evil was localised and set against more positive aspects. The Nether World, however, powerfully fused an ideological commitment formed in bitterness and anger with a total exposure of himself, as writer, to the actuality of poverty, depravity and frustration. The new quality of Gissing's art has been recognised in the general assessment of his last working-class novel as one of his finest. A greater tightness and coherence of plotting and detail, a more sustained and concentrated thematic emphasis, the absence of a hero figure to mediate between writer and reader, an increased willingness

42. Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, p.189.

to deal in symbol and image and the acceptance by the author of his effective apartness from the individuals he is portraying means that it is possible to talk of The Nether World as articulating a whole world.

The acknowledgement that the lower-class possesses a separate culture, beyond the writer's influence is reflected in what could be called the parabolic significance of the events at the core of the work. These revolve around the figure of Michael Snowden. He desires, like the novelist, to create an ideal relationship with the masses, through educating Jane to fulfil a role which both keeps her involved with their life and yet at the same time enables her to help them; a similar but less explicit version of this ambition was present in Thyrza. The emphasis upon this theme suggests it has a directly personal relevance to Gissing; the philanthropic impulse can, to some degree, be regarded as an image of the artistic one. At the same time, thus, as the work demonstrates the writer's achievement of an impersonal perspective, it also contains an awareness of the significance of this achievement. Central then, in an oblique form, is a self-consciousness about the artist's relationship to the working-class.

Part of the cause of Gissing's rejection of responsibility towards the proletariat is the despairing and bleak nature of his insights. People seem in the control of forces they cannot understand, their lives spent seeking relief from the demands of economic necessity; alternatives and opportunities are few. At the heart of the analysis is the ironic perception that the consumer articles which Clerkenwell's factories manufacture

have no relevance to the poverty-stricken lives of the men who make them; the nation is close to William Morris, in "Art and Socialism",<sup>43</sup> who talks about the senseless production of useless goods. Work is not only detached from these people; it can be actively destructive. Thus Mr. Marples:

...his way of going up to bed was very simply explained by the fact that a daily sixteen hours sitting on the box left his legs in a numb and practically useless condition. (1,4) 44

these  
or two sisters: 44

... they were middle aged women, gentle natured, and so thoroughly subdued to the hopelessness of their lot that scarcely could even their footfalls be heard as they went up and down the stairs; their voices were always sank to a soft murmur. (1,3)

In the context of the whole novel such minor vignettes have a considerable generalising significance, illuminating, for example, Clara's experience.

The influence of work extends into people's leisure time, contributing to the anarchic vitality that emerges on bank holidays. The Crystal Palace scene is finely caught through a tone of ironic participation which enables involvement and judgement and prevents the sensationalism which can result from a stance of objective detachment. Or there is Mr. Eagles, whose planning of Government budgets suggests the degree to which the ethos of society can penetrate the identity. Gissing's case isn't simply that the inhabitants of 'the nether world' are ignorant or sunk into indulgence; their opportunities are few. Bob and Penny can be generous to each other when they hear music; culture has a potentially humanising influence but it is denied to them:

43. William Morris, "Art and Socialism", (1884), Bijou Reprints 7, pp.12-14.

44. George Gissing, The Nether World (1889). All references are to this edition.

Had the British Museum been open to visitors in the hours of the evening, or on Sundays, Bob Hewitt would possibly have been employing his leisure now-a-days in more profitable pursuits. (ii,11)

Another area beyond work is domestic life. The choice is nearly always between living alone in comfort or living in a family situation with little money. And what the latter means is fairly clearly established in the work. There is Shooters Gardens, where the corruption of the slum offers no kind of resistance to the corruption of the people; the two are closely associated:

Meanwhile the Gardens looked their surliest; the walls stood in a perpetual black sweat; a mouldy reek came from the open doorways; the beings that passed in and out seemed soaked with grimy moisture, puffed into distortions, hung about with rotting garments. (iii,1)

Here, the parts of the building seem to merge with the inhabitants; it is the walls that are alive, that perspire, individuals who are objects, grimy and damp, on whom garments hang. And this identification of the human and the non-human is continued in the description of Farringdon Road Buildings. These are theoretical improvements upon the slums, but instead of chaos there is a deadening monotony that is active and destroying; the walls have 'eyes', a courtyard 'looking up', the bricks and mortars <sup>are</sup> 'crushing'. Both this passage and the one describing Shooters Gardens undermine the sense that the domestic interior may prevent the dehumanising encroachment of the society outside. Hewett's abode, with the mother dying, the father out of work, the children growing up difficult, suggests this very precisely.

There is, however, in the novel one home that seems to represent a genuine alternative to the ruthlessness of the society. In the portrayal of the Byass family, Gissing

stresses that whilst economic security can bring happiness, the problem of the individual's alienation from the potentialities of the self cannot be solved by mere affluence. Devoted to their babies, maintaining a constant cheerfulness punctuated by petty arguments, the lives they lead are inevitably limited. To sneer at them would be impossible but to hold them up as ideals would be to evade the real issues the fiction is concerned with. The home should offer some protection against the forces of the world outside but it shouldn't serve as a way of escaping from them.

The characters' situation is made more difficult by the impossibility of their escape. Keating has stressed the importance of the prison motif to the book.<sup>45</sup> One of the forms of release dealt with is the pastoral. The impulse towards the rural has a positive significance, as the purposive energy of the rhythms of the following passage, in its repetition of prepositions, suggests:

Over the pest-stricken regions of East London, sweltering in sunshine which served only to reveal the intimacies of abomination; across miles of the city of the damned, such as thought never conceived before this age of ours; above streets swarming with a nameless populace, cruelly exposed by the unwanted light of heaven; stopping at stations which it crushes the heart to think should be the destination of any mortal; the train made its way at length beyond the outmost limits of dread, and entered upon a land of level meadows, of hedges and trees and crops and cattle. (iv,6)

However, although the countryside is seen in idyllic terms major qualifications are made; for Kirkwood it is associated with childhood and thus with a regressive evasion of reality and although the beauty of the landscape is acknowledged the beauty isn't extended to the human relationships it encloses:

Here, as elsewhere the evil of the times was pressing

45. The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction, p.85.



upon men and disheartening them from labour. Farms lying barren, ill-will between proprietor and tenant, between tenant and kind, departure of the tillers of the soil to rot in towns that have no need of them - of such things did honest Pammanenter speak, with many in sturdy malediction of landlords and land-laws, whereat Sidney smiled, not unsympathetic. (ii,6)

the conventional archaism of the last phrase suggests an ironic mockery of the traditional rural image.

A further type of escape Gissing considers to be politics. John Hewett, as a result of his extreme hardship, becomes obsessed by a hatred of the established order. His almost inarticulate fanaticism, the deepness of his bitterness, the way his attitudes come to dominate him, indicates the extent to which Gissing regarded politics, in the context of the economic deprivation of the working-class, to be an evasion of the actual problems that existed. Hewett takes to politics as he takes to drink - to avoid having to face the horror of his own situation.

His daughter seeks to free herself by attempting to climb out of her class. Unable to accept her circumstances, she finds in the acting profession merely an image of the actual world - a rigid hierarchy, an intense competitiveness and a naked violence. Returning home, the city landscape echoes her state of mind - the disconnection of St. Paul's reflecting back her own isolation, Newgate reflecting her imprisonment and the dehumanised people seen from the window, her own loss of self; both she and the world have been stripped of values. Clara's history is reinforced by the characterisation of Scawthorne, whose efforts to improve his social position has meant his adoption of the code of the world he is making his way in:

Pity that some self-made intellectual man of our time

has not flung in the world's teeth a truthful autobiography. Scawthorne worked himself up into a position which had first seemed unattainable; what he paid for the success was the loss of his pure ideals, of his sincerity, his disinterestedness, of the fine perceptions to which he was born. (ii,9)

Genuine escape then, though it can be achieved on the surface, is impossible in any kind of deep-rooted way. For Clara there is return and for Scawthorne simply the refusal of Jane to marry him. The theme of escape had been a feature of Gissing's earlier work. There is Golding's flight to America or Mutimer's social climbing but it had never received such a sustained and concentrated examination. A new clear-sightedness is apparent which suggests that Gissing is neither writing out of his own exposed experience or out of a fixed position; the perspective which has been gained can both render and place character. Clara's characterisation is far superior to that of any similar figure earlier. Her manifest faults and weaknesses are appreciated but they are directly connected to the whole society in which she lives, so that we are led to understand and to judge. It is a deeper, more interior study than had been the case before.

The Nether World also deals with the waste of talent that occurs and the consequent frustrations. Earlier the theme had received sustained treatment in Thyrza but the portrait of Grail, although very moving, had been weakened by an excessive emphasis upon the pathetic. The characterisation of Hewett is a more complex one, including a greater variety of response and feeling. He is enabled to powerfully articulate his own anger and despair—

"Walked to Enfield and back. I was told of a job out there; but it's no good; they're full up. They say exercise is good for the health." (i,3)

suggesting that Gissing has sufficient confidence in his own

perspective to give his characters a real degree of freedom. Hewett is held responsible for his decline but also admitted is the way that society has forced him to be in a state of friction with his own nature:

His business was a failure, partly because he dealt with a too rigid honesty, partly because of his unstable nature, which left him at the mercy of whims and obstacles and airy projects. (i,6)

In discussing Hewett in terms of the wasted talent he embodies, it is necessary to stress that talent, in this context, means not so much the kind of intellectual ability of someone like Grail or the artistic genius of Golding, but simply rather a fullness and generosity of potential life. At the close, unable to control his children, rather sickly in his affection for Clara, made small by the presence of Kirkwood and falling ill, he is an image of shrunken possibilities.

In his son, who possesses artistic gifts, a similar theme is dealt with. Gissing's anger and pity at Bob's death are intense:

Useless Pennyloaf, useless. That fierce kick, making ruin of your rotten barrier, is dealt with the whole force of the Law of Society; you might as well think of resisting death when your hour shall come. (iii,10)

The forces of order here, have become totally identified with society; the police are the true source of authority and the prison the true image of the real world. That the novelist can suggest this after having emphasised his character's faults throughout is an indication of his achievement.

In the portrayal of Kirkwood waste and frustration are also central. These experiences seem, however, to become internalised, so that his will for happiness isn't sufficiently strong for him to marry Jane with her wealth and responsibilities. He can only live by the reality that Clara represents. Gissing

admires him but the losses involved are recognised as well:

But reading was as much a thing of the past as drawing. Never a moment when his mind was sufficiently at ease to refrain itself with other men's thoughts or fancies. As with John Hewett, so with himself; the circle of his interests had shrivelled, until it included nothing but the cares of his family, the cost of house and food and firing. (111,12)

Together with escape and waste, imitation is the other major experience available to the nether world's residents. Clem Peckover in her violent greed, in her animalism and Joseph Snowden in his logical inhumanity mirror the jungle and machine-like society in which they live. The necessary complement to this is Pennyloaf Candy's complete inability to resist the pressure of her immediate environment. All three, in their different ways, lack the creative energy to shape their world according to human values.

The central perception of The Nether World is then, that only pragmatic humanism can preserve the integrity of the self. All solutions and principles in the book's world partake inevitably of that world's harsh nature; thus Michael Snowden's philanthropic scheme has the cold ruthlessness of the exploitive relationship. The main impression of the novel is a static one. Aspiration and escape end in frustration; the prison incarcerates everyone - everyone, that is, except the novelist. In his earlier work it was necessary to talk of his movement between his exposure to the actual and his commitment to a position outside it. Now this distinction doesn't really apply, for the book, reveals a writer able to totally translate his private experience and understanding into fiction. He is creatively enacting and registering, in the powerfulest way, his deepest knowledge and feelings; the perspective makes the commitment and exposure one vision.

Perhaps a major cause of The Nether World's success lies

in the fact that Gissing no longer feels compelled to place at the centre of his fiction, in the direct way he had earlier on, his own deep-rooted and raw emotions about the problems of living without money and with education in a class society; the theme of the intellectual has become a theme, rather than being a set of partially comprehended feelings shaping the whole novel.

It would be a mistake, however, to over estimate it. Compared to the greatest nineteenth century fiction of Dickens and Eliot, it is not of the very highest quality. However, through an understanding of his difficulties as writer - the conflicting demands of the world and ideology he had to face - both his achievement and failure emerge. Characters such as Hood and Hewett are not easily gained but are the result of complicated workings of the imagination.

During the 1880's, in the working-class novels of the decade, the precise nature of these workings can be viewed. In Workers in the Dawn, Gissing has to write out of a growing exposure to the real and an emerging commitment to stable values; there is a lack of poise. By the time of The Unclassed the tensions involved here have been resolved, so that the novelist can comprehend thematically the value of exposure. Isabel Clarendon and A Life's Morning, in their concentration upon the inner life of the intellectual and his relationship to the realities of class, explore the significance such exposure can have; Demos seeks to formulate a position in the light of the findings of its two predecessors but in so doing cannot itself embody the exposed stance; and Thyrza and The Nether World fuse openness to experience and commitment. It

is not a clear or simple development but the superiority of these last two novels of the 1880's, display the significant advance in the maturity of Gissing's art that had taken place.

## CHAPTER 7

### GISSING AND THE MASS SOCIETY: AN EXAMINATION OF NEW GRUB STREET

The fiction of the latter part of the 1880's was crucial in shaping the nature of Gissing's work in the early 1890's. In resolving the tension between his desire for exposure and his need for a fixed perspective and in accepting the necessary detachment of the intellectual from the working-class the novelist was enabled to examine the state of exile as a condition of being rather than as a problem to be solved. Thus he writes of The Emancipated: "At all events it will be a new line of work to those who know me only from my other books".<sup>1</sup>

This development occurs in years that are vitally important both historically and biographically. Lines between the classes were hardening<sup>2</sup> and Gissing, by his journey to the classical world, both strengthened his identification with the gentlemanly ideal of his imagination and discovered the

1. Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, ed. A.C. Young (1961), p. 103.
2. William Morris, for example, joined the S.D.F., the major Marxist inspired organisation of the time and the Dock strike of the 1880's symbolises the growth into consciousness of a new sense of class.

anonymity that answered to his internal situation. As a result of these tendencies the writer began to move away from the complications and ambiguities of his earlier days in London. His marriage to Edith Underwood is marked by a clear-sighted understanding of his nature and needs:

This solitude is killing me. I can't endure it any longer. In London I must resume my old search for some work-girl who will come and live with me. I am too poor to marry an equal and cannot live alone. 3

and again:

I know that my danger if I become connected with a tolerable girl of low position is very great; I am weak in these matters. But, then, reflect: there is no real hope of my marrying anyone of a better kind, no real hope whatever! I say it with the gravest conviction. 4

The pain of solitude expressed here has been uncomprisingly seen and admitted; matrimony is entered into in a spirit of cultivated indifference, with the ~~sense~~<sup>aim</sup> of performing an essential act.

Such clear perception, together with the calm acceptance of the detached stance, provided the conditions for the concern of both The Emancipated and New Grub Street with the experience and significance of being an intellectual. Only in the latter, however, can a new maturity be felt. Crucial to this quality is the significantly different stance to experience that is present. Autobiographical matter is now being used and shaped. Instead of the reader participating with the author in a process of comprehension, instead, for example,<sup>of</sup> the premature identification with Kingcoate that makes for impatience, there is a feeling that Reardon is the product of knowledge already gained and absorbed. Consequently

3. Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, p.110.

4. Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, p.112.



it is possible to feel detached from him, even when his suffering is at its most intense and is most obviously related to Gissing's personal life.

The distinctiveness of New Grub Street is reflected in the nature of the book's world. Whereas a relativistic view of reality had been present in The Nether World and The Emancipated, in the dense and variegated pattern of possible ways of seeing they embodied, now that view is incorporated into the narrative stance of the writer, making for a greater lucidity of effect and a new form of irony, centred not upon the gap between the ideal and the real but upon an embedded scepticism. Here is the book's opening:

As the Milvains sat down to breakfast the clock of Wattleborough parish church struck eight; it was two miles away, but the strokes were borne very distinctly on the west wind this autumn morning. Jasper, listening before he cracked an egg, remarked with cheerfulness: 'There's a man being hanged in London at this moment'.  
(i,1) 5

A playful self-consciousness dominates here, establishing the writer's cool distance from his subject-matter.

Allied to this is a growth of the novelist's subtlety of response. Attempt is made to capture shades of meaning and render unarticulated significances. The following passage is evidence of the complex sensitivity that is achieved:

The impulses which had part in this outbreak were numerous and complex. He felt all that he expressed, but at the same time it seemed to him that he had the choice between two ways of uttering his emotion, the tenderly appealing and the sternly reproachful; he took the latter course because it was the less natural to him than the former. His desire was to impress Amy with the bitter intensity of his sufferings; pathos and loving words seemed to have lost their power upon her, but perhaps if he yielded to the passion she would be shaken out of her coldness. The stress of injured love is always to speech that seems its contradiction. (ii,15)

5. George Gissing, New Grub Street (1891). All references are to this edition.

Here the internal life of the character is related to its social expression in language.

Such a sensitivity is connected to New Grub Street's thematic interest in communication. The work is part of that increased awareness of writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century of art and the role of its creator.<sup>6</sup>

Gissing in dealing with the world of letters, then, was treating a subject fundamental to the culture of the time,<sup>7</sup> was writing a book that would appeal and sell relatively widely.<sup>8</sup> Although he was very worried about standards, about the temptation to succumb to the dictates of popular opinion, the idea that he was a solitary saint, able to preserve a purity in his art against the corrupting influences of the world, is a mistaken one: He writes: "I cannot and will not be reckoned among the petty scribblers of the day..."<sup>9</sup> And one of the

6. See for a discussion of the changing position of the artist in society and fiction in the period Malcolm Bradbury, The Social Context of Modern English Literature, Oxford (1971), pp.36-43 and pp.78-84; Gerald Jay Goldberg, "The Artist Novel in Transition", English Literature in Transition, 1V (1961), 12-27; Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind (1968), p.6.

7. The new interest in the world of authors was not confined to a narrow circle, as has been pointed out by John Gross, The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters (1969) p.200

8. See Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge, George Gissing: The Critical Heritage (1972), p.5 and John Spiers and Pierre Coustillas, eds. The Rediscovery of George Gissing (1971), p.76.

9. Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, eds. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (1927), p.76.

achievements of New Grub Street lies in the feeling that emerges that Gissing is not completely alien to the sorts of impulses that move Milvain and Whelpdale. His ambitiousness is not like that of Dickens, a figure whose immense audience filled him with a mixture of admiration and contempt, instinct with energy and self-confidence;<sup>10</sup> it is more nervous and negative, more a claim for recognition as a writer than a desire to be a great and popular genius. As Reardon needs his wife to believe in him, so Gissing needs the acceptance of others of his role. He does very little journalism or teaching; having decided to be a novelist he stakes his whole identity on the decision. To do otherwise is to risk being swamped by the pressures working against artistic commitment, for these pressures from a mass kind of society are centrally concerned with flattening and defining the individual. As a result the work registers a sense of character in which moral concerns are subordinated to a concern with exploring the self, as Conrad does, in its most exposed condition. Reardon, in conversation with Amy in the early part of the book, seeking to keep some awareness of himself alive against external forces, reviewing his past against his present understanding of reality, haunted by failure and loss of love, typifies Gissing's quality of characterisation.

The similarity with Conrad expresses itself in the two writers' comprehension of the city. In The Secret Agent London is a more threatening and sinister place than it is in New Grub Street but both novels convey a particular form of sensitivity to the implications of living in the metropolis; the stress is on the loneliness and anonymity, on the gloom

10. See John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens (1872)i, 51-52

and seediness. Dicken's city had frequently been felt as hostile but except perhaps for Little Dorrit or Our Mutual Friend there was also a strong realisation of its fullness, of the opportunities for human connection it offers, present. Gissing, with a bleaker awareness had continued this type of perception in his work of the eighteen-eighties.

What distinguishes New Grub Street is the fact that the scene is not now evoked in a rhetoric shaped by the writer's dislike; the pastoral perspective is absent. The 'country-side' is viewed in economic terms:

The house was pleasantly situated by the roadside in a little village named Findon. Opposite the church, a plain, low, square-towered building. As it was cattle-market in the town of Wattleborough, droves of beasts and sheep occasionally went by, or the rattle of a grazer's cart sounded for a moment. On ordinary days the road saw few vehicles, and pedestrians were few. (i,1)

- from the city, as it were, which is felt primarily in its emptiness, in its lack of human meaning. Reardon goes out to wander the streets in order to be by himself, to think. He travels occasionally to the district where his separated wife is living:

Once or twice a week, sometimes early in the evening, sometimes at midnight, he haunted the street at Westbourne Park where his wife was dwelling. (iii,25)

That word 'haunted' is crucial, suggesting how Reardon's apartness has reduced his humanity. And the image of the man outside the comforts of home, in the cold, brings to mind Zacharia in Mark Rutherford's A Revolution in Tanner's Lane, walking the streets of Manchester, or his wife trying to look in at the window to hear what is going on inside; a similar awareness is at work. This awareness can be more precisely defined through contrast with a book like The Princess Casamassima, in which London, in spite of the subversive

activities it harbours and in spite of the experience of exile it contains, is full of people and significances. James's city is of the nineteenth century, Gissing's of the twentieth, of the mass society which denudes the world of values and separates out individuals from forms of community. The characteristic note is caught as Reardon looks out from his window:

One evening he sat at his desk with a slip of manuscript paper before him. It was the hour of sunset. His outlook was upon the backs of certain large houses skirting Regents Park and lights had begun to show here and there in the windows; in one room a man was discoverable dressing for dinner, he had not thought it worthwhile to lower the blind; in another, some people were playing billiards. The higher windows reflected a rich glow from the western sky. (i,4)

There is no connection between him and those he observes; they are objects in a scene rather than individuals implying the possibility of relationship. The style is flat and detached - purely descriptive, denying all potentiality for meaning. In such a glimpse a whole sense of the city landscape is conveyed.

Those who compose this landscape are recognisably members of a mass society. The Carters are humane and kind, deferent towards art and culture, but the central quality of their lives is a cheerful complacency; a holiday abroad to the unclassical Norway is the high-spot. Gissing is not harsh towards them; there is none of the bitterness which is the mark of In the Year of the Jubilee but there is an absolute acceptance of their status as non-entities. They are representative of the passive consumers fostered by mass society. In the following passage the novelist finely catches their voice:

'Then, so long as you let me come here now and then, I must give in. I promise not to trouble you with any

more complaining. But how you can live such a life I don't know. I consider myself more of a reader than women generally are, and I should be mortally offended if anyone called me frivolous; but I must have a good deal of society. Really and truly, I can't live without it.' (i,10)

The slight affectedness, the refusal of Edith to leave herself open to any possibility of criticism by implying a type of normality, and then later on-

'Of course you think me rather silly to want to talk so much with silly people' Edith went on. 'But then there's generally some amusement to be got, you know.' I don't take life quite as seriously as you do. People are people after all; it's good fun to see how they live and hear how they talk! ' (i,10)

- the defensiveness, suggests the nature of her attitudes.

The resemblance is with someone criticised for watching a mindless television programme who replies that you can't be watching serious programmes all the time and anyway it is interesting to see how low most people's tastes are.

Friends of the Carters are Mrs. Edmund Yule and family.

The son can be defined by his idiocy but the mother and daughter are more interesting. The concern of the former <sup>is</sup> with maintaining appearances, for the opinions of others confirms her own individual reality:

Like her multitudinous kind, Mrs. Yule lived only in the opinions of other people. What others would say was her ceaseless pre-occupation. She had never conceived of life as something proper to the individual; independence in the directing of one's course seemed to her possible only in the case of very eccentric persons, or such as were altogether out of society. (ii,18)

Without integrity her genuine emotions can only be focused upon her immediate family, for everyone else exists as a potential threat; only here can a restricted form of identity find expression. The significance of such a characterisation is pointed to by Ernest van Den Haag:

As a result of the high psychological and emotional costs

of individuality and privacy, gregariousness has become internalised. People fear solitude and unpopularity; popular approval becomes the only moral and aesthetic standard most people recognise. 11

Amy too is intensely anxious about public attitudes but as the conversation with her mother after the break-up of her marriage, and her feeling that Reardon must not do bad work indicates, she has sufficient strength to judge and act according to her own criteria.

Lower down the social scale there is Mr. Barker, who is preparing for a civil-service examination. Much of the humour of the main scene in which he appears derives from the incongruity between the character - his appearance, his work, his dull intelligence, his vocabulary drawn from manual labour and the studious activities he is engaged in. Gissing is suggesting that education, in the form it takes here, doesn't enable self-fulfilment and the growth of individuality but merely narrows energies into conventional channels. In the mass society learning becomes another consumer product - a matter of syllabuses and tests - rather than a possible source of civilised and humane values. It's not simply the fact that it is a vehicle for self-advancement in the classical Smilesian fashion; the process is more mechanical, requiring not determined enthusiasm but passive and dogged obedience to an arranged scheme. The characterisation of Barker then, touches upon certain of the dangers involved in the institutionalisation of education; in In the Year of the Jubilee the theme receives more extensive treatment.

New Grub Street doesn't deal at any length with the

11. Ernest van Den Haag, "A Dissent from the Consensual Society", in Norman Jacobs, ed., Culture for the Millions, New York (1961), p.59.

working-class but in the figure of Mrs. Goby Gissing does indicate his comprehension of its situation in the changing society of the period. A tone of resentment distinguishes the novelist's attitude - resentment of the woman's assertiveness and arrogance. Having been given the vote and education, the proletariat seemed to pose a threatening challenge to traditional distinctions of quality and traditional sources of authority.

Through, thus, considering a cross-section of individuals, a particular type of social world is registered - one distinguished by a neutralising complacency, by an absence of intelligent direction, by a failure of serious and vital response to the life of culture and by a cheap flashiness and presumptuousness. Clearly felt are the influences reducing people's individuality and sense of purpose. It is not a case of an actively evil system as in Dickens which can be plainly condemned in moral terms but of a type of monotonous flatness that is pervasive; the social landscape is a two-dimensional one. Wells's analysis of a similar world in Tono-Bungay may also be pessimistic but it lacks this bleakness.

In such a context the intellectual is faced with particular kinds of problems and issues. Class is no longer the sole or perhaps the crucial mode through which he identifies his position. Whereas the significant experience of Gissing's earlier fiction had centred upon the forms of social connection Arthur, Egremont, Mutimer or Emily could forge with their surrounding society, in New Grub Street it centres upon the ways and the extent to which Reardon can oppose or resist the impingement of that society upon his self-hood. Coping with exile, rather than overcoming isolation becomes of fundamental importance.

A major agent of pressure is the mass-media. The point is that the stance of apartness has to be maintained in full



consciousness of the attractions of the media, in the midst of the immensely broad appeal it can command; the loudness of its voice prevents the possibility of evasion. Nor is escape easily available in other ways. A feature of mass society is its tendency to diminish opposition to the status-quo through including a multitude of possible challenges under its umbrella; consequently, as Hannah Arendt points out, despair increases for the sensitive individual.<sup>12</sup> Clearly New Grub Street's world is only an embryonic version of such a society but it is alive to the relevant issues involved.

In the first place there is the question of art and the artist. Reardon starts his career with a gradual climb to success but he does so as an amateur, as it were. Once he chooses to make writing his full-time occupation, once he knows that the crucial point about his work will be its capacity to sell, he is unable to produce anything of worth. The reductive move to two volume novels, to essays and to a one volume story symbolises the increasing failure of his art to resist external pressures. A loss of confidence is his central difficulty. With the dangers of writing badly felt so acutely all he does is subjected to extreme scrutiny and found wanting. The maintenance of high standards becomes therefore a constant refusal to accept what he creates as possibly worthwhile:

There were floating in his mind five or six possible subjects for a book, all dating back to the time when he first began novel-writing, when ideas came freshly to him. If he grasped desperately at one of these, and did his best to develop it, for a day or two he could almost content himself; characters, situations, lines of motive, were laboriously schemed, and he felt ready to begin writing. But scarcely had he done a chapter or two when all the structure fell into flatness. He

12. Hannah Arendt, "Society and Culture", in Culture for the Millions, p.44.

had made a mistake. Not this story, but that other one, was what he should have taken. The other one in question, left out of mind for a time, had come back with a face of new possibility; it invited him, tempted him to throw aside what he had already written. Good; now he was in a more hopeful train. But a few days and the experience repeated itself. No, not this story, but that third one, of which he had not thought for a long time. How could he have rejected so hopeful a subject?

For months he had been living in this way; endless circling, perpetual beginning, followed by frustration. (vi,9)

The language imitates here, in its movement, the internal life of the mind - its periods of energy, the sudden loss of confidence, the quick, insecure resurgence of vitality.

Reardon is, of course, heavily criticised implicitly - for his lack of will, for the superfluity of sensitivity he possesses, for the absence of a practical grasp of the world. He is unable to turn things to his own advantage; so, for example, he refuses Milvain's offer to help him with a favourable review and will not attend the appropriate social functions. A sort of pride motivates him but it is a pride based not on strength but on weakness. How he regards the literary market is suggested by his attitude to the buyer who comes to purchase his books:

Perhaps the offer was a fair one; perhaps it was not. Reardon had neither the time nor the spirit to test the possibilities of the market; he was ashamed to betray his need for haggling. 'I'll take it,' he said, in a matter of fact voice. (i,10)

This degree of carelessness borders on the irresponsible.

Reardon fails but Biffen achieves a kind of success, for his realistic novel is finished and published. This fact indicates that New Grub Street is not simply a description of the literary scene at the end of the nineteenth century from the point of view of a man unable to succeed but is rather an examination of the issues characteristic of the changing

society and cultural conditions of the time.<sup>13</sup> The crucial question is not its mimetic accuracy but its capacity to identify and explore the significant tendencies present, the significant choices to be made. Biffen's cheerfulness and dedication to art, together with the fact that his book does materialise, indicates that Gissing still believed that matters were open to human intervention, that an absolute pessimism wasn't fitting. Thus he writes to Hardy:

Yes, I know too well the dangers of writing too fast and I fear I shall not be able to shun it altogether. It is my misfortune to be obliged to make literature a business - a very poor one in sooth - yet it shall go hard with me but I will follow your example and give my books that individuality which comes of their being heartfelt. 14

Good literature he considers can be produced in spite of his economic situation. Compare this with Reardon's comment:

What an insane thing to make literature one's only means of support! When the most trivial accident may at any time prove fatal to one's power of work for weeks or months. No, that is the unpardonable sin! To make a trade of an art! I am rightly served for attempting such a brutal folly. (1,4)

The difference between them lies in the distinction between 'misfortune' and 'insane'. For Gissing, whilst sharing his hero's experience, possesses an energy of purpose that connects him with Biffen.

Not only is Gissing concerned with the quality of art in a commercial society; he is also interested in its changing significance in such a society. Mass-culture produces artifacts for consumption, for satisfying immediate needs. In a discussion of this topic Hannah Arendt draws the following distinction:

Perhaps the chief difference between society and mass society is that society wanted culture, evaluated and

13. See James Hepburn, The Author's Empty Purse and the Rise of the Literary Agent (1968), pp.19-20.

14. Pierre Coustillas, "Some Unpublished Letters from Gissing to Hardy", English Literature in Translation 1X, 4 (1966), 147-209.

devaluated cultural things into social commodities, used and abused them for its own selfish purposes, but did not 'consume' them. Even in their most worn-out shapes these things remained things, they were not consumed and swallowed up but retained their worldly objectivity. Mass society on the contrary, wants not culture but entertainment, and the wares offered by the entertainment industry are indeed consumed by society just as any other consumer goods. 15

If art becomes a consumer product then, its temporal significance considerably alters. Great classical art is approached with a sense of its place in history; mass art on the other hand, has no past. Randall Jarrell writes that in the new society-

The present is better and more interesting, more real, than the past; the future will be better and more interesting than the present. 16

and Hans Magnus Enzenburger writes:

The new media are orientated towards action, not contemplation; towards the present not tradition. Their attitude to time is completely opposed to that of bourgeois culture which aspires to possession, that is to extension in time, best of all, to eternity. 17

Such ideas are implicit in New Grub Street. One of the main pressures on Reardon, acting against his creativity is the temporal. At home, trying to write, he struggles each day to accumulate the number of words he has set himself:

After all, there came a day when Edwin Reardon found himself regularly at work once more, ticking off his stipulated quantum of manuscript each four and twenty hour. He wrote a very small hand; sixty written slips of the kind of paper he habitually used would represent - thanks to the astonishing system which prevails in such matters: large type, wide spacing, frequency of blank pages - a passable ~~three~~ hundred page volume. On an average he could write four such slips a day; so here we have fifteen days for the volume, and forty-four for the completed book. (1,9)

Repeatedly Gissing makes the reader conscious of the pressure of time on Reardon; it is a constant presence, haunting the

15. Hannah Arendt, "Society and Culture", in Culture for the Millions, p.46.
16. Randall Jarrell, "A Sad Heart at the Supermarket", in Culture for the Millions, p.102.
17. Hans Magnus Enzenburger, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media" in Dennis McQuail, ed., Sociology of Mass Communications (1972), p.108;

artist. A frequent image is that of a clock, associated with the threatening workhouse:

The various sounds which marked the stages from midnight to dawn had grown miserably familiar to him; worst torture to his mind was the chiming and striking of clocks. Two of these were in general audible, that of the Marleybone parish church, and that of the adjoining workhouse; the latter always sounded several minutes after its ecclesiastical neighbour, and with a difference of note which seemed to Reardon very appropriate - a *thin, querulous* voice, reminding one of the community it represented. After lying awake for a while he would hear quarters sounding; if they ceased before the fourth he was glad, for he feared to know what time it was. If the hour was complete, he waited anxiously for its number. Two, three, even four, were grateful; there was still a long time before he need rise and face the dreaded task, the horrible four blank slips of paper that had to be filled ere he might sleep again. (i,9)

To be responsive to the passage of time to such a degree is to suffer a growing incapacity to resist its encroachment. The work of art is now no longer felt as standing against the flux of temporality but as an object within that flux; the classics Reardon admires become a mockery of his present achievement. His defeat is implied in the following passage:

The past twelve months had added several years to Edwin Reardon's seeming age; at thirty-three he would generally have been taken for forty. His bearing, his personal habits were no longer those of a young man; he walked with a stoop and pressed noticeably on the stick he carried; it was rare for him to show the countenance which tells of present cheerfulness or glad onward looking...(ii,15)

Time then not only prevents genuine creativity but also erodes the self.

On the other hand, for Milvain, it represents opportunity. A sense of him constantly busy, constantly opposing its process by the energy of his activity is powerfully conveyed; he is always in a hurry. And his work as a journalist, which demands the ability to respond quickly to change, reinforces the emphasis upon this aspect of his nature.

If one concern of Hissings' art is with the intellectual's relationship to art, another is with his relationship to his public. What actually occurred in this area is a matter of debate. Recently the idea that the 1870 Education Act led to the development of a new sort of demand for literature, which was met by magazines of a wholly new type, has been heavily criticised.<sup>18</sup>

That there were fundamental changes is, of course, undeniable. The story is a familiar one. The new magazines were more frivolous in style and interest, more concerned with personalities than issues, more willing to experiment in order to capture readers. Perhaps the changes are most precisely described by Louis Dudek, when he talks about the new periodical literature and the mutual relationships that had existed before the eighteen-eighties between the serious and the popular.<sup>19</sup> In addition the old journals had come to seem dull and stuffy. T.H.Darlow, a leading editor, claims that the editors were like 'schoolmasters' - didactic, with no willingness to condescend to popular taste.<sup>20</sup> This in 1893 Clement Shorter transformed the 'Sketch' to meet the need for an illustrated paper for 'music-hall goers.'<sup>21</sup> According to his theatre critic he -

...foresaw a new sixpenny public, a hungry crowd which all the draughtmanship in the world could not appease, who had their eyes on the side-shows, and were content to let the older generation look at princes and revel in the solemn events of life. <sup>21</sup>

That demand was also met by the 'Strand Magazine'.<sup>22</sup>

18. See, for example, Richard Altick, The English Common Reader, Chicago (1957), pp.171-172; Harold Perkins, "The Origins of the Popular Press", History Today V11 (1957), 425-435; Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (1961), p.116.
19. Louis Dudek, Literature and the Press, Toronto (1960), p.116.
20. T.H.Darlow, William Robertson Nicoll: Life and Letters (1925) p.57.
21. Clement Shorter, C.K.S: An Autobiography, Edinburgh (1927) p.8.
22. According to Malcolm Elwin, Old Gods Falling (1939), p.226 Newnes aimed "The Strand" at the entire middle-class rather than the 'massed bands of the lower orders'.

established in 1890 and the altered 'Pall Mall Gazette'.

In New Grub Street the changes that were occurring, the passing of domination to the new journalism can be felt, as Gross has indicated, in the rivalry between the slow, pedantic, uninspiring Yule and the up and coming Fadge.<sup>23</sup> That the old style of journalism should be typified by such an obviously inadequate figure suggests that Gissing's aim is not to deplore the new by comparison with some ideal past.

Attitudes to the new public varied. Obviously there were some, like Gissing who hated its dominance and its threat to quality; the response is, part of a long tradition which includes Wordsworth, J.S. Mill and Mathew Arnold. A crucial voice in this context is that of Northcliffe, who disclaimed any criticism that he was condescending to his audience. Angell comments:

It is noteworthy that one of the characteristics most commonly observed by those who came into contact with Lord Northcliffe was his dislike of an argument, of the discussion of an abstract idea. Quick, alert, with a wide knowledge of curious facts, extremely sensitive to what people were feeling, he had not the patience to follow even the simplest discussion of an issue like Free-trade and Protectionism, Femininism, a currency problem...He had no sense of talking down to the public but assumed, for the most part rightly, that what would interest him would interest them.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to this attitude, there was the attempt at justification. This is the way George Newnes replied to criticism of Tit-Bits:

You may call it cheap journalism but I will tell you this. An enormous class of superficial readers, who crave for light reading, would read the so-called sporting-papers if there were no 'Tit-Bits' to entertain them. At least its contents are wholesome and many of those readers may be led on to take an interest in higher forms of

23. John Gross, The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters (1960), pp.24-25.

24. Norman Angell, After All (1951), pp. 126-127.

literature.<sup>25</sup>

A similar argument is employed by Whelpdale when talking to Dora. And in an article in the Nineteenth Century the author writes:

It may be objected that the reading of scraps printed in these papers tends to develop a habit of loose-reading. The answer is that, whatever habit it engenders if the working-classes did not read these papers they would read hardly anything save the novel or the weekly newspaper; and, even though gained in a disjointed fashion it is surely better for them to acquire pieces of historical information thus wise than never conquer them at all. 26

A further point of view is shaped by disillusionment, by a feeling that the results of Forster's Act hadn't been as anticipated.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand there was a refusal to despair, a refusal which altered in form as time progressed. In 1883, before the new mass culture had really got underway, an article on the audience for penny serial literature, ended on this hopeful note:

On the one hand the penny serial reading public have become and are still becoming more cultured; on the other hand there is a constantly increasing tendency for the better classes of light reading to be brought within the reach of the most modest expenditure. 28

At the turn of the century Andrew Lang makes this defence of the reading public:

We, whose business it is to read and write, have all the day, the fresh morning hours for what is our delight as well as our studies; and really we have no more grounds for despising people otherwise engaged because they do not read than Sir William Richmond has for despising me because I do not occupy my spare hours in drawing in water colours. 29

25. See Reginald Pound, The Strand Magazine 1891-1950 (1966), pp. 24-25.

26. Edward G. Salmon, "What the Working Classes Read", Nineteenth Century, XX (1886), 113.

27. See The English Common Reader, p. 364; Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind, pp. 257-258; John Hepburn Millar, "Penny Fiction", Blackwoods, CLXIV (1898), 202. (Note 24, p. 363 below).

28. Thomas Wright, "Concerning the Unknown Public", Nineteenth Century, VX111 (1883), 295.

29. Andrew Lang and "X", a Working Man, "The Reading Public", The Cornhill Magazine, XI (1901), 795.



The change is from a fairly simple hopefulness to a democratic tolerance which accepts people are entitled to their own tastes and abdicates judgements.

In large part, New Grub Street's fineness comes from its sensitivity to the whole span of attitudes and responses to the new public, which existed. Despair is present as well as a tolerant, if cynical acceptance of the situation. Although Gissing's sympathies are plainly with the sensitive artist, he is very alive to Whelpdale's qualities, appreciating the cleverness of his ideas and the quickness of his mind. He laughs with his character, and at the gullibility and stupidity of the people he intends to exploit. For the opportunist, the novelist always had considerable admiration; he is attracted to the heroes of Born in Exile and Our Friend the Charlatan.

Neither is there a simplistic attitude to Milvain. His high degree of self-consciousness, his cultivation of a style of disarming frankness, his charm and intelligence are all given their due. Although he is always talking about other people in exploitive terms, he is not without integrity. Thus there is no question of him neglecting his sisters. His desire for success is based not so much on instinctive greed, although he has an intense desire for the possession of luxuries, as on a fear of failure, a knowledge that the alternative is poverty and all its consequences. In an early conversation with Marion, he says:-

'Poverty is the root of all social ills; its existence accounts for the ills that arise from wealth. The poor man is a man labouring in fetters. I declare there is no word in our language which sounds so hideous to me as 'Poverty'.' (i,3)

What this implies, is suggested symbolically when he approaches his mother's house. Strolling in the garden he stands to observe -

...a poor worn-out beast, all skin and bone, which had presumably been sent there in the hope that a little more labour might be extracted from it if it were suffered to repose for a few weeks. (i,3)

The image is a powerful one and suggests the extent to which Milvain recognises what the absence of money signifies. His acceptance of the world's reality makes him a fairly sympathetic figure to Gissing, for it is precisely this acceptance that he has achieved.

The distinction between the novelist and his character resides in the fact, that for Milvain this acceptance is merely a starting point. Mainly he is characterised by his role of manipulator - of his sisters, of Marian, of his own talents. Coming from a lower-middle class Provincial background, attempting to make his career in the metropolis, he has cultivated a style of energetic brashness. Although he talks about the mass in contemptuous terms, essentially like Northcliffe he is one of them.<sup>30</sup> There is no sense conveyed of his superior intellectual tastes; in conversation with Biffen and Reardon he makes no attempt to touch upon their serious interests. His voice is captured superbly by Gissing - the pushiness, the tone of self-confidence, the rapid incisiveness, the enjoyment he derives from the sound of his own speech, and the knowingness.

At certain moments a more sinister and inhuman note is touched upon:

He was a young man of five-and-twenty, well built, though a trifle meagre, and pale of complexion. He had hair that was very nearly black, and a clean-shaven face, best described, perhaps, as of bureaucratic type. (i,1)

That word 'bureacratic' points to the way that Milvain, in

30. See After All, pp.128-129 and Curt von Stutterheim, The Press in England (1934), p.80.

spite of all his assertiveness, can be seen to lack individuality. When he is justifying himself to Marian he attempts to split off an inner self from his outward behaviour:

I am rather despicable, you know; its part of my business to be so. But a friend needn't regard that. There is the man apart from his necessities. (ii,14)

And there is the almost compulsive way he immediately treats Maud's question about the literary value of a day's work in mercenary terms; the unthinking naturalness of his reply indicates the extent to which that kind of response has become automatic. It is however his desertion of Marian, a desertion he seems to drift into, that finally reveals the failure of his humanity. Milvain, like Reardon seems to have no will; he is a victim of his drive to success, and capitalist society's values have completely hollowed out his identity. The depth to which his individuality has been eroded by the social world around him is suggested by the fact that his speech sometimes lapses into the gossipy, inconsequential journalese of public discourse:

"Well, she married this fellow Jedwood, and there was a great row about something or other between him and her publishers. Mrs. Boston Wright told me all about it. An astonishing woman that; a cyclopedia of the days' small talk. I'm quite a favourite with her; she's promised to help the girl all she can. Well, but I was talking about Jedwood!" (i,12)

And this corruption of language is part of a corruption of feeling. When he and Marian are courting he has no means of expressing himself, no private sources of communication available.

Milvain, then, is far from a simple creation. His ability to succeed, to give the public what they want, has significant implications for his own self. He is not a simple cynic, able

from a distant position to exploit the low level of mass taste; he both manipulates and is manipulated. For the intellectual, then to attempt to relate to the new, democratic and educated populace is to encounter certain fundamental problems. The selling out may not be merely a figure of speech and the abandonment of the role of upholder of traditional cultural values, may leave him completely at the mercy of the vacuum of values that surround him. New Grub Street is also concerned with what, most accurately perhaps, can be termed the intellectual's relationship to reality. His growing sense of alienation from society, the growing sense of his peripheral position, the increasing professionalisation of his role, obviously created very fundamental psychological and emotional difficulties. More and more he is compelled, in his state of estrangement, to look inwards and examine himself and his position. Some of the possible implications are suggested by Trilling:

Sometimes as you meditate upon yourself in your individuality, insisting upon that individuality for the moment or for an extended time, your fellow beings do not seem very real to you. They do not exist sufficiently. 31

In a very interesting passage in My Apprenticeship, Beatrice Webb brilliantly describes a form of the experience:

There is so much that is terrible and awful in mental organisation, lit up as it is by one's own self-consciousness and surrounded by the dark background of annihilation. Constantly, as I walk in one of the crowded streets of London, and watch the faces of the men and women who push past me, lined, furrowed, and sometimes contorted by work, struggle and passion, and think that all this desire and pain, this manifold feeling and thought is but a condition of force and matter phantomlike forms built up to be destroyed, a hopelessness overtakes me, paralysing all power of wishing and doing. Then I sink into inertia, relieved only by a languid curiosity as to the variations in structure and function of those individuals who will let me observe them and

31. Quoted by Malcolm Bradbury, "The Idea of a Literary Elite", Critical Quarterly, 11 (1960), p.237.

inquire of them. Cold-blooded inquiry takes the place of heartfelt sympathy. But this one should shake off sternly. 32

A nightmarish quality distinguishes this passage, a sense of extreme disassociation, as the mind seems to disintegrate the world into its component parts and remove from it all meaning. She is observing in a crowded street, and it is the pressure of multiple anonymity that is present which triggers off her stream of thought. The feeling is a particularly modern one; the next step is perhaps Satre's Nausea. In New Grub Street a comparable sense is communicated. Reardon is travelling by train to visit his wife and ill child. He is watching his fellow-passengers:

...the sight of their foolish faces, the sound of their laughs, the talk they interchanged, exasperated him to the last point of endurance, but for all that he could not draw his attention from them. He seemed condemned by some spiritual tormentor to take an interest in their endless games, and to observe their vicissitudes until he knew every line with abhorrent intimacy. One of the men had a moustache of unusual form; the ends curved upwards with peculiar suddenness, and Reardon was constrained to speculate as to the mode of training by which this singularity had been produced. He could have shed tears of nervous distraction in his inability to turn his thoughts upon other things. (111,32)

The outside world, here, becomes a spectacle to be watched in detachment; the emphasis upon the isolated detail of the moustache paradoxically reduces the human reality of the people's lives he is watching. Reardon undergoes this experience after having lived alone, in unhappiness, creative sterility and relative poverty for a considerable time. He lacks the protective composure which dulls the impact of the actual on the sensitive individual. With only his constantly active mind to occupy him, the alienation he undergoes is partly the result of what has happened to him and partly a way of reducing

32. Beatrice Webb, My Apprenticeship (1926), p.120.

its effect. Although, on one level he seems to have recognised reality, to have seen where he has gone wrong in his marriage and in his attitude to life, to the end he remains within the cocoon of illusion, believing that his wife has at last returned his love, not understanding that her new kindness is made up of a mixture of sorrow and pity.

This experience of illusion is also the central element in the presentation of Alfred Yule. From the start he is shown to be a man obsessed by the petty rivalries of the literary world, jumping upon Milvain's information about two contradictory reviews with an extravagant glee. Unable to communicate in any natural way with other people, suffering from an intense self-pitying bitterness through which he regards the world, driven still by an ambition that has little relation to the actualities of life, he has small genuine contact with reality. Only his literary work is significant to him; others are largely objects for his contemptuous petty tyranny. He is a forerunner of the type that was becoming increasingly important at this time - the specialist,<sup>33</sup> the man who is so involved in one particular pursuit that he loses contact with the rest of human life and whose personality, in the words of Goldmann 'is thus deformed and narrowed to an extreme degree'.<sup>34</sup> It is in this light that Yule's blindness has symbolic meaning, for it represents, in concrete terms, the extent to which he has lost his ability to understand the world. However, it is at the moment of learning about his illness, talking to the poor doctor, that he seems most humane, most deserving of compassion

33. See The Social Context of Modern English Literature, p.41.

34. Lucian Goldmann, "Criticism and Dogmatism in Literature", in David Cooper, ed., The Dialectics of Liberation (1968) pp.131-132.

most able to relate to another person. Gissing is too fine a novelist to press the point but there are perhaps signs of a new humility and responsiveness; when he leaves Marian after telling her about the loss of her inheritance, Gissing writes: "He was dismissed and went quietly away." (111,29) His blindness, as is the case with Lear, can lead him to see better.

Related to Yule's predicament is that of Marian's, for the keynote of her character is frustration, an inability to be fully alive to experience. She has been made the slave of her father: "She was not a woman, but a mere machine for reading and writing." (1,8) and then again:

She did her best, during the hours spent here, to convert herself into the literary machine which it was her hope would some day be invented...(111,34)

But it is also the type of work she does that is important. It is intellectual, involving the reading about other people's lives, whilst hers seems to be denied joy. The image of the British Museum Reading Room, so often introduced in the novel, suggests the life-denying forces at work within her. It is the 'valley of the shadow of the books' (1,2) where culture has become merely a matter of toil, a matter of extracting the living quality of literature and turning it into a dead object for consumption. Gissing is not so much concerned with criticising a dominant mass-market - Marian's efforts are intended for a fairly cultivated minority - but registering the sense in which the kind of intellectual work she is engaged in, necessarily partakes of the parasitic, necessarily is dry and futile. The symbolic evocation of the Reading Room is skilfully accomplished; obviously a set-piece in one way but nevertheless perfectly integrated into the context of the novel, through the meaning it embodies.

Oh, to go forth and labour with one's hands, to do any

poorest, commonest work of which the world had truly need! It was ignoble to sit here and support the paltry pretence of intellectual dignity...The fog grew thicker, she looked up at the windows beneath the dome and saw that they were a dusky yellow. Then her eye discerned an official walking along the upper gallery, and in pursuance of her grotesque humour, her mocking misery, 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 the radiating lines of desks, what were they but hapless flies caught in a huge web, its nucleus the great circle of the Catalogue? Darker, darker. From the towering wall of volumes seemed to emanate visible motes, intensifying the obscurity; in a moment the book-lined circumference of the room would be but a featureless prison-limit. (i,8)

People are seen here caught in fixed postures, solitary, linked to others mainly by their work. It is a vision of Kafkaesque quality, achieving its effect through the way it remains connected with a normal reality whilst transforming that reality into something nightmarish.

From the sort of existence implied here, Milvain offers the possibility of rescue. The eagerness with which Marian seizes the chance of happiness, the way she responds with her whole person, is well rendered and makes her much more than an object of pity. She has strength of will and independence of mind, falling in love with a man who has the energy, it seems, to master rather than be prisoner of the books they both wander among. His desertion thus represents not only the loss of love but also the loss of the opportunity to escape from the literary prison she inhabits. After their final meeting Marian goes immediately to the Reading Room; again she becomes a spider in its web.

The Museum also plays a significant part in Biffen's life. It provides him with the poison he will commit suicide with. Like Marian, in spite of his cheerfulness, he is denied full



access to the reality of experience. In his fiction he cultivates an impersonal detachment from actuality; in his life, in spite of his aspiration to self-sufficiency, he is unable to adopt the same remoteness of stance. He suffers from loneliness and his love for Amy Reardon:

He could not bear to walk the streets where the faces of beautiful women would encounter him...Only he, who belonged to no class, who was rejected alike by his fellows in privation and by his equals in intellect, must die without having known the touch of a loving woman's hand. (111,35)

There is self-indulgence in the pathetic here, but the note of real pain is present too, and such passages cannot be dismissed lightly. It is after his meeting with Whelpdale, who tells him of his approaching marriage with Dora, that he decides to kill himself. Poverty is a contributory cause, but the main reason that emerges, is just the fact of isolation. Consequently, when Jasper and Amy are discussing the incident, their assumption that it was lack of money which prompted it, reflects on their materialism and narrowness of attitude rather than on the central motivation of Biffen's suicide; he remains misunderstood.

One area of concern of New Grub Street is then the intellectual's relation to actual experience. A deep involvement in books can lead to a deep alienation from life, and literature itself can become a substitute for reality. Gissing suggests this briefly, when he relates the biography of Mrs. Boston Wright, through Milvain:

"She's had an extraordinary life. Was born in Mauritius - no, Ceylon - I forget; some such place. Married a sailor at fifteen. Was shipwrecked somewhere, and only restored to life after terrific efforts; her story leaves it all rather vague. Then she turns up as a newspaper correspondent at the Cape. Gave up that, and took to some kind of farming. I forget where. Married again (first

husband lost in aforementioned shipwreck), this time a Baptist minister and began to devote herself to soup-kitchens in Liverpool. Husband burned to death somewhere. She's next discovered in the thick of literary society in London. A wonderful woman I assure you. Must be nearly fifty, but she looks twenty-five.\* (1,12)

This seems a case of the actual imitating art or cheap fiction and indicates how fiction can penetrate life, moulding it to its shape. The frustrated lives of Marian and Biffen occur in a setting that has made the secondary, the vicarious experience literature offers, the most significant.

New Grub Street renders a society in which real feelings and relationships have become of extreme difficulty. Communications on the institutional level have expanded but on the personal level they have diminished. Intellectuals, concerned with truth and verbalising ideas, in this situation are compelled to confront immense problems. These problems are magnified by the fact that these intellectuals Gissing writes about come mainly from the lower middle-class. Without the benefits and assurances of a University education, without much money, with only their intelligence and talent to support them, they enter a world in which not to succeed is to fail, for in a market becoming increasingly mass you either appeal or suffer neglect. At the centre of the novel is that crucial question - whether or not to compromise. Not to do so is to be condemned to a private universe, defined by its isolation, poverty and pain; to do so is to sacrifice an inner self to the public domain. It is the acceptance of the full implications of this necessary division that makes New Grub Street a far more honest novel than anything Gissing had achieved before. In much of his previous work and indeed

afterwards also, there had often been a basic evasion, a way of enabling the protagonist to retain his integrity whilst fulfilling his social destiny. In New Grub Street there can be no such attempt at wholeness; the division between private and public is accepted and incorporated into the fiction.

As a result the novel is one of the first to capture the modern myth of the artist, the comprehension of him as an essentially private, inward-looking, suffering being. A comparison of the relatively outward going and socially adjusted heroes of David Copperfield or Pendennis reveals the new significances he is beginning to take on. For Freud, adopting according to Trilling, one of the popular beliefs of his age,<sup>35</sup> he is a neurotic figure; mental imbalance becomes in the myth a protest against the respectable sanity of modern society, which emphasises conformity at the expense of individuality. Susan Sontag in 'The Artist as Exemplary Sufferer' also deals with the subject, claiming that one of the distinguishing features of the modern world is a preoccupation with the self, which is necessarily the suffering self; and thus we look to the writer as the person best able to express this suffering. Concentrating on the journal of Cesare Pavese, she writes:

He does not describe himself but addresses himself. He is the ironic, exhortatory, reproachful spectator of himself. The intimate consequence of such a bracketed view of the self would seem to have been, inevitably suicide. <sup>36</sup>

This observation could also with justice be made of Reardon, who clearly in the first part of the novel, seems to be a

35. Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (1951), p.162.

36. Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation, New York (1967), p.4.

spectator of his own misery. It is this which accounts for the success of the characterisation and prevents it from being merely the projection of a self-pitying ego. Thus, in writing New Grub Street, Gissing was drawing upon a sense of the artist that was later to be more fully articulated by Joyce and Mann, among others.

His novel places the myth very firmly in a social context, and therefore retains a sceptical, common-sensical reasonableness to it. If Reardon is the 'Exemplary Sufferer' he is also an unpractical, slightly pathetic weakling. Something of Trollope's comprehension of the writer's situation is present:

The career, when success has been achieved, is certainly very pleasant; but the agonies which are endured in the search for success are often terrible. And the author's poverty is, I think harder to be borne than any other poverty. The man, whether rightly or wrongly feels the world is using him with extreme injustice. The more absolutely he fails, the higher, it is probable, he will reckon his own merits; and the keener will be the sense of injury in that he whose work is of so high a nature cannot get bread, while they whose tasks are mean are lapped in luxury. 37

Gissing's realism is too strong for the myth to suffer inflation.

New Grub Street is a very fine work. The novelist's attitudes to the literary world, based on his own experience and observation, are embodied in a fiction able to incorporate the flux and fluidity of reality. This is reflected in the book's narrative tone; it has an impersonality and clear-sightedness that enables the reader to invest his confidence in its description and comments and that gives significance to selected detail.

In New Grub Street he is no longer using his art to discover or project himself, it is no longer the expression of his unresolved difficulties as thinker, artist and individual.

37. Anthony Trollope, Autobiography (1883), ii, 23.

Rather a cool acceptance of his condition allows him to analyse and explore the problem of being an intellectual in a mass type of society and assess the emotional and psychological implications for the self. Both the range and depth of comprehension that the novel demonstrates make it a crucial text in a consideration of the altering place and significance of culture in the society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

#### Gissing and the Intellectual

In Jeremy Seabrook's The Underprivileged there occurs the following character sketch:

Dick was a reserved and gentle man, earnest and anxious as he haunted reading rooms and public libraries ('always non-fiction' whispered the family to each other in awe, as though this were proof of unparalleled erudition) in search of the education that had been denied to him. He assimilated a vast but fragmented and unrelated collection of knowledge, and he remained bewildered that his sense of inferiority in the presence of educated or cultivated people did not diminish at all. 1

The portrait is immediately recognizable as a potential Gissing character. Dick's fictional counterpart would have to read great literature rather than non-fiction if he was to gain the novelist's full sympathies, but the experience he embodies - the nervous anxiety, the absence of substantial self-hood, suggested by the word 'haunted', the lack of certainty in relation to those who can take education for granted, and the isolation, places him centrally in Gissing's world. Other writers have dealt with the type. Perhaps Forster in his treatment of Leonard Bast comes close to realising the crucial feelings and meanings involved.

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1. Jeremy Seabrook, The Underprivileged, 3rd edition (1973), p.31.

However, although Dick and Bast share a similar insecurity and 'bewilderment', the novelist's interest in the latter character is shaped by the didactic demands of Howards End as a whole. Both for the Schlegels and for Forster he is significant primarily for the problem he poses. What distinguishes Gissing's imaginative grasp of the subject is the way he renders the felt-identity of the lower-class intellectual, focuses upon the internal meaning of his social situation. Gilbert Grail in Thyrza in spite of the idealisation present in his characterisation, claims an absolute kind of interest and involvement from the reader because the novelist is concerned with presenting the quality of experience he embodies for its own sake, as it were.

Gissing's repeated return to this kind of figure comes in part from the fact that he can there find a reservoir of psychological and emotional implication able to attract and feed his imagination. In the past, novelists had dealt with the intellectual of the lower-ranks. Commonly he or she is a source of virtue, offering a critical contrast to established society. Fanny Price, Silas Marner, Tom Pinch - all in their different ways enable a radical exposure of the world of money and status to be made. The characteristic feature of Gissing's figures is that their intellectual life has become formalised into knowledge and cultural awareness: they are not simply intelligent but educated. Therefore, they exist not as isolated positives in an essentially negative world, but as members of a form of potential community, bound together by their shared experience of learning. Whereas the earlier heroes of Fielding, Austen, George Eliot and Dickens were protected by their virtue,

these intellectuals stand exposed in their fictional societies and are felt most representatively in their trapped loneliness. This comprehension of the self in direct and immediate connection to the world makes for a certain similarity of impression between Gissing's fiction and that of writers such as Conrad and Dostoyevsky. There, a way of seeing individuals has become a vision, whereas in his work it is still an emphasis, yet one which gives it a distinctly modernist note. The painfully introspective mind of Kingcoate in Isabel Clarendon, carefully dramatised by Gissing, is a function of his role as a lower-class intellectual.

The impulse to deal with the intellectual arises, not only from the novelist's attraction to certain areas of experience, but can also be seen as a strategy for treating the contemporary social reality his fiction uses as material for art. Hillis Miller has distinguished between the early and late use of the omniscient author convention in Dickens, claiming that the narrator of Our Mutual Friend or Little Dorrit is a 'mirroring consciousness' rather than an 'uncritical spokesman for the values of community'.<sup>2</sup> This suggests the particular kind of detachment Dickens achieved at the close of his career. The stance is that of the intellectual, cut off from all groups, searching, almost in desperation, for some positive form of identification. Characters such as Arthur Clenham, Eugene Wrayburn and Rokesmith, in their self-conscious separation are new to the fiction, and image the novelist's own difficult position. In George Eliot as well, in the figure of Daniel Deronda poised between two worlds, and in Trollope, in

2. Joseph Hillis-Miller, The Form of Victorian Fiction, Indiana, (1968), p.78.



the late The Way We Live Now the desire and need for a new form of relationship between writer and subject can be felt. Given this tendency to concentrate upon the rootless protagonist Gissing's emphasis upon the intellectual is comprehensible. It offers a way of sensing and examining the complex tensions and conflicts of his society, a way of remaining within the fictional world of his creation without either succumbing to its values or to those of a group within it. Through the device a stance of poise could be maintained towards the whole society. Wells, Shaw and Lawrence, slightly later, in their efforts to deal with a wide range of contemporary social experience, similarly placed the figure of the intellectual at the centre of their evaluations. Although then, it is possible to understand the characteristic Gissing individual mainly in terms of weakness, indecisiveness, passivity and frustrated solitude - that stress, necessary as it is, shouldn't block out the fact that his interest in the sensitive thinking man can be given a more dynamic significance.<sup>3</sup>

Gissing's distinction can be defined by regarding him as the novelist of the intellectual. Other writers of the period deal with the figure but none at such length and none with his concentrated passion. The characters of his fiction

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3. Thus, such characters as Waymark, Egremont, Reardon and Rolfe can be seen to embody the contradiction between 'universality' and the particular realities of society, that Jean Paul Sartre in Politics and Literature, 2nd ed, (1973), p.14 sees as crucial to the figure of the intellectual in bourgeois society.

are not intellectuals secondarily and aspiring seekers after education or neglected artistic geniuses primarily. They are individuals whose distinct nature is shaped by the way their minds set them apart, in tense separation from their environments. Gissing is concerned with the experience that this implies - the frustration that cannot be released in ambition, the alienation that can't be a source of creative growth, the internal divisions that penetrate the inner self going deeper than attitude, the sterility and lack of real values which lie as a possibility at the heart of an engagement with the vacarious experience books and art offers. Thus, for example, through The Emancipated there runs a constant desperate search for some substantial worth and meaning that can be wrested from the hypocrisies, affectations and uncertainties of the characters who inhabit its semi-Bohemian world. Perhaps the figure of Madeline Denyers, becoming paralysed and bed-ridden, symbolically summarises the novelist's deep-set fears about the intellectual life. Her physical state mirrors her and her contemporaries' internal state - able only to read, look and talk, but not to act meaningfully.

This concern with the nature and significance of action links Gissing to Forster. Both writers reacted against a spectatorial passivity but both, in the difficulties they had in imagining ways out of this state, couldn't entirely escape its attractions. Figures such as Tibby in Howards End and Musslewhite in The Emancipated, minor as they are, express in their aimlessness and lack of coherent energy, a form of possible release for their respective creators from the dilemmas they pose, not to those characters who experience these

dilemmas fully that their sympathies are extended. Philip and Caroline in Where Angels Fear to Tread and Mallard and Miriam in Gissing's novel, live out, in slow motion, as it were, the passion and revolt which prompt the other figures into precipitate and disastrous activity. Italy in both writers offers the possibility of liberation but it is available only to those capable of responding maturely. It can help to free Miriam and Philip from their sterile conventionality, but can also help to provide a prison for Cecily and Lilia. Gissing and Forster share then a nervous cautiousness in their attitude to the relationship of the intellectual to action. Their imaginations seem more at home with the idea of non-commitment, for they are too alive to the difficulties of going beyond that for them to embrace the alternatives with any great enthusiasm.

The Emancipated also displays a sensitivity to the possibly damaging implications for the personality of the intellectual's life. A character like Cecil in A Room with A View reveals a significant division between a superficial liberalism of outlook and a rigid internal conformity of mind, but the contradiction in him is in no way as radical as that to be found in Reuben Elgar. Here, an absolute claim to freedom of thought and feeling, collapses under the pressure of actuality into a doctrinaire conventionality on the one hand, and an irresponsible hedonism on the other. Beneath the intellectual poise there is simply an internal anarchy, corrupting worth. This analysis is taken further in Denzil Quarrier. Here Glazzard, unable to find satisfaction in the artistic life, desiring to prove himself in the world of action, is forced

into crime in order to assert his identity. Both he and Mrs. Wade through corruption, attempt to confront the world of ennui and futility they inhabit, seek to give meaning to their lives. Whereas earlier, Gissing's intellectuals could discover significance in commitment to another class or to art, they now stand exposed in their alienation. Political and aesthetic interests are pursued, but for ulterior ends - to pass the time, affirm social status or aid ambition. The new heroes - Tarrant, Langley, Rolfe are without a vocation or absolute belief in the value of any one thing. Nor are they gentlemen content in idleness and the life of leisure. They are pulled by the world, but in contradictory directions.

Certain of his contemporaries share a degree of interest in the intellectual. A main anxiety at the root of Mark Rutherford's work has to do with those emancipated from simple moral standards, with Catherine Furze attracted by a cultured but married clergyman, or Miriam learning to accept the worth of her rather ordinary husband. And in Robert Elsmere, in the character of Langham, a 'thoroughgoing' sceptic, Mrs. Ward expresses her worry that the life of the mind by itself, unsupported by any external ethical norms, can destroy the self. Both Rutherford and Mrs. Ward are, however, less satisfactory in their treatment of the subject because they fail to face up to the problem of living as an intellectual, are too concerned with pointing to the dangers and need for alternative values beyond the individual. Gissing often expressed his attractions for the simple unselfconscious existence. In The Whirlpool Rolfe's belief that he is wrong to educate his child into sensitivity and in Will Warburton, Will's acceptance of the life of a grocer indicates this. At his most mature and

complex though, he didn't seek to suggest that his heroes had any real alternative but to live out the difficulties of their situation.

### Gissing and Culture

They are characterised in their relation both to art and to class. The novelist's sense of these is complex and not easily separated. From the unresolved tensions they produced he created his fiction. Thus to take him at his own estimation in the realm of aesthetics is to misunderstand. He writes in July 1883:

My attitude is henceforth is that of the artist pure and simple. The world for me is a collection of phenomena, which are to be studied and reproduced artistically. In the midst of the most serious complications of life, I find myself suddenly possessed with a great calm, withdrawn as it were from the immediate interests of the moment and able to regard everything as in a picture...<sup>4</sup>

The apparent certainty here is belied by a book like Demos which is far from possessing this ideal of calmness and distance. It is also, perhaps, qualified by the fact that the comment comes in a precise context. Just before and after it Gissing is talking about feeling ill and depressed and the difficulties he is having in writing.<sup>5</sup> To see his artistic views as the expression of a particular mood rather than the expression of a definitely adopted position is to guard against viewing Gissing's claims to aestheticism too simplistically.

He never, although he comes close to it at times, seeks to find in art a protective escape from the pressures of history.

4. The Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, eds. Algernon and Ellen Gissing (1927), p.128.

5. See Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, p.138, for here also his aestheticism is expressed in a context of personal discontent (Note 22, p.363 below)

A novel such as Sleeping Fires in the mid-1890's which offers, through the characterisation of Warboys, a criticism of a pedantic dedication to scholarship and through Langley a criticism of the attempt to use the classics as a way of forgetting the self rather than as a guide to living, indicates Gissing's concern to place culture firmly in the actual and enable it to survive there. The desperate optimism of Demos is thus counterbalanced by the subtle realism of Thyrza, which explores intelligently and tentatively the tensions between class and culture that can exist or by the relativism of New Grub Street which can offer critical insights into both Reardon and Milvain.

A way of approaching Gissing's aesthetic ideas is through a comparison with Ruskin, whom the novelist admired. It is for his emphasis upon Beauty and for his idealism that he valued him most:

His worship of Beauty I look upon as essentially valuable. In that he differentiates himself from Carlyle, whom else he closely follows. It matters little that his immediate schemes are impracticable; to keep before the eyes of men the ideal is the great thing...<sup>6</sup>

Through the novels aesthetic criteria are used for moral purposes. Most crudely this is reflected in the way individuals' appearance indicates their inner-state but also in the constant way characters' tastes in books and surroundings suggest their worth; thus Mutimer, to take the obvious example, is condemned because his book-shelves lack fine literature. The whole concern with fashion and houses, which is very important in In the Year of the Jubilee, further illustrates the writer's concern with the externals of

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6. Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, p.126.

civilization as an indicator of its internal state. There is this passage; for example -

Architectural grace can nowhere be discovered, but the contract-builder of to-day has not yet been permitted to work his will; age and irregularity, even though the edifices be so many illustrations of the ungainly, the insipid, and the frankly hideous, have a pleasanter effect than that of new streets built to one pattern by the mile. (i,3) 7

which also, in its preference for 'irregularity' rather than order, is reminiscent of the Nature of Gothic; or there is the following:

Plaster fell from the ceiling; paper peeled away down the staircase; stuccoed portions of the front began to crack and moulder. Not a door that would close as a door should; not a window that could open in the way expected of it; not a fireplace that discharged its smoke into the room, rather than by the approved channel. Everywhere piercing draughts, which often entered by orifices unexplained and unexplainable. From cellar floor to chimney-pot, no square inch of honest or trustworthy workmanship. So thin were the parti-walls that conversation not only might, but must, be distinctly heard from room to room, and from house to house; the Morgans learnt to subdue their voices, lest all they said should become common property of the neighbourhood. For the privilege of occupying such a residence, "the interior" said the advertisement, 'handsomely decorated', they were racked with an expenditure which away in the sweet-scented country, would have housed them amid garden graces and orchard fruitfulness. (ii,2)

Bad architecture and building, in this way, became almost symbolic of the shoddiness and rottenness of the whole social order. At the slightest pressure things began to disintegrate and surfaces fall away, privacy is impossible, the demands on resources extravagant. The basic similarities of this perception with that found in "Traffic", are fairly clear.

There Ruskin criticises the manufacturers of Bradford for believing they can divorce the Exchange building they want from the context of values in which it will be set. He goes on to say:

7. George Gissing, In the Year of the Jubilee (1894). All references are to this edition.

Taste is not only a part and an index to morality; -it is the only morality. The first, and last, and closest trial question to any living creature is, 'What do you like?' Tell me what you like and I'll tell you what you are. 8

and in Lectures on Art he emphasises the importance of good dress and lodgings.<sup>9</sup> Gissing's acceptance of Ruskin was not uncritical.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless the similarities between the two are marked, for they both had an intimate sense of the relationship of culture to social reality. The novelist was, however, less sure in his understanding, for he lacked the kind of supporting security a university could have provided.

Without Wells's or Lawrence's capacity to embrace a cause, without Forster's or James's identity with a small coterie, Oxford and Cambridge<sup>as</sup> for Hardy, had a considerable hold over his imagination. He wrote:

Surely there ought to be a college for unmarried intellectual men (or even married of small means) where we would live much as students at the University. 11

and in the Commonplace Book he expresses his attraction towards the tranquility Grey experienced at Cambridge.<sup>12</sup>

This desire to inhabit an academic community was never more than a dream for Gissing however. Having no equivalent of Bloomsbury to turn to but sensing the need of the individual for social support, Gissing tended to flounder. In his first

8. John Ruskin, "Traffic", The Crown of Wild Olive (1886), pp.82-83.

9. John Ruskin, Lectures on Art (1870), p.111-113.

10. Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family, p.126.

11. Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, ed., A.C.Young, 1921.

12. George Gissing, Commonplace Book, ed. Jacob Korg, New York (1962), p.39.



novel, for example, a central weakness of the characterisation of Arthur Golding lies in the fact that he is presented both as victim and as hero. He embodies<sup>i</sup> very positive qualities - sensitivity, natural refinement, creative talent - but he lacks the strength to live them out by himself. Without Helen Norman both Golding and Gissing seem to think that his life is worthless. It is only necessary to compare Workers in the Dawn with some other novels of the time concerned with artists, to recognise this. The heroes of such books as Sons and Lovers, Of Human Bondage, and Portrait of the Artist, have a strength and thus representative significance which Arthur lacks. Even Philip in Maugham's book, despite the stress on his sensitive fragility, symbolised by his club-foot, represents the values of the novel's world by himself, in independence. He gives to it a coherence and order, whilst Golding can't tie the numerous strands and perspectives of Gissing's work together. There is a sense in which this could be regarded as fruitful and valuable, giving to the characterisation a complex realism, preventing an easy sympathy or identification, but the point is that the alternate responses of pity and admiration that are demanded exist side by side, rather than as part of an integrated understanding.

Again, in The Unclassed, Gissing's confusion about where precisely to locate the culture he is committed to, reveals itself in the need to raise<sup>f</sup> Ida Starr socially, so that when Waymark chooses her rather than Maud, the values he is intended to embody are allied to an upper-class world. Isabel Clarendon reflects the novelist's uncertainty, through its failure to separate sufficiently the narrator's view of the heroine from Kincoate's. Thus, although she is not meant to be a

representative of culture, this is not felt in the response we make to her. Rather Bernard's illusions are ours, and the power of the novel comes from the way his experience and the reader's are so closely allied. The effort to see Kingcoate as an intellectual hero, is, then, plainly present but the romanticisation of Isabel indicates Gissing's need to identify cultural values with a specific area of society. By Demos this sort of effort was even more significant; Eldon is both a representative of the aristocracy and isn't. In A Life's Morning and Thyrza, however, the awareness that culture has to be seen both within and without the self is plainly articulated, made part of the theme. Both novels dramatise the failure of the intellectual to live out his values independently of the social world. Grail both needs Egremont and is destroyed by him, Emily cannot survive wholly without Wilfred but is compelled to reject him; the comprehension is tragic. By The Nether World this has led to an acceptance of the irrelevance of art for the lower-classes. Richard paints, but for the most part, the book's characters have little contact with it. The disciplined and controlled vision of the work comes from the fact that Gissing is no longer projecting his confusion or his own divided awareness into the fiction.

This tendency to confusion in the writer's attitude to culture and its social context is repeated in his attitude to art and the figure of the artist, composed as it is of a commitment to aestheticism that enables him to use reality for raw material and to a penetrating realism that stresses the need to explore its inner significance.<sup>13</sup> The creative

13. See his comments on painting in Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, p.28 and p.117 (note 23, p.363 below)

character is thus presented ambivalently in the fiction. Whilst he was always concerned to criticise such protagonists as Milvain in New Grub Street and Franks in Will Warburton, who used their talents merely to achieve social success, he was also very aware of the dangers of a position that made its only reference an aesthetic one. Gresham is condemned in Workers on the Dawn for his irresponsibility, and Elgar and Marsh exposed in The Emancipated; in that book Cecily's romantic idea of the artist is viewed as dangerously naïve. However, whereas Reuben is seen as actively destructive, the latter, more secondary character, emerges as slightly pathetic, needing his affected pose because he hasn't much else. This strain of pathos is present in the figure of Vincent in Isabel Charendon, whose total dedication to painting is almost obsessive, or Kite in The Crown of Life, who can't form any lasting relationship with Olga.

Gissing's treatment of the artist figure, thus, embodies his sense that culture has to remain remote from the world to survive, but that this remoteness could easily imply a corrupting and debilitating lack of responsibility and energy. What Korg sees as an internal conflict between the artist and social reformer <sup>14</sup> is in fact a double awareness of two different ideas of art and culture. In this, the novelist comes closest to James's outlook. A work such as The Tragic Muse displays well that writer's anxieties about the possible seductions that face the individual talent. At the centre of the novel is the actress, Miriam, partly affectation, partly genuine, constantly developing, demanding and refusing

14. Jacob Korg, "Division in Purpose in George Gissing", in Pierre Coustillas, ed., Collected Articles on George Gissing (1968), pp.64-79.

relationship, expressing in her subtle and shifting self all the doubts and tensions of James's comprehension of art - at the same time wanting popularity, and thus writing Guy Domville and not wanting it, and thus writing a whole series of works bound to have small appeal. The division has a profound intensity.<sup>15</sup>

In a tale like The Next Time the contradictions in James's perspective find their expression and a difficult resolution. The story powerfully conveys the complex burden of the artist, who is doomed to live outside society, even against his own wishes.

That James and Gissing shared a similar ambivalence should not, however, disguise certain fundamental differences, for the former could absorb unpopularity and separation into his aesthetic, and dramatise his lack of success whereas with Gissing a hard-done by note, a feeling of undeserved neglect is to the surface:

My new novel (The Crown of Life) will not be out till September; it is anti-jingo, and therefore not at all likely to be popular. But I have done without popularity for twenty years and must go on to the end.<sup>16</sup>

and:

The fact of the matter is that some men are born not to make money. I do not touch the 'great' public, and I suppose I never shall. Well, as you know, I don't complain of this; what right have I to complain? But the practical issues grow very serious.<sup>17</sup>

Unpopularity, in this light, becomes an indication of worth.

An uncertain and complicated confusion is, then, central to his idea of the artist and art. E.M.Forster and James, as the subtle and intimate irony of their narrative voices

15. See for James's anxiety about his unpopularity and for his confidence in his own isolation, The Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock (1920), i, 236-237 and 173 (note 24, p. 344 below)
16. Pierre Coustillas, ed. Henry Hick's Reflections on George Gissing (1973), p. 56.
17. Letters of George Gissing to Edward Clodd, ed. Pierre Coustillas (1973), p. 9

suggests, possessed a strong sense of the minority audience they were addressing:

And in fact as the years passed he became more and more the 'Master' of a select literary elite - related to the emergent Bloomsbury but including such powerful independent figures as...Edith Wharton. 18

The writer, in this context, was part of an intellectual élite, concerned with the moral problems of human feeling and conduct, having a task similar to that of the philosopher. They would have liked popularity but their fiction had an alternative basis upon which to rest. Lawrence's idea of the artist was an intensely Romantic one and his writing drew strength from his own sense of his prophetic genius. Wells, on the other hand, looked for sustenance to the mass-public, eager for stimulus. 19 It is with Hardy that Gissing has perhaps the greatest similarities in this area. He admired Hardy's work, although with qualification, finding Jude the Obscure too pessimistic, and saw him as a sincere and fine novelist, whom the majority couldn't appreciate.<sup>20</sup> Yet Hardy had a rural security, whereas Gissing had only his own anxious belief in himself. Caught between aesthetic and didactic impulses, between the acceptance of failure and the desire for success, between an idea of art and culture that places it within the self and an idea that places it within a specific area of society, Gissing enacted in his work the crucial tensions his outlook gave rise to.

The word is 'caught' not trapped, for his is continually, dynamically shaping his response. A tone of condescension

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18. Roger Gard, ed., Henry James: The Critical Heritage (1969), p.14.

19. See David Jago, Tradition and Progress: a study of the Popular Literature of Ideas 1899-1918. Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Leicester (1965).

20. See for Gissing's praise of Hardy, Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, p. 142 and for his dislike of Hardy's pessimistic view of life, p.314.

should thus be avoided. He is not the helpless victim of forces that he never comprehended, interesting because of his limitations. The point is that his ability to embrace the complexity of the issues at stake, was a positive achievement, having its source in a determined ambitiousness, a wholehearted belief in the value of high-culture, and an earnest concern with the significance of his own role and that of the arts in general.

### Gissing and Class

Central to this concern is Gissing's background, for his insecurities~~/~~inevitably meant that he couldn't take the career of writer or writing itself for granted; it had to be painfully worked out within him. Gillian Tindall has played down his lower middle-class origins, claiming that his exile had deeper sources.<sup>21</sup> What is important is not the objective reality of that background but his distinctively personal experience of it. Encouraged to go beyond it through education, he finds himself early in life forced behind it; wanting social acceptance by his superiors he is worried and uncertain in face of it. Whereas Lawrence's identity as writer was formed in the working-class community of his youth and Wells's through the process of advancement he underwent, Gissing's identity as author is shaped in the early conflicts and tensions he experienced outside both community and mobility. At twenty-one he is not simply the young man from the provinces, eager to make his way in the capital, but a young man who has

21. Gillian Tindall, The Born Exile (1974), pp.18-19.

already experienced failure and writes with a consciousness of what it signifies. If Bennett, Wells and Lawrence in their early work are the articulators of a lower-class challenge and confidence, Gissing speaks for its defeat. In this he is closest to Joyce, whose early life as Ellman's biography demonstrates, was shaped by a sense of crisis averted from disaster. And the writer's attitude to his background bears resemblance to Gissing's:

He did not abjure his family, being fond of them, but he did not intend to sacrifice himself either by conforming to their standards or by earning money for their support. 22

In both there is a similar need for exile, a similar disillusionment with leftwing politics, a similar exaltation of art and deep interest in life. The pre-occupation with failure and frustration present in The Dubliners, echoes a fundamental note of Gissing's imagination.

Not only is Gissing's identity as author shaped by his early experiences but also shaped is his imaginative response to the working-class, for his expulsion from college and his marriage to Nell compel that his response to its world was determined within the context of an already formed relationship. Throughout the works of the 1880's there is a constant movement between exposure to social reality and the need for drawing back into positions that can limit and control that exposure, between the openness of Thyrza and the rigidity of Demos.

That the stance is that of the involved writer, and the resemblance is to Lawrence in this respect, emerges quite clearly in the characterisation of such figures as Mrs. Mutimer, Lydia or John Hewett - individuals who are presented in a domestic context and who gain their significant reality

22. Richard Ellmann, James Joyce, New York (1959), p.67.

from the way they embody and defend qualities that are rooted, not simply in the working-classes but in working-class family life - the stubbornness, the scepticism, the reticence, resilience and bitterness. This is Hewett in The Nether World:

"No, I haven't been to Corder - I beg his pardon; Mister Corder - James Corder Esquire. But where do you think I went this morning? Mrs. Peckover brought up a paper and showed me an advertisement. Gorbutt in Goswell Road wanted a man to clean windows an' sweep up, an' so on; -offered fifteen bob a week. Weel, I went. Didn't I mother? Didn't I go after that job? I got there at half-past eight; an' what do you think I found? If there was one man standing at Gorbutt's door, there was five-hundred! Don't you believe me? You go an' ask them that lives about there. If there was one there was five-hundred..."<sup>23</sup>

The rhythms of that are finely dramatic, registering creatively the mixture of self-dramatisation, self-justification and aggression in the character. The voice finds its nearest modern equivalent in Jimmy Porter or Archie Rice in Osborne's plays; the rhetorical questioning, the colloquial flexibility, the sense of theatre are similar. Even where the proletarian characters are presented with manifest hostility, as is the case with Alice and 'Arry, that hostility emerges from a deeply concerned and involved perspective - a perspective that perhaps can best be defined by reference to the statement by F.R.Leavis of his own position:

But as for the specifically working-class people who can be regarded as characteristic, it's not anything in the nature of moral indignation one feels towards them, but shame, concern and apprehension at the way our civilization has let them down - left them to enjoy a high standard of living in a vacuum of disinheritance.<sup>24</sup>

A similar anxiety is at the root of Gissing's attitude to the working-class. With The Nether World, however, he abandoned the subject, for the death of Nell enabled him to escape its hold on his imagination. He could now see it outside himself

23. George Gissing, The Nether World (1889).

24. F.R.Leavis, Nor Shall My Sword (1972), p.79



and thus after he had embodied his vision he was compelled no longer to return to it. The intellectual detachment he had so often expressed could become an emotional one.

### Gissing's Realism

In focusing upon the place of the intellectual, art and the working-class in Gissing's fiction the crucial elements of his world have been sketched in. It is a world that is embodied through a sensitive and wide-ranging realism. Orwell praised this aspect of his predecessor's work:

Gissing was not a writer of picaresque tales, or burlesques or comedies, or political tracts: he was interested in individual human beings, and the fact that he can deal sympathetically with several different sets of motives, and makes a credible story out of the collision between them, makes him exceptional among English writers. 25

That emphasis is the right one, for the openness to experience his work contains, in spite of his fairly rigid attitudes, has to do with the sense it gives of rejecting certain imaginative modes that structure the flux of actuality. Thus the pastoral convention appears in the novels but except in Demos, where it is an essential component of a whole argument, it has small significance. There can be no doubting Gissing's love of the countryside, expressed most clearly in The Private Papers of Henry Rycroft, but the rural in the major work has not sufficient sustaining authority or imaginative force to offer an alternative to the negatives associated with the city. In In the Year of the Jubilee it fosters and enables

25. George Orwell, "George Gissing", The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 2nd. edition (1970), p.491.

the expression of Nancy's and Tarrant's sensuality. In Isabel Clarendon it encourages illusion, in Workers in the Dawn it represents a cosy middle-class domesticity from which Golding must escape, and in The Nether World it offers a brief release from the pressure of urban experience. Compared with Forster's or Hardy's pastoralism, Gissing's offers no permanent source of alternative values. In their fiction there is an inextricable imaginative connection between their comprehension of the power-classes and their awareness of nature. Giles Winterbourne or Gabriel Oak, Gino or Stephen, in their closeness to the natural world embody forces and meanings that can provide substantial resistance to middle class urban assumptions and ways of living. On the other hand Gissing's proletarian figures are members of the city absolutely. When associations with the natural are made they are essentially negative ones. Thus Clem in The Nether World embodies the ethos of the jungle in London's Clerkenwell.

Gissing's imagination also rejects the mode of romance. In spite of the wide differences of James's and Wells's aesthetic ideas, their work does share, in certain respects, a romantic emphasis. This is the result of the sense of self that emerges from the fiction. Kipps and Isabel Archer are subject to immense external pressures that shape their lives but they retain throughout the potential for significant choice; they experiment and take risks and finally take on themselves the responsibility of deciding their own future.

A comparison of The Princess Casamassima and Workers in the Dawn, which share fairly clear thematic concerns, illustrates more precisely the romance imagination. Whereas

Golding needs the allegiance of the upper-class Helen Norman to sustain him as an artist and dies because he cannot gain it, Hyacinth finds himself in a situation in which it is he who embodies the real world of culture and is forced into suicide because of his discovery that the world had offered simply the illusion. Both protagonists' deaths occur alone but the one is that of a victim, cut off from the real sources of value in his society, and the other that of a hero, a martyr to the absence of values in that society. Gissing's characters need the acceptance of others to live out their possibilities because their social environment is too pressing upon their identities for them to claim the freedom of self-assertion. Whereas Kipps and Polly are able to make private worlds for themselves that are felt as affirmative and life-enforcing, Rolfe in The Whirlpool, in his retirement to a rural retreat, is defeated and broken.

There are happy endings in Gissing's work but no character who seems to possess the vitality and worth to gain heroic status, none who seems able to transform their separation from conventional middle-class society into a significant stance that can bear the burden of a full and creative alienation. In other words Gissing had no need to explore the myth of the working-class hero as Lawrence did. There was first of all George in The White Peacock and his gradual decline; there was Paul in Sons and Lovers, who at the close has won through, after an immense struggle, to a position of freedom; and finally Ursula in The Rainbow who has the stature to articulate a whole vision by the end. In Gissing's world the lower-class individual can only be heroic through deception

or self-deception. Waymark's happiness comes through marriage to Ida, who represents the philanthropic impulse he is unsympathetic to. Peak is great in his commitment to hypocrisy and Lashmar, in Our Friend the Charlatan, in his commitment to deceit and opportunism. For Gissing's other positive figures, idealisation is commonly resorted to. He is most at ease, however with the unexceptional and the ordinary.

The realism of his fiction should be seen then in terms of the perspectives he resisted. Through avoiding the pastoral, the romantic and the heroic modes he negotiated a fictional world that could face the actual, relatively unmediated. His views are everywhere present in his work, his fear of exposure to reality often very marked, but as with Orwell the sense is nearly always of him seeking to be as honest and forthright as possible. This realism places Gissing, as a writer, at the centre of his society. Certainly his work doesn't offer a simple reflection of the social world-its range of outlook is too narrow. Embedded within it however are certain of the major tensions, conflicts and difficulties that were central to the period and which came to the surface most clearly in the discourse of the age's intellectuals. The whole concern with the implications of democracy in relation to education, politics or cultural life which worried them, which they dealt with from different ideological perspectives, is fundamental in Gissing's fiction. It's not merely that he used his novels for didactic ends, although there is certainly an element of that involved. Rather it is that in these novels it is possible to feel the experiential significance of the forces and

attitudes at work in his society, in their complex inter-relation. No other contemporary writer is as alive to the full span of implication, that the historical changes which occurred, caused or offers such a sustained fictional analysis of their significance. A work like In the Year of the Jubilee is characterised by the sense it conveys of the sheer weight and variety of pressure that the new democracy could exert upon the sensitive individual. Nancy, at the centre, is pulled by the traditional values represented by her father and Mary, by the free anonymity of the urban masses symbolised by the jubilee crowds, by the emphasis upon ambition and success of Jessica, by the glamour and excitement of contemporary culture typified by Crewe and by the aristocratic detachment of Tarrant. Other novelists might have dealt with certain of these aspects but Gissing incorporates all of them into his work, testing out the connections between them. The unsatisfactoriness of the book comes from its failure to resolve the manifold tensions and problems that are raised. Tarrant, who through most of the novel is a focus of criticism turns abruptly into a hard working journalist and provides a suitable positive to rescue the heroine from her unhappy submersion in the vulgarity of urban life. And she develops from a complex, mixed figure capable of responding to the appeal of Crewe, into a suffering angel. Only in this way could the writer wrest order from his broad sensitivity to the social world.

This sensitivity has fundamentally to do with the way in which Gissing's private reality imitates the external reality beyond. His class background at the time when the lower-middle class was becoming increasingly significant, his contact through Owen's college with the new educational

tendencies of the Victorian period, his move from the provinces to London at a time when the capital held an increasing attraction, his involvement in the working-class political activity at a time when it was undergoing a significant revival, his effort to live by art at a time when the changes in publishing and habits of reading was making that increasingly difficult, his disillusioned liberalism at a time when the Liberal Party was facing serious problems, reveal the way in which Gissing experienced the fundamental history of his period from the inside as it were. It was out of the fusion of his internal biography with the wider social reality that he wrote. Thus the fiction is in a way similar to that of Orwell's, standing as it does curiously in between the poles of the private and public experience. The stuff of history is present in his work but as the source of feelings and attitudes that seem more related to his private world than to the world of history. Richard Mutimer, for example, is only fully comprehensible if he is seen not simply as a portrait of a working-class politician but as a dramatisation of certain deep seated insecurities and anxieties to do with class, sex, identity and success.

The responsiveness of Gissing to a wide range of political and social issues is apparent in the fact that present in his work there is an awareness of society in terms of both its class and mass character. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed both an increase in class enmity and the gradual emergence of what can conveniently be called a mass culture, which made a broad appeal to the

public across conventional lines.<sup>26</sup> Gissing, like Wells, was concerned with the meaning of these divisions and the significance of mass society. The relationship between them is, however, considerably different in the two novelists' worlds. For the former the new culture, made up of popular journalism, advertising, large business and financial institutions offered a type of alternative to the narrow repressions of a rigidly hierarchical society. In Kipps Chitterlow seems to sum up a whole set of values and energies that can challenge the snobberies of the Walsingham world, and in Tono-Bungay the attractions of Edward Ponderevo for George are clear. That work expresses a sad disillusionment with the worth of the new order but the dichotomous structure nevertheless remains intact. Nor is it simply that this order is a simple positive to be set against the negative of a class perspective. At one point the hero and Ewart, after their disappointment with the Fabians, come out into the streets of London:

Ewart twisted his arm into a queerly eloquent gesture that gathered up all the tall facades of the banks, the business places, the projecting clock and towers of the Law Courts, the advertisements, the luminous signs, into one social immensity, into a capitalistic system gigantic and invincible. (11,1) 27

Political pessimism here is reinforced by the image of the impersonal and "gigantic" city, for that image seems to mock a way of seeing that is essentially class orientated. Wells's sense that mass culture offered a possible alternative to this way of seeing derives in part from the fact that it enabled

26. See for example, the observation by Quentin Bell in Virginia Woolf (1972), i, 31 that Virginia and Vanessa Stephen read "Tit-Bits" as children.

27. H.G.Wells, Tono-Bungay (1909).

him to escape from a life of retailing and teaching, enabled him to be a writer.

In Gissing's world, however, the two aspects of social reality are held together side by side. There are the lower-class novels of the eighties and ~~there~~ are the novels of the nineties, like New Grub Street and In the Year of the Jubilee, but there is little sense that the one kind of historical emphasis holds out any answers for the other. As a man and writer Gissing felt them as posing separate problems for his identity and career. Thus he can respond to the political and social implications of the democratic tendencies of the period as well as the cultural ones without needing to deal in false alternatives and polarities. It is only necessary to compare a character like Samual Barmby with Edward Ponderevo to gauge the difference. Both are more products of their own imaginings than anything else, living off the advantages and opportunities provided by the mass society, but the one is critically exposed whilst the other is indulged. Gissing perceives the temptation to find romance in the new environment:

Crewe had stories to tell of this and that thriving firm, of others struggling in obscurity or falling from high estate; to him the streets of London were ~~so~~ many chapters of romance, but a romance always of today, for he neither knew or cared about historic associations. (ii,3)

but through using the consciousness of Crewe here, he places it, for his real perception is a bitter one:

New-lit lamps, sickly under the dying day, stretch in immense vistas, unobscured by fog, but exhibit no detail of the track they will presently illumine; one by one the shop-fronts grow radiant on deepening gloom, and show in silhouette the figures numberless that are hurrying past. By accentuating a pause between the life of daytime and that which will begin after dark, this grey hour excites to an unwonted perception of the



city's vastness and of its multifarious labour;  
melancholy, yet not dismal, the brooding twilight  
seems to betoken Nature's compassion for myriad mortals  
exiled from her beauty and her solace. (v,4)

It is this landscape, slightly unreal and impersonal, that represents an essential component of his comprehension of the city. Between the packed, over-crowded dense spr<sup>w</sup>al of Workers in the Dawn and the desolation of this urban scene, Gissing's imagination moved, for the class and mass society each offered its own types of difficulty and failure. The significance of his art lies in its openness to a wide range of social experience, in its capacity to receive and express the pressures of the complex historical situation in which it is set. Lionel Trilling has written:

And in any culture there are likely to be certain artists who contain a large part of the dialectic within themselves, their meaning and power lying in their contradictions: they contain within themselves it may be said, the very essence of culture, and the sign of this is that they do not submit to serve the ends of any one ideological group or tendency. 28

Gissing is one of these artists. His centrality is expressed, for example, in the far-ranging and sensitive reference that shapes his attitude to the relation of education and class; he both recognises the danger of schooling as well as its positive value. It is not that he is a representative of some mediating consensus but that a major strength of his work is its aliveness to the complex values implicit in social experience.

### Gissing and Liberalism

His realism connects him with his mid-Victorian predecessors and their effort to explore matters fundamental

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to the working of a society. The forces and ideas which were making for the new uncertainties and pressures in the period after 1880 meant, however, that the task had become immensely more difficult. Writers continued into the 1890's with the three-volume novel but the fact that autobiographical fiction and the short-story became more common, that Naturalism developed, enabling the author to assume the stance of neutral observer, that James secreted himself behind his dramatised scenes, that Hardy after the formal strains present in Jude the Obscure turned to poetry, that Lawrence gradually moved away from ordinary life and that Forster stopped writing about England after 1914 indicates the desire of novelists to escape from the burden of sustaining in their narratives an on-going and wide-ranging recreation of a whole society.

The fact that Gissing remained committed to realism is connected with the fact that he never went beyond the liberalism of his youth but remained within its boundaries, uneasy and dissatisfied. This gives to his perceptions a tragic quality, for at the same time as he recognises the need and value of certain changes and forms of action, he also has to acknowledge their limitations and futility; he could be neither simply pessimistic or optimistic. Thus whilst Wells saw how culture was necessarily compromised by alternative social pressures and values and came to accept the consequences and Lawrence saw ways to meaningfully sustain the isolation of culture from these pressures, Gissing understood the compulsion to connect culture and opposing realities but knew that this couldn't be accomplished. Emily Hood and Waymark, of his intellectual characters find some happiness but Helen, Golding, Kingcoate, Egremont, Grail, Snowdon and Peak all fail in their aspiration

to cross class lines through philanthropy, love, education or art. In New Grub Street, the bleakest of his books, the cultural hero's estrangement is not from a section of society, alien but human - a form of community - but from a set of impersonal forces; the choice is between a debilitating apartness and absolute compromise. The significant contrast, in this respect, is with Forster, who also shared a liberal stance, for in his work, instead of an effort to connect culture and the social world in the knowledge of the inevitable failure of such an effort, there is an attempt to force a way through the impasse by writing Howards End and compelling connection.

The stress on Gissing's liberalism is important, for the temptation is to view him as a reactionary conservative. The whimsical old-worldliness characteristic of Rycroft was never the novelist's. His roots in a strong provincial Radical background <sup>29</sup> were too powerful for him to totally embrace a facile remoteness. What emerges in his fiction is a liberalism gone sour, a bitter disillusionment. He is so continually pessimistic because he has to repeatedly discover his pessimism anew: he is unable to rest in a complacent world-weariness. Throughout his career he was always willing to keep an open mind. Having dismissed philanthropy and philanthropists in The Nether World he could sympathetically portray Mrs. Tresilion in Sleeping Fires who has a missionary dedication to helping the poor. In Gissing's immense sympathy with the oppressed, in his hatred of dogma, exploitation and militarism, in his refusal of cynicism and his emphasis upon

29. See The Born Exile, p.49. - - -

the importance of individual liberty, his liberal stance is observable. Having rejected existing radical politics he avoided the substitute ideologies or extreme positions that attracted Wells and Lawrence, resisted the temptation to a metaphysical fatalism similar to Hardy's, although the early Hope of Pessimism shows how drawn he was to it, and found it difficult to accept James's cultural conservatism. All these writers went beyond the liberalism that had sustained the Victorian novel, and took the genre into new forms. Gissing remained within its value-world - on the edge, necessarily, challenging its assumptions even more than Trilling believes Forster does,<sup>30</sup> but nevertheless forced to come to terms with what might be possible, with the achievements individuals can accomplish.

Snowdon's unsentimentalised goodness in The Nether World which seeks to make the best of unsatisfactory circumstances, stands out against the bleak background of the novel relieving its vision of blank inhumanity. That the tentative close of the work, the resort to the negative qualification in order to affirm meaningful positions, the very rhythms of the prose, is reminiscent of Littæ Dorrit's conclusion suggests Gissing's connections with Dickens's political outlook. And that note is found again in Forster when Philip and Caroline return home in Where Angels Fear to Tread, or when Aziz and Fielding part at the close of A Passage to India. It's a kind of affirmation that is made, but one that has to be set in the midst of the forces antagonistic to it, in the costs that it has made necessary, in the limitations it is confined

30. See Lionel Trilling, E.M. Forster (1943), pp.7-24.

by. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers doesn't end conclusively, but there is a heroism there which is markedly different from the self-conscious testing out of possibilities and hopes which Dickens, Gissing and Forster share.

It is no accident that Orwell, whose own imagination embodies the dilemmas and strains of liberalism, valued these three predecessors so highly. His discussion of Forster's essay on T.S.Eliot's "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock" is in this context of interest, for he shares the critic's sense that the feebleness and aloofness expressed in the poem, can, in certain circumstances be of value, that they somehow represent the 'human voice'.<sup>31</sup> It's a kind of perception that illuminates Gissing's fiction; figures like Dymchurch and Rolfe seek their sanity in stasis, in private worlds. The liberal, the novelist suggests, desiring to maintain his perspective might need to contemplate withdrawal<sup>a</sup>, but the escape isn't evasive or permanent but compelled under necessity for survival. In The Whirlpool, in Howards End, in Keep the Aspidestra Flying this stress upon the need and difficulty of survival is ever present. For all these writers enacted in their work a defence of the values of liberalism against both historical and internal pressures.

### Gissing in Perspective

The fact that Gissing's importance is inextricably connected with both his political stance and the quality of

31. The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, pp.574-575.

his art should enable judgement to move away from an evaluation of his fiction in terms of its symptomatic value. Certainly it helps an understanding of late nineteenth and early twentieth century culture but its centrality in this respect is closely related to its intrinsic artistic significance.

The nature of this significance is extremely difficult to establish. Critics have frequently pointed out the failure of the novels to embody a full and substantial awareness of life. Gettmann talks about Gissing's inability to 'wholly lose himself in his characters'<sup>32</sup> and Virginia Woolf has written:

Where the great novelist flows in and out of his characters and bathes them in an element that seems common to us all Gissing remains solitary, self-centred, apart. 33

This is true to a degree and a barrier to greatness. What is necessary is an acceptance of the writer's apartness and a comprehension of its precise form. The separation comes <sup>not</sup> out of a Flaubertian disgust at life or a timid rejection of its possibilities. It is a strategy, open to constant modification, adopted with knowledge and experience, capable of providing its own kind of insights. A sensitivity, then, to the difficulties and implications of the writer's stance, is required. Salgado goes to the heart of the matter when he writes:

The problem is to find a way of talking about the second best which will define and illustrate what is good about it without making extravagant claims on the one hand or

32. George Gissing and H.G.Wells; Their Friendship and Correspondence, ed. Royal.A.Gettmann (1961), p.23.

33. Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader, 2nd. series (1932), p.222.

being insufferably condescending on the other. 34

A central aspect of Gissing's limitations lies in his failure to realise in his fiction energetic positives that would give him the confidence and power to go beyond a negative and narrow hostility to his culture and would have rescued his fiction from depression.<sup>35</sup> His work is written in reaction to the dominating influence of Dickens whose romanticism he objected to, in reaction to the declining liberalism he grew up with, in reaction to the dominating tendency of the period's cultural life towards fragmentation and dilution. A conscientious, self-conscious, critical sensitivity prevails. The characteristic tone of the narrative suggests a certain distance between the writer and the language he is using; the latinate diction, the careful rhythms of the prose, the stance of knowledgeable spectator rather than omniscient author, give to the writing, at its best, a sense of interested aloofness. It's a tone essentially of defence because the poise has a tight-rope quality; it isn't assured and flexible but anxiously assumed. This is from The Nether World:

To say that his aspect was venerable would serve to present him in a measure, yet would not be wholly accurate, for there was too much of past struggle and present anxiety in his countenance to permit full expression of the natural dignity of the features. (1,1)

That sort of structure made up of the need to qualify and expand, is characteristic; few things can be taken for granted because everything is potentially part of an argument, part of a strategy.

In the way that his novels deal directly with contemporary

34. Gamino Salagado, "Review of Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth Century Fiction", Essays in Criticism 18 (April 1968), 201-208.

35. See for a discussion of Gissing's depression Michael Irwin, "Cross Purposes in Gissing", Gissing Newsletter, 1X, 1, 6-14.

historical issues, Gissing can be regarded as the heir of the mid-Victorian prophets. Yet Gissing grew up apart from the major sources of culture of the time. A leading intellectual of the day, who belonged to the world of Oxbridge could thus write of Owens College:

The merchant princes of the industrial North, . . . had endowed the College so that their sons could be taught the principles of calico printing, or 'learn enough Chymistry and mechanics' to be able to make more money than their fathers. It might well have been Owen's intention to found a University, like that of Oxford and Cambridge. But his College had degenerated into 'an emporium of useful knowledge and general information', and did not promote 'the culture which comes of a wide and prolonged discipline in letters'. 36

For him and for his contemporaries, culture could be identified with confidence; it has an obvious location and an obvious expression. Gissing had to deal with the problem they and others dealt with, from a different perspective, within different tensions. His fiction gives to the rather abstract forms of argument employed by Arnold and Ruskin their human implication. It is interesting in this context that Eliot's attitudes to Lawrence are very similar to his views on Gissing. Both writers he considers, are weakened by the fact that they are types of self-made men, who are unable to take for granted a tradition outside them.<sup>37</sup> Although that view is open to serious doubt it does suggest the way in which the two novelist are connected through the type of relationship they shared to established culture. It's not simply that they are lower-class it's rather that their social experience made the issue of class crucial to their imaginative experience of the world.

Lawrence worked out an escape from it, moving, after 1914,

36. Quoted by Diderik Rørdam, The Academy 1869-1879 (1957), p.81. <sup>Copenhagen</sup>

37. See H. Coombes, ed., D.H. Lawrence (1973), p.243. and Jacob Korg, "A Possible T.S. Eliot Reference to Gissing", Gissing Newsletter V (Oct 1969) 15-16, for Eliot's review of The Letters of George Gissing to Members of His Family.



further away from the realisation of concrete human experience in society. Gissing never could, though the fiction of the nineties might suggest a similar tendency; his awareness of the significance of class went very deep. This is apparent in the difficulty he had in locating culture in a specific social situation; in the discovery that only certain kinds of relationship are possible between the lower-class intellectual and the educated world; in the awareness that the class structure of society prevents release but yet refuses return too; in the writer's need to work within a proletarian setting. Yet the obvious importance of class<sup>38</sup> in his work, doesn't mean that Gissing is blind to other historical forces. Goldmann's idea that after 1880 it became less significant as a focus of artist's attention<sup>39</sup> is reflected in the novelist's willingness to deal with the mass society.

What links his concern with this phenomenon and his concern with class is his commitment to the idea of culture. Throughout his work there is expressed a profound antagonism to those who misuse it out of ignorance or self-interest. The hostility though, is not static. Egremont's idealism ends in failure but by Our Friend the Charlatan, May Ogram's description of her effort to take the arts to the populace, is heavily satirised. Gissing's attitude to culture then, involves an emphasis upon

38. The term class can have a significance wider than the economic. Brian Jackson and Denis Marsden in Education and the Working Class, 2nd ed (1966), p.192, write: "Class could be something in the blood, in the very fibre of a man or woman: a way of growing, feeling, judging, taken out of the resources of generations gone before."

39. See Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood, The Sociology of Literature, 2nd. edition (1972), p.73.

its limitation.<sup>40</sup> Whereas Wells came to devalue it because of its class connections, he sought to redeem it from the pressures of history that were undermining it. The mature perspective of The Nether World is that the problems of society cannot be solved by the arts, that they require other kinds of solution and that culture, whilst it can never be isolated from society because it draws its life from there, should be defended for the values it embodies, even if those values have no direct social function. There was no possibility it was recognised, of taking those values for granted, no possibility of detaching them from the social context in which they existed but within the shaping awareness this implies they had to be affirmed. For that reason the intellectual is fundamental to his fiction. Through an exposed liberal perspective, through a committed realism, with an engrained ambivalence to class and art Gissing made a continuous and urgent exploration of the central problems and tensions this figure lived out.

40. See George Gissing, The Private Papers of Henry Rycroft (1903), p. 67 and p. 69.

NOTES

- 1) [p. 8] An article, "University Extension in England", Quarterly Review 172 (1891) p.430, says:  
"The diffusion of intellectual interests, which gives to the rich and poor the same diffusion of mental associations is one of the only means by which we can hope to bring about the solidification of different classes which agitators vainly hope to find in political equality."
- 2) [p.12] Barnard writes: "Board school was a term of contempt in my middle-class, suburban milieu; and we said 'board-school boy' much as Swift's Houyhnhnms used the term 'yahoo'.  
H.G. Wells writes in Experiment in Autobiography (1934),1,93: "The Education Act of 1871 was not an act for a common universal education, it was an act to educate the lower classes for employment on lower class lines, and with specially trained, inferior teachers who had no university quality."
- 3) [p.13] Charles Booth, Charles Booth's London, eds. Albert Fried and Richard Elman, 2nd. ed. (1971), p.429 writes: "Nevertheless, popular education had been far from wasted

even in the case of those who may seem to have learnt but very little. Obedience to discipline and rules of proper behaviour have been inculcated; habits of order and cleanliness have been acquired..." An Inspector in 1895 quoted by G.N. Lowndes, The Silent Social Revolution (1969), p.15, writes: "Anyone who can compare the demeanour of young people at the present day with what it was five and twenty years ago must notice how roughness of manner has been smoothed away, how readily and intelligently they can answer a question, how the half-hostile suspicion with which they regard a stranger has disappeared; in fact how they have become civilized."

- 4) [p.14] Tom Mann writes: "By degrees it dawned on me that I had missed something in the educational line; I realized that boys under 14 were now obliged to attend school."
  
- 5) [p.28] "If you had never taught the blackened men down in the various hells that they were in hell, and made them despise themselves for being there - a common collier, a low labourer - the mischief could never have developed so rapidly, But now we have it, all society resting on a labour basis of smouldering resentment."

- 6) [p.39] Edward Carpenter writes: "One of the pathetic things of the Socialist movement is the way in which it has caused not a few people to try and leave their own ranks and join those of the workers when - by their very birth and training unable to bridge the gulf - the result has been that they belonging neither to one class nor the other, outcasts from one and more or less pitied or ridiculed by the other, have fallen into a kind of limbo between."

Thomas Gautrey writes: "When I saw them my heart sank into my boots. How ever could I live among such graceless little rag-a-muffins? Poverty I did not mind; that I had been accustomed to. But it had been clean poverty, not grimy, heart-rending poverty like this."

Basil Henriques writes about a visit to an East End mission: "I went. Dressed in my oldest clothes, and feeling fearfully self-conscious, I found myself standing in the corner of a rather dirty, extremely stuffy and nauseatingly smelly room filled with boys whose language I could not understand - for they were too lazy to pronounce their consonants - and with whom I felt I had nothing in common and that they had nothing in common with me."

- 7) [p.42] Basil Williams writes of War of the Worlds:  
"There is too much of the young man from Clapham about the book... He reminds one of the man of whom it was said that he had travelled to more interesting places and talked to more interesting people than the rest of the world, but had really seen and heard nothing for himself."
- A reviewer of Anticipations writes: "If anyone wishes to know what a very cocksure person, 'well-up' in two or probably three of the natural sciences, but comprehensively ignorant of history, ethics and the social sciences in general, thinks mankind will be and do in the year 2000 AD, this is the book for him."
- A French reviewer, Augustin Filon, writes:  
"Wells represents a special new type of thinker and writer which could not have emerged and come into its own in the intellectual atmosphere of thirty years ago. He is a product of the Royal College of Science, a great democratic institution, preserving none of the old university traditions. Afterwards he knew the difficulties of the life of an apprentice teacher. And all of this was in the thick of the great whirlpool of London, where one is forced to speak little, think quickly and keep constantly on the move, and where the individual is reduced to the point of

deafness to his own cries and insensible to his own suffering...in each word you will sense the clamour of six million beings and the vibration of a million buildings, you will have the feeling of the noise, the crowd..."

- 8) [p.45] Wells writes: "But, if I may speak frankly and formally, why have you in fact for emphasis - why the Hell have you joined the conspiracy to restrict me to one particular type of story? I want to write novels and before God I will write novels. They are the proper stuff of my every day work, a methodical careful distillation of one's thoughts and sentiments and experiences and impressions."
- 9) [p.46] "The workers' Educational Union, acting in sympathy with the Labour view - that vocational studies are to be avoided - practically taboos technical studies. This is reasonable as things are today, when a man's work is too often for the profit of others, and for this reason the workers are not in love with their work, and when the day is over they have seen plenty of it; so the best of them go elsewhere for the springs of spiritual life. But this is all disastrous to individuals and disastrous to progress. What the workers should do is to

watch for the spirit in their daily work, for it is the work itself which will hold a man to God - nothing else will."

- 10) [p.54] Wells writes: "The first thing that has to be realised if the Labour question is to be understood at all is this, that the temper of Labour has changed altogether in the last twenty or thirty years. Essentially that is a change due to intelligence not merely increased but greatly stimulated, to the work, that is, of the board schools and the <sup>e</sup>chap Press. The outlook of the workman has passed beyond his work and his beer and his dog. He has become - or, rather, he has been replaced by - a being of eyes, however imperfect, and of criticism, however unjust. The working man of today reads, talks, has general ideas and a sense of the round world; he is nearer to the ruler of to-day in knowledge and intellectual range than he is to the working man of fifty years ago."

- 11) [p.55] "What we prosperous people, who have nearly all the good things of life and most of the opportunity have to do now is to justify ourselves. We have to show that we are indeed responsible and serviceable, willing to give



ourselves, and to give ourselves generously, for what we have and what we have had. We have to meet the challenge of this distrust."

- 12) [p.62] "Kipps is essentially a novel built on modern lines, about the development of a single character. The older type of novel was held together as a rule by a complex plot, and was ampler and looser in form than its successor. Here the interest is concentrated upon a single amusing individual and often on what he says or does on this or that occasion."

- 13) [p.66] Wells writes in Certain Personal Matters: "I learned the value of thoroughly good things only too early. I know the equivalent of a teacup to the very last scowl, and I have hated good, handsome property ever since. For my part I love cheap things, trashy things, things made of the commonest rubbish that money can buy; things as vulgar as primroses and as transitory as morning's frost." In Boon he argues through Wilkins that "the thinkers and poets and all the stuff of literature and the study don't represent the real mind, such as it is, of humanity, when you note how the mass of mankind turns naturally to make and dominate its own organs of expression. Take the popular press, take current fiction, take the music-hall, watch the development of the cinematograph. There you have the real

body of mankind expressing itself. If you are right these things should fall in a kind of relationship to the intellectual hierarchy. But the intellectual hierarchy goes and hides away in country-houses and beautiful retreats and provincial universities and stuffy high-class periodicals. It's afraid of the mass of men, it dislikes and dreads the mass of men, and it affects a pride and aloofness to cover it."

- 14) [p.77] Wells writes: "But I have an insurmountable objection to Literary or Artistic Academies as such, to any hierarchies, any suggestion of controls or fixed standards in these things."
- 15) [p.109] Lawrence writes to a friend about his son: "When you said he might be a musician it struck me. He has got that curious difference from other people, which may mean he is going to have a distinct creative personality. But he will suffer a great deal and he will want a lot of love to make up for it." And in "Introduction to Memoirs of the Foreign Legion", he says: "But the lonely terrified courage of the isolated spirit which grits its teeth and stares the horrors in the face and will not succumb to them but fights its way through them, knowing that it must surpass them: this is the rarest courage."

- 16) [p.135] Forster writes: "Culture, thank goodness, is no longer a social asset, it can no longer be employed either as a barrier against the mob or as a ladder into the aristocracy. This is one of the few improvements that have occurred in England since the last war."
- 17) [p.160] Forster writes in "The Consolations of History": "Difficult to realise that the past was once the present, and that, transferred to it, one would be just the same little worm as to-day, unimportant, parasitic, nervous, occupied with trifles, unable to go anywhere or alter anything, friendly only with the obscure, and only at ease with the dead; while up on the heights the figures and forces that make history would contend in their habitual fashion, with incomprehensible noise or in ominous quiet," and in Aspects of the Novel, p.171: "We may harness the atom, we may land on the moon or intensify warfare, the mental processes of animals may be understood; but all these are trifles, they belong to history not to art."
- 18) [p.218] Bland writes: "The constant presence of a vast mass of human misery is generating in the educated classes a deep discontent, a spiritual unrest which drives the lower types to pessimism, the higher to enquiry."

Toynbee says: "Workmen we have neglected you. Instead of justice we have offered you charity, and instead of sympathy we have offered you hard and unreal advice. But I think we are changing. If you would only believe it and trust us, there are many of us who would spend our lives in your service."

19) [p.238] "...as to the present parties I say: damn Tweedle-dum and blast Tweedle-dee."

20) [p.266] "In consequence of the limited education they receive, the intellectual outlook of class 'D' is narrow. They do not as children stay long enough at school to acquire intellectual tastes, or even the power of applied reading and study. To this broad statement there are, of course, not a few exceptions - thoughtful men and women who throughout their lives take every opportunity of extending their knowledge by reading and in other ways. But for the most part the reading of class 'D' is confined to the evening papers, to more or less sentimental or sensational novels or to the endless periodicals made up of short stories, scrappy paragraphic comments upon men and events, columns of jokes and riddles, and similar items of merely trivial character. And apart from reading, when literary or historical subjects are presented in the form of popular

lectures, the number of these who are interested is comparatively small. Well-delivered lectures upon scientific subjects are, however, appreciated."

- 21) [p.302] Millar writes: "But for one reader who goes to Scott and Dickens, we suspect that a score seek their literary sustenance in very different quarters."
- 22) [p.323] "My own life is too sterile and miserable to allow of my thinking much about the Race. When I am able to summon up any enthusiasm, it is only for Art..."
- 23) [p.328] Gissing writes about an Italian and Dutch painting: "Both are realistic, but in how different a way. Take away from Vandyke even his Ass and the Manger, and much more remains than a woman watching her new-born child, and much more. Yet there are no aureoles, whilst Caravaggio, absurdly enough, gives one to his Madonna," and he comments on a book of Morley Roberts: "In Low Relief has in my opinion, great merits, but the book is a literal transcript from life; he has merely reported a story in which he played the principal part... This is realism, but of a particularly restricted species."

24) [p.330] "I have felt for a long time past, that I have fallen upon evil days - every sign or symbol of one's being the least wanted anywhere or by anyone, having so utterly failed. A new generation, that I know not, and mainly prize not, has taken universal possession. The sense of being utterly out of it weighed me down, and I asked myself what the future would be."

and:

"One must go one's way and know what one's about and have a general plan and private religion - in short have made up one's mind as to ce qui en est with a public <sup>the dragging web-</sup> after which simply leads one in the gutter. One has always a 'public' enough if one has an audible vibration - even if it should only come from oneself."

## A LIST OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES

The items included have been selected for their contribution to an understanding of the central perspective of the thesis rather than for their general literary or historical relevance to the period 1880-1914.

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SUMMARY OF Ph.D. THESIS

The work of Gissing provides the clearest and broadest perspective on the tensions generated by the pressure of certain ideological and social forces upon traditional values and forms of authority. Ideas about culture and individuals' actual experience of it were altered in ways fundamental both to society and to fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Gissing's fiction is not unique in its enactment of these types of significance and thus can only be defined within both a historical and literary context. Wells's novels formulate a comprehension of culture which prevents its survival in a positive way, both inside and outside society; the pessimism connects with James's The Princess Casamassima of the 1890s. Lawrence's work envisages the possibility of culture being sustained by the single individual; the heroic emphasis connects with Hardy's Jude the Obscure. In Forster the pressure is constantly to end the conflict between true culture and the elements working against it, and here the relationship is with Gissing, for whom these elements are too deeply embedded for the liberal stance to be a genuine one.

His novels of the 1880s embody a series of positions within which the crucial relation is that between his particular attitudes and concerns and the fictional structures that express, reflect and resist them. The resolution of the tensions between his fixed ideological commitment and his sense of historical reality occurs in Thyrza and The Nether World. With New Grub Street a new maturity is apparent which enables Gissing to fully explore the implications of an emerging mass society. Throughout his work the figure of the intellectual is of central importance.

Michael Peters