

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Leicester

by

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For

Guy and Nathan Rawlinson

The Other Gissing: Short Stories, Essays and Miscellaneous Works
by
Barbara Rawlinson, Leicester University

Abstract of thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in the University of Leicester

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how, over three separate phases, George Gissing transformed his relatively unremarkable early short stories into the uniquely individualistic tales that elevated his work in the eighteen nineties to the front rank of realistic short fiction.

Chapters one and two relate to Gissing's first venture into short fiction whilst living in America, which is notable for its accumulation of important themes that the author carried forward and repeatedly adapted to reappear in his later work. In order to establish its impact on subsequent work in terms of political and philosophical influence, chapter three studies the writer's non-fictional output following his return to England, while chapters four and five cover the same period with regard to his second phase of short fiction, focusing on causality as the dominating theme at this time.

The role of realism in Gissing's short work is addressed in chapter six and in chapter seven its application is demonstrated by means of an overview of the author's third phase of the genre. Chapter eight focuses exclusively on Gissing's writings on the work of Charles Dickens, while chapter nine follows a similar analytical pattern to chapters two and five. At this stage it is evident that the author's interest in the concept of causality as the major force in his short work has been overtaken by a more challenging preoccupation with the human psyche, thus introducing philosophical, sociological and psychological overtones to the writer's work. The final chapter aims to draw together all the threads that combined to establish Gissing as a major contributor to late nineteenth-century realism in the field of short fiction.

Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Chronology of the Short Stories	iii
Introduction	x
Chapter One	Exile in America 1
Chapter Two	A Promising Start 41
Chapter Three	The Formative Years 73
Chapter Four	A Time of Transition 105
Chapter Five	Changing Values 140
Chapter Six	The Place of Realism in Gissing's Short Fiction 175
Chapter Seven	The Right Place at the Right Time 201
Chapter Eight	Gissing on Dickens 226
Chapter Nine	A Victim of Circumstances 248
Chapter Ten	Conclusion 293
Appendix A	'Answer to Goldsmith's Criticism on Hamlet's Soliloquy' 305
Appendix B	'John Milton' 309
Appendix C	'Walks about Ilkley' 314
Appendix D	'The Grandfather's New Year's Story' 328
Appendix E	'The Hidden Treasure' 334
Appendix F	'The Little Dove' 342
Appendix G	'"Rabba" the wizard of the Alps' 354
Appendix H	'The Smuggler's Cave' 370
Bibliography	380

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Short extracts from this thesis have been incorporated in a paper given at the International George Gissing Conference held in Amsterdam in September 1999. The paper, entitled 'Buried Treasure,' has now been published in *A Garland for Gissing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B. V., 2001).

Chronology of the Short Stories

<u>First Phase: 1877</u>		<u>Publication</u>
‘The Sins of the Fathers’	<i>The Chicago Tribune</i> (Saturday Supplement)	10 March 1877
repeated as ‘The Sins of the Father’	<i>The Troy Times</i>	14 July 1877
‘R.I.P.’	<i>The Chicago Tribune</i> (Saturday Supplement)	31 March 1877
‘Too Dearly Bought’	<i>The Chicago Tribune</i> (Saturday Supplement)	14 April 1877
‘The Death-Clock’	<i>The Chicago Daily Tribune</i>	21 April 1877
‘Too Wretched to Live’	<i>The Chicago Daily News</i>	24 April 1877
‘The Serpent-Charm’	<i>The Chicago Daily Tribune</i>	28 April 1877
‘The Warden’s Daughter’	<i>The Chicago Evening Journal</i>	28 April 1877
repeated as ‘The Warder’s Daughter’	<i>The Chicago Daily News</i>	18 May 1877
‘A Terrible Mistake’	<i>The National Weekly</i>	5 May 1877
‘Gretchen’	<i>The Chicago Tribune</i> (Illustrated Supplement)	12 May 1877
‘A Mother’s Hope’	<i>The Alliance</i>	12 May 1877
‘Twenty Pounds’	<i>The Chicago Evening Journal</i>	19 May 1877
‘A Game of Hearts’	<i>The Chicago Daily News</i>	28 May 1877
‘Joseph Yates’ Temptation’	<i>The Chicago Post</i>	2 June 1877
‘A Test of Honor’	<i>The Alliance</i>	2 June 1877
‘How They Cooked Me’	<i>The Chicago Daily News</i>	4 June 1877
‘The Portrait’	<i>The Chicago Daily News</i>	18 June 1877
‘The Artist’s Child’	<i>The Alliance</i>	30 June 1877
rewritten version	<i>Tinsleys’ Magazine</i>	January 1878

‘An English Coast-Picture’	<i>Appletons’ Journal</i>	July 1877
‘The Mysterious Portrait’	<i>The Chicago Daily News</i>	6 July 1877
‘Dead and Alive’	<i>The Chicago Daily Tribune</i>	14 July 1877
‘One Farthing Damages’ repeated	<i>The Chicago Post</i> <i>The Chicago Post</i>	28 July 1877 2 August 1877
‘Brownie’	<i>The Chicago Daily Tribune</i>	29 July 1877
‘The Picture’	<i>The Chicago Daily News</i>	14 August 1877

Second Phase: 1879 – 1884

1879-1880

‘My First Rehearsal’	<i>English Literature in Transition</i> , 9, No. 1	1966
&	<i>My First Rehearsal and My Clerical Rival</i> ed. Pierre Coustillas (London: Enitharmon Press)	1970
‘My Clerical Rival’	<i>My First Rehearsal and My Clerical Rival</i>	1970
‘An Heiress on Condition’	(Philadelphia: The Pennell Club)	1923
‘The Last Half-Crown’	<i>Essays & Fiction</i>	1970
‘Cain and Abel’	<i>Essays & Fiction</i>	1970

1881:

‘The Quarry on the Heath’	<i>Essays & Fiction</i>	1970
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1882:

‘The Lady of the Dedication’	<i>Essays & Fiction</i>	1970
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1883:

‘Phoebe’	<i>Temple Bar</i> , LXX	March 1884
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1884:

‘Mutimer’s Choice’	<i>Essays & Fiction</i>	1970
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‘Letty Coe’	<i>Temple Bar</i> , XCII	August 1891
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Third Phase: 1893 – 1903

1893:

‘A Victim of Circumstances’	<i>Blackwood’s Magazine</i> , CLIII	January 1893
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‘Lou and Liz’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , X	August 1893
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‘The Day of Silence’ repeated	<i>The National Review</i> , XXII <i>The Living Age</i> , CXCIX	December 1893 30 December 1893
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‘Fleet-Footed Hester’	<i>The London Illustrated News</i> , CII	Christmas 1893
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‘The Muse of the Halls’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XI	Christmas 1893
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1894

‘Under an Umbrella’	<i>To-Day</i> , I	6 January 1894
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‘Our Mr Jupp’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XI	March 1894
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‘A Capitalist’	<i>The National Review</i> , XXIII	April 1894
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‘The Honeymoon’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XI	June 1894
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‘Comrades in Arms’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XI	September 1894
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‘The Pessimist of Plato Road’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XII	November 1894
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‘A Midsummer Madness’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XII	December 1894
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1895

‘The Salt of the Earth’	<i>The Minster</i> , I	January 1895
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‘A Lodger in Maze Pond’	<i>The National Review</i> , CXLIV	February 1895
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‘The Poet’s Portmanteau’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XII	February 1895
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‘In Honour Bound’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XIII	April 1895
‘The Friend in Need’	<i>To-Day</i> , VI	4 May 1895
‘A Drug in the Market’	<i>To-Day</i> , VII	11 May 1895
‘Of Good Address’	<i>To-Day</i> , VII	18 May 1895
‘By the Kerb’	<i>To-Day</i> , VII	25 May 1895
‘His Brother’s Keeper’	<i>Chapman’s Magazine</i> , I	June 1895
‘A Calamity at Tooting’	<i>The Minster</i> , I	June 1895
‘Humble Felicity’	<i>To-Day</i> , VII	1 June 1895
‘A Man of Leisure’	<i>To-Day</i> , VII	8 June 1895
‘The Tyrant’s Apology’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XIII	July 1895
‘Their Pretty Ways’	<i>Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper</i>	15 September 1895
‘The Fate of Humphrey Snell’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XIV	October 1895
‘The Medicine Man’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XI	9 October 1895
‘Raw Material’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XI	16 October 1895
‘Two Collectors’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XI	23 October 1895
‘An Old Maid’s Triumph’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XII	30 October 1895
‘The Invincible Curate’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XII	6 November 1895
‘The Tout of Yarmouth Bridge’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XII	13 November 1895
‘A Well-Meaning Man’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XII	20 November 1895
‘A Song of Sixpence’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XII	27 November 1895
‘An Inspiration’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XIV	December 1895
‘A Profitable Weakness’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XII	4 December 1895
‘The Beggar’s Nurse’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XII	11 December 1895

‘Transplanted’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XII	25 December 1895
1896		
‘The Foolish Virgin’	<i>The Yellow Book</i> , VIII	January 1896
‘A Parent’s Feelings’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XII	1 January 1896
‘Lord Dunfield’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XII	15 January 1896
‘The Little Woman from Lancashire’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XIII	29 January 1896
‘In No-Man’s Land’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XIII	12 February 1896
‘At High Pressure’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XIII	19 February 1896
‘A Conversion’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XIII	26 February 1896
‘A Free Woman’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XIII	4 March 1896
‘A Son of the Soil’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XIII	11 March 1896
‘Out of Fashion’	<i>The Sketch</i> , XIII	18 March 1896
‘Our Learned Fellow-Townsmen’	<i>The New York Times</i> <i>English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XV	20 March 1896 May 1896
‘Simple Simon’ bowdlerised version	<i>The Idler</i> , IX	May 1896
‘Vegetarianism v. Love: The Story of Simple Simon’	<i>The Harmsworth Magazine</i> ,	December 1900
‘Joseph’	<i>Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper</i>	17 May 1896
‘The Justice and the Vagabond’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XV	June 1896
‘The Firebrand’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XV	July 1896
‘A Yorkshire Lass’	<i>Cosmopolis</i> , III	August 1896
‘The Prize Lodger’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XV	August 1896
‘The Schoolmaster’s Vision’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XV	September 1896

1897

‘The Light on the Tower’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XVI	January 1897
‘The Hapless Boaster’	<i>The Illustrated London News</i> , CXI	11 September 1897
‘Spellbound’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XVIII	October 1897

1898

‘A Despot on Tour’	<i>The Strand Magazine</i> , XV	January 1898
‘The Ring Finger’	<i>Cosmopolis</i> , X	May 1898
‘One Way of Happiness’	<i>The English Illustrated Magazine</i> , XIX	June 1898
‘The Peace Bringer’	<i>The Lady’s Realm</i> , IV	October 1898

1899

‘A Freak of Nature’ bowdlerised as ‘Mr Brogden , City Clerk’	<i>The Harmsworth Magazine</i> , II	February 1899
‘The Elixir’	<i>The Idler</i> , XV	May 1899
‘Fate and the Apothecary’	<i>Literature</i> , IV	6 May 1899
‘A Poor Gentleman’	<i>The Pall Mall Magazine</i> , XIX	October 1899

1900

‘Snapshall’s Youngest’	<i>The Sphere</i> , I	17 February 1900
‘Humplebee’	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Review</i> , IV	March 1900
‘At Nightfall’	<i>Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine</i> , LXV	May 1900
‘The House of Cobwebs’	<i>The Argosy</i> , LXXI	August 1900

1901

‘A Scrupulous Father’ repeated	<i>Truth</i> (New (New York) <i>Cornhill Magazine</i> LXXXIII	December 1900 February 1901
‘A Charming Family’	<i>The Illustrated London News</i> , CXVIII	4 May 1901
‘A Daughter of the Lodge’	<i>The Illustrated London News</i> , CXIX	17 August 1901

1902

‘The Riding-Whip’	<i>The Illustrated London News</i> , CXX	22 & 29 March 1902
‘Christopherson’	<i>The Illustrated London News</i> , CXXI	20 September 1902

1903

‘Topham’s Chance’	<i>The Daily Mail</i>	9 December 1903
‘Miss Rodney’s Leisure’	<i>T. P. ’s Weekly</i>	Christmas 1903

1904

‘The Pig & Whistle’	<i>The Graphic</i> , LXX	Christmas 1904
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Introduction

This study comprises a detailed examination of George Gissing's short stories with a view to tracing their development through three separate phases in order to establish the author's singularity in the field of realistic short fiction. However, during the course of the work it has become evident that his fluid political and philosophical leanings during the early 1880s had an enormous influence on his later fiction, rendering it necessary to broaden the scope of this work to include such of the author's non-fictional works as have been pivotal in placing the author among the leading short story writers of the late nineteenth century.

In his lifetime, George Gissing wrote over one hundred short stories, the majority of which achieved publication, yet to date this important area of the author's work has received scant critical attention. Broadly, Gissing's short story production falls into three separate phases, the first of which covers a six-month period during 1877 whilst the author was living in exile in America following his expulsion from Owens College, and subsequent imprisonment for theft. Gissing's departure was shrouded in mystery, thus his pioneering literary efforts remained a closely guarded family secret for many years. However, between 1920 and 1980 research into the archives of the Chicago press uncovered some twenty published stories. Individual finds have been well documented, but a detailed chronological record of these discoveries has yet to be produced. Consequently, the first chapter of this study provides a comprehensive account of the events that led up to what is believed to be the complete recovery of Gissing's first phase of short fiction,

though sight of the missing 1877 file of the *National Weekly* could well prove interesting. The American stories contain the nuclei of ideas that the author repeatedly reworked and refined to become major themes in his mature novels and short fiction; therefore the chapter also reflects the initial stages of the author's evolutionary approach to his work. The second chapter comprises detailed analyses of the most important of these early stories, notable for their experimental significance and their relevance to future work.

In view of its significance in relation to Gissing's changing political and philosophical values, and the influence these changes had on his later fiction, chapter three is devoted to his non-fictional output during the early eighties. This includes in-depth discussions of his 'Notes on Social Democracy' and contributions to the Russian journal *Vyestnik Evropy*, both of which provide a vital insight into Gissing's political views at the time, and 'The Hope of Pessimism' which serves a similar purpose in revealing a fundamental shift in the author's philosophical outlook. Attention is also paid to two early essays, 'On Battersea Bridge' and 'Along Shore,' in order to reveal a growing interest in social and environmental issues, foreshadowing the emergence of Gissing's innate conservatism.

From 1878 to 1884, while struggling for recognition as a novelist following his return to England, Gissing produced, in addition to his non-fictional work, eleven short stories. However, apart from 'The Artist's Child', which was a revised version of a story previously published in America, only 'Phoebe' achieved

publication during that time.¹ Despite their apparent lack of appeal to magazine editors however, a number of tales show enormous strides in composition and characterisation, revealing a progressive re-evaluation of technique and style. A major innovation at this time was that Gissing now tended to focus more on character than plot and, within an uncomplicated and plausible narrative, to observe impartially that character's reaction to good or ill fortune. In 'The Last Half-Crown' for example, a seemingly ordinary occurrence triggers off a series of events, which culminate in tragedy for the psychologically damaged hero. The laws of cause and effect are key to maintaining credulity in the story, and to this end the author focuses on a single act, and allows the consequences to evolve naturally through a sequence of plausible events. Although for most of this period, deed and consequences represent the basic philosophy underpinning Gissing's short fiction, a marked trend is seen to emerge revealing a growing interest in the sociological and psychological ramifications of causality. Thus, chapter four traces the author's artistic development during his second phase of short fiction in light of the political and philosophical influences discussed in chapter three.

Since only eleven stories were produced between 1880 and 1884, these are analysed in their entirety in chapter five in order to establish the overriding philosophy persistent themes have in common, and furthermore to reveal the emergence of a powerful counter philosophy, grounded in Schopenhauerean doctrine, that by the end of his second phase begins to dominate Gissing's short fiction. Chapter six centres on a discussion of late nineteenth century realism in

¹ 'The Artist's Child' was published in *Tinsleys' Magazine* in January 1878; 'Phoebe' appeared in *Temple Bar* in March 1884.

relation to its application in the author's short work. In view of his singular approach to realism in his short stories, emphasis is placed on his exceptional gift for authentic characterisation in this field.

The most prolific and extended phase of Gissing's short fiction began in 1890 and continued until shortly before his death in 1903, by which time his stories were sought after by leading magazine editors of the day. Chapter seven records the author's progress through his third period towards his ultimate mastery of the genre. Here, as in previous chapters, attention is drawn to the experimental and innovative nature of Gissing's work.

At the end of December 1896, a request was received from J H Rose, editor of Blackie's Victorian Era Series, for a monograph on Dickens. A telling diary entry notes: '*Shall be glad to have this change from fiction-grinding,*' signalling the burgeoning of Gissing's critical acumen.² In the event this significant movement away from fiction formed a considerable part of his literary output for the remaining eight years of his life, running seamlessly from specially commissioned works on Charles Dickens to his later *By the Ionian Sea* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Finally, as with chapters two and five, which focus on stages one and two, chapter nine is principally concerned with analyses of stories from the author's third phase of short fiction; selections are made from the three series of stories published in leading magazines of the day, and the most notable individual tales from the period.

² *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1978), ed. Pierre Coustillas, p. 430.

Throughout this study there are references to Gissing's juvenilia, an interesting eclectic mix of genres in one so young, comprising two critical essays, an essay on the Yorkshire Moors, a short story and four plays, all of which are discussed in chapter four. In each case these early pieces reveal signs of the young writer's future potential. Full transcripts of these works are contained in Appendices A–H.

By the 1890s Gissing's short stories were in popular demand. Jerome K Jerome commissioned him to write six sketches for *To-Day* magazine, under the heading 'Nobodies at Home,' and Clement Shorter, editor of *The Illustrated London News*, *The English Illustrated Magazine* and *The Sketch*, published two series of Gissing's stories entitled 'Human Odds and Ends' and 'Great Men in Little Worlds,' as well as numerous individual tales. In all, Gissing produced some seventy short stories during this latter period of his life, and the titles of the three series give a good indication of the direction his work had taken. By the mid 1890s Gissing had mastered the art of realistic representation, producing a seemingly inexhaustible array of distinctive human figures, with but one characteristic in common - the capacity to come to terms with misfortune and to rise above it.

CHAPTER ONE

Exile in America

The twenty or so stories written during the course of George Gissing's brief sojourn in America represent the first of three distinct phases of his career in short fiction.¹ Notwithstanding some unevenness in style, the American tales are notable for being generative of more fully developed themes and characterisations in the author's later works. Furthermore, several stories reveal his growing appetite for experimentation, indicating a preference for narrative primacy over plot, multiple theme interaction and indeterminate endings. Bearing in mind the author's undoubted lack of self-esteem following the dramatic turn of events that put an end to his academic dreams and separated him from the girl he loved, it is not surprising that his first literary efforts should rely rather heavily on sensation and melodrama, at that time revealing no trace of his aptitude for satirising the absurd, bringing pathos to the commonplace, and chastening the vain with a touch of gentle irony, all of which would become hallmarks of his mature short fiction.

Gissing's year of exile in America was undoubtedly one of the most crucial periods of his career. Compared with his experience during the early years following his return to England, he enjoyed remarkable success across the Atlantic, and this clearly reinforced his self-belief when times were hard. From his letter to

¹ The signed and attributed tales, including a disputed supernatural trilogy, appear in three collections of Gissing's American short stories, these being *Sins of the Fathers and other tales*, ed. V. Starrett (Chicago: Pascal Covici, 1924); George Gissing, *Brownie* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931); *George Gissing: Lost Stories from America*, ed. R. L. Selig (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

brother Algernon it is evident that, even though publishers were consistently turning down his work, Gissing had faith in himself as a writer:

... if ever literature was a man's vocation it is certainly mine. I feel that no amount of discouragement will make me cease writing; indeed I cannot conceive of my life otherwise than as being spent in scribbling. I have written now for so long that it has become second nature.²

Indeed, had Gissing experienced in America the kind of treatment he received from English publishers and editors between 1877 and 1884, he might well have carried out his threat to 'very seriously begin to think of some business or other, even if it be the position of draper's clerk.'³ For six years, with the exception of a re-written version of 'The Artist's Child,' Gissing's self-funded *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) remained his sole work of fiction to achieve publication.⁴

As holder of an Oxford Local Exhibition, a University of London Exhibition, and Owens College's own Shakespeare Scholarship, Gissing seemed destined for a brilliant academic career.⁵ However, his hopes came to an abrupt end in his senior college year, when he became infatuated with Nell Harrison, a young prostitute. Fellow student George Black clearly regarded the affair as a youthful prank, no more than an opportunity for him to engage in a bout of sexual rivalry with his friend, but as his conscience-stricken letter reveals, Black soon discovered that Gissing was deeply in love:

² *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Volume One 1863 – 1880, eds., P. F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young and P. Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1990), p. 238.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁴ *Lost Stories from America*, pp. 59-65, 67-76. Version one of 'The Artist's Child' was published in *The Alliance* on June 30, 1877; the wholly re-written version two was published in *Tinsleys' Magazine* (London) on January 22, 1878; George Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880; Brighton: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1985).

⁵ Pierre Coustillas, 'George Gissing à Manchester,' *Études Anglaises*, 16 (July - September, 1963), p. 260.

My dear fellow, I feel wretched at receiving your letter - you saw me on Tuesday "smiling" bitterly when we were talking of this poor girl; what do you suppose are my feelings when I know the real case! How could you expect me to think that all you said of her was said in good earnest? I believed everything, except that you had really fallen in love with her. Then, why - can you imagine me so base, if I had known your affection for her, to wish to cut you out?⁶

Black provided the address in Southport where the young couple spent a clandestine holiday, and also helped to install the sewing machine that Gissing bought to provide Nell with an alternative occupation to prostitution.⁷ In a letter warning his friend of the furore his absence was creating, Black was alarmingly prophetic: 'Thinkst thou the Sun will ever shine? Nay verily, the day will come, has come when the Sun shall shine no more & all thy glory shall depart.'⁸

In May 1876, Gissing was caught red-handed stealing money from the cloakroom at Owens College, was expelled on 7 June 1876, and on 28 July received a letter from the College, enclosing a cheque in payment of the 'income of the Shakespere Scholarship up to the date of your expulsion from the College, from which period your Scholarship is forfeited.'⁹ Gissing served one month's hard labour at Bellevue Prison, Manchester, and in the autumn of that year left England for America.¹⁰

On his departure, Gissing wrote a love poem to Nell promising ultimate reunion:

O peace, my love, and let safe sleep
Lie calm upon thy breast;

⁶ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁸ p. 44.

⁹ p. 45.

¹⁰ Paul Delany, 'Gissing in Prison,' *The Gissing Journal*, Vol. XXXII, No. 4 (October, 1996), p.12.

Forget thy sorrows, cease to weep,
 And lay thy heart to rest.
 In yon' new world I seek a home
 Far, far from England's shore;
 Wait but a while and thou shalt come,
 With me to weep no more!¹¹

Much has been written about the sorry outcome of the author's relationship with Nell, yet, from the tone of the poem, there can be little doubt that at its beginning the young man was deeply in love, and not, as has been claimed, driven by a misguided sense of chivalry.

Gissing arrived in Boston, Massachusetts, all but destitute except for a few letters of introduction, one of which brought him into contact with William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, through whom he hoped to obtain a post on the paper. When this plan failed, he submitted an essay on Burns and Heine, but this too was unsuccessful.¹² However, his review 'Art Notes - "Elaine" - Rosenthal and Tojetti,' was accepted by *The Boston Commonwealth*, and published on 28 October 1876.¹³ Although he produced other stories - 'I have just been writing some "Sketches of Life in an English Manufacturing Town." I have sent them to one of our Magazines' - clearly these were rejected, since on 28 January 1877, he informed Algernon that he had obtained a teaching post at Waltham High School.¹⁴

¹¹ *George Gissing's American Notebook: Notes - G. R. G. - 1877*, ed., B. Postmus (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press Ltd., 1993), pp. 6-7. Quoted from *Verses by George Gissing: 1869 to [1882]*, manuscript notebook, Beinecke Library of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Yale University, pp. 76-8.

¹² *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1., p. 47.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 52. 'I am doing a little writing for newspapers & periodicals. Ask Mother to let you see the newspaper I sent her.'

¹⁴ pp. 53, 55-7.

Unfortunately, a paragraph appeared in the *Waltham Free Press* on 5 January 1877 stating, 'Mr G. is a graduate of Owens College, England,' and it is generally believed that fear of his expulsion being discovered was the main cause of Gissing's abrupt departure from Waltham on 28 February 1877.¹⁵ However, Robert Selig suggests in *George Gissing: Lost Stories from America* (1992), that the young man's sudden disappearance may have been motivated more by the desire to avoid temptation than by fear of exposure. Selig claims that while at Waltham Gissing had an 'incipient romance' with Martha Barnes, a pupil at the school, which not only questioned the depth of his feelings for Nell, but also potentially made a mockery of the whole sorry business.¹⁶ Moreover, Pierre Coustillas, who first unearthed this interesting fact, sees the brief interlude as further proof that the unsigned 'The Sins of the Fathers' belongs irrefutably to the Gissing canon; like the author, the hero falls in love with a prostitute, goes to America, teaches there, and has an affair with a high-school student.¹⁷ On the evidence he has gathered, Coustillas hypothesises:

Haunted as he was by the sense of his responsibilities, he must have been smitten with remorse after allowing his passion for his pupil to develop. His past, he had already thought, made him forever unacceptable to a young girl of good family, and he found flight from Waltham the only means of remaining faithful to Nell.¹⁸

¹⁵ A reference to a *Waltham Free Press* news item on page twenty of twenty-four pages described as 'Materials collected by P. M. Stone about Gissing's residence in Waltham, Mass.' notes that Gissing left Waltham High School on 28 February 1877. Collection GEN. MSS. 286, Folder No. 158, Box. No. 7 held by the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁶ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 4.

¹⁷ Pierre Coustillas, 'Gissing's Short Stories: A Bibliography,' *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1964), p.64.

¹⁸ John Halperin, *Gissing: A Life in Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 22, 375 and 371; quotation from Chapter III of Coustillas' unpublished 'George Gissing: The Dynamics of Frustration.'

A personal visit to the Beinecke Library at Yale University in May 2001, uncovered research, undertaken between 1941 and 1953 by Percival Stone, into Gissing's brief period at Waltham School and his relationship with Martha Barnes. It appears that Stone's first contact was Martha Barnes herself, who informed him on 7 February 1941: 'I have the said letter & two pictures of Geo. Gissing and *The Whirlpool*, for your inspection if you wish – all dated.'¹⁹ Stone then wrote to Richard Neibling about his interest in Martha Barnes, to which the Professor replied:

In *The Nation* for August 7, 1916 (vol. CIII, p. 154) there was published a letter to Gissing from a friend he had made while teaching at Waltham. According to Professor Edgar J. Goodspeed, who published the letter, Gissing corresponded with this friend for over twenty years. The name of the correspondent is not given – could it have been Miss Barnes?²⁰

In 1942 Professor Niebling sent Stone a copy of his article 'The Adams-Gissing Collection,' published in the *Yale University Gazette* in January 1942, at the foot of which he appended the following note: 'For an interesting use of G's Waltham experiences, see his *Sins of the Fathers* ... the title-story. Minnie Warren must be your old lady in Waltham.'²¹ In January 1944, Martha Barnes again wrote to Stone offering him her collection of Gissing memorabilia: 'If you would care to call at any time before long, I would like to deliver now to your hands – myself – the Gissing books etc promised to you for later.'²²

In response to an enquiry in the *New York Saturday Review of Literature* relating to the American career of George Gissing, Stone wrote, on 12 October

¹⁹ Page one of twenty-four unnumbered pages described as 'Materials collected by P. M. Stone about Gissing's residence in Waltham, Mass.'

²⁰ Ibid., pages three and four.

²¹ Page nine.

²² Page two.

1946, to a Mr Paterson imparting all the information he had gleaned from his research so far. His letter contained a cutting from the *Waltham Free Press* dated 9 March 1877:

We regret to learn that Mr. Gissing, the accomplished teacher of our High School left town suddenly and unexpectedly on Thursday of last week in a distracted state of mind in consequence of a disappointment he had suffered.²³

The letter stated:

Another of Gissing's pupils, Miss Martha McC. Barnes, died last Spring at the ripe age of 88 years. For many years I enjoyed very friendly associations with Miss Barnes, who was a school teacher here during my youthful days and I had long been keenly interested in her own recollections of one who was to become a famed literary figure. At time of Gissing's stay here, Martha was 18 years old and it is said by those who remember her during that period, a singularly attractive girl: I judge from her remarks that she and G. G. had been attracted to one another, but she never "expanded" upon the theme except to state that following his departure from Waltham he had carried on a correspondence with her for several years. You can imagine the shock I experienced when she told me some 10 years ago that during one of her Spring housecleaning operations she had burned up some dozen or more Gissing letters in her back yard incinerator. One only has been salvaged and this was presented to me in 1945 together with an inscribed 1st ed. copy of *Eve's Ransom* and an inscribed photograph (taken, I judge, during the late nineties).

Miss Barnes also informed me some years ago that Gissing had dedicated some verses to her during his stay here but, - alas - she had no copy of them at hand, and was unable to quote any of the lines with any degree of accuracy. One would, indeed, like to learn something of their precise nature.²⁴

Stone's article, sent to the *News-Tribune* in November 1953, entitled 'George Gissing (1857 - 1903), with some notes surrounding his engagement as Instructor in WALTHAM HIGH SCHOOL' recapitulates his findings during his research. Referring to the lost letters from Gissing to Martha Barnes, he comments: 'One wonders, of course, as to the nature of this animated correspondence which

²³ Page fifteen.

²⁴ Page sixteen.

continued up to 1897 [...]’.²⁵ At a Gissing Exhibition at the National Book League in London in June and July 1971, a first edition of *Eve’s Ransom* (1895) was shown, inscribed ‘To Miss Martha McC. Barnes, in pleasant memory of years ago. George Gissing Ap. 1895.’²⁶

The last pieces of evidence relating to this research are two letters, dated 9 and 13 November 1953 respectively, from the City Librarian of Wakefield Public Library, one acknowledging a letter from Stone, enclosing his correspondence with Paterson, the other returning the enclosures.²⁷ Vexingly, the mystery appears destined to remain unsolved.

After leaving Waltham, Gissing travelled, via New York, to Chicago. The city was still suffering the effects of the great fire of 1871 and the 1873 financial crisis, as a consequence of which all its literary periodicals had been forced to close, thus Gissing had no option but to look for work among the local newspapers.²⁸ Using the same tactics as in Boston, but lacking letters of introduction, he presented himself before the managing editor of the *Chicago Tribune* and asked for a post on his staff.²⁹ He failed to get a job, but his first story, ‘The Sins of the Fathers,’ was accepted by the *Tribune* and published on 10 March 1877.³⁰

²⁵ Page twenty.

²⁶ John Spiers and Pierre Coustillas, *The Rediscovery of George Gissing* (London: The National Book League, 1971), p. 102.

²⁷ Pages twenty-two and twenty-three of twenty-four pages described as ‘Materials Collected by P. M. Stone’.

²⁸ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 5.

²⁹ *American Notebook*, pp. 21 and 64, notes 9-10.

³⁰ *The Sins of the Fathers*, introduction, unnumbered first page.

Selig's extensive research into the life of Samuel Medill reveals that Gissing was indeed fortunate to make the managing editor of the *Tribune* his first point of call.³¹ It seems likely that it was the young writer's desperate need as much as his earnest endeavour, that persuaded Medill to publish so much of his work. After his death, the full extent of the editor's generous nature was revealed in his paper's touching tribute:

There was one quality of his character that was but little known, and that was his generosity, and his generosity was little known because it was bestowed in a quiet, private manner, and upon those whom he knew could never make any requital to him. ... There never was a time when he did not have some ragged little protégé whom he was clothing, some hungry mouth which he was filling, or some hopeless one he was encouraging.³²

Gissing lived in Chicago from March to July 1877, during which time the *Chicago Tribune* published five of the author's stories, or eight if a disputed supernatural trilogy is included.

While in America, Gissing kept a notebook of miscellaneous jottings, from which it is plain that distance did not diminish his love for Nell Harrison. A quotation from George Eliot's *Romola* is especially poignant: 'Wherever affection can spring, it is like the green leaf and the blossom - pure and breathing purity, whatever soil it may grow in.'³³ Similarly, an extract from George Sand's *Lucrezia Floriani* is an outpouring of deep, yet troubled, passion:

Quand tu verras deux époux, excellents l'un pour l'autre, s'aimer d'une manière paisible, tendre et fidèle, dis que c'est de l'amitié; mais quand tu te sentiras, toi, noble et honnête homme, violemment épris d'une misérable

³¹ Robert L. Selig, 'Gissing's Benefactor at the *Chicago Tribune*: An Identification from a Passage in *New Grub Street*,' *Études Anglaises*, 38 (1985), pp. 434-41.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 439.

³³ *American Notebook*, p. 22.

*courtisane, sois certain que ce sera de l'amour, et n'en rougis pas! C'est ainsi que le Christ a chéri ceux qui l'ont sacrifié!*³⁴

Interestingly, the significance of the quotation from *Lucrezia Floriani* has since been noted in Bouwe Postmus' recently published *An Exile's Cunning: Some Private Papers of George Gissing* (1999).³⁵

The notebook not only provides a fascinating insight into the writer's state of mind during his exile, it also points to the source of several of his later works; the 'friendly lead' in *Thyrza* (1887) for instance, almost certainly derives from the entry 'Sentimental Songs in Music Halls.'³⁶ Gissing had a habit of reworking material, and 'How They Cooked Me' appears to be an amusing inversion of his account of Maria Kauffmann's unhappy real-life experience:

Maria Angelica Kaufmann [sic] (the painter), had addresses paid to her by Eng. artist. She refused him and he detd. on revenge. Selected handsome young man from lowest ranks - been valet - and passed him off to her as Count Horn. Man becomes accepted suitor and married her. Rejected artist disclosed his deceit, and low husband got rid of by payment.³⁷

Although it is probable that the note was written after his departure from America, Gissing was obviously aware of the story since Angelica Kauffmann, who died in 1807, was well known among the English art fraternity, having been a close friend of Sir Joshua Reynolds.³⁸

³⁴ Ibid., p. 38. English translation: 'When you see a married couple, good for each other, loving in a quiet manner, tender and faithful, call this friendship; but when you, noble and honourable man, find yourself violently attracted by a wretched prostitute then you can be sure that this is love, and do not blush! This is how Christ cherished those who were responsible for crucifying him!'

³⁵ Bouwe Postmus, *An Exile's Cunning: Some Private Papers of George Gissing* (Wormerveer, The Netherlands: Stichting UitgeverijNourd – Holland, 1999), p. 8.

³⁶ *American Notebook*, p. 26.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁸ pp 15-17 and p. 78, n. 120.

By supplementing the basic idea of false identity with a reversal of the sexes and lightening the tone, Gissing transformed an ill-natured factual event into an engaging farce. Ernest Morland is inordinately proud of his indifference to the charms of calculating women, claiming that principle and temperament are more attractive to him. Having never met her, he eagerly awaits his cousin's impending visit, visualising a woman who would meet his ideal. However, encouraged by Morland's mischievous sister, the cousin and her companion switch places, and the dupe is tricked into believing that cousin Annie is no better than her designing sisters, quite unlike the counterfeit companion, with whom he falls in love. When the ruse is revealed, Morland takes the joke in good part, but to his credit he had lived up to his conviction that he could love someone as 'poor as a dressmaker' so long as she matched up to his ideal.³⁹

Access to his personal memorabilia has enabled scholars to penetrate the conspiracy of silence shrouding the events that precipitated Gissing headlong into a literary career. There is a note in his *Commonplace Book* which reflects, albeit somewhat arrogantly, his resilience at that critical stage in his life: 'If it be true that the English national characteristic is to act without foresight, & then make up for the negligence by vigour & capability - what an Englishman I am!'⁴⁰ When one considers the number of personal documents that have survived, it would seem

³⁹ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 121.

⁴⁰ *George Gissing's Commonplace Book*, ed., J. Korg, (New York: The New York Public Library, 1962), p. 52.

that, despite his and his family's determination to erase all trace of his scandalous past, Gissing was nevertheless always mindful of posterity.⁴¹

The paper chase that has continued for more than three quarters of a century began within the pages of *New Grub Street* (1891), where a fictionalised account of Gissing's adventures in America is narrated by Whelpdale, a minor character in the novel. The author's *American Notebook* contains a short list of customers obtained while working as a photographer's assistant, thus corroborating Whelpdale's comment, 'I don't think I got half-a dozen orders,' and thereby the contents of the chapter.⁴² Furthermore, in *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (1912), a fictitious biography of Gissing, Morley Roberts states that he heard the whole American story at first hand from his friend:

He was, in fact, somewhat reserved as to his adventures there. And yet, little by little, I learnt a great deal ... With a very few comments and alterations, the account given in "Paternoster Row," contains the essence of Maitland's own adventures in America.⁴³

Roberts further intimates that 'it would be very interesting if some American student of Maitland would turn over the files of the *Tribune* in the years 1878 and 1879 and disinter the work he did there.'⁴⁴ The year in question was in fact 1877. It appears that Roberts deliberately misquoted the date to avoid the threat of libel.

⁴¹ *American Notebook; Commonplace Book; Diary; George Gissing at Work: A Study of his Notebook 'Extracts from my Reading,'* eds., P. Coustillas and P. Bridgwater, (Greensboro: University of North Carolina, 1988); *George Gissing's Memorandum Book: A Novelist's Notebook, 1895 - 1902*, ed., B Postmus, (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1997).

⁴² *American Notebook*, p. 60; George Gissing, *New Grub Street* (London: 1891; Penguin Classics, 1985), p. 431.

⁴³ Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland: A Record Dictated by J. H.* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912), pp. 33, 34-5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

On the basis that the clues contained in *New Grub Street* and *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* provided substantial proof of the whereabouts of Gissing's stories, several American academics began independent investigations into the files of the *Chicago Tribune*. Although the dates turned out to be inaccurate, Christopher Hagerup's diligent research eventually retrieved four Gissing's stories from the 1877 files of the paper.⁴⁵ While Hagerup was of the opinion that the tales were 'not important enough to justify publication' colleague Vincent Starrett argued that the 'early work of an author of Gissing's ability is not negligible, and often is of considerable biographical and bibliographic interest.'⁴⁶ Therefore, at the risk of doing 'Gissing's reputation a disservice,' Starrett 'privately determined some day to reprint the four discovered stories.'⁴⁷ The first collection of Gissing's American short stories, *Sins of the Fathers and other tales*, was published in 1924.

Although two of the tales, 'Gretchen' and 'Too Dearly Bought' were easily identifiable by the 'G.R.G.' signature Gissing used when writing to his brothers, 'The Sins of the Fathers' and 'R.I.P.' were unsigned. In the case of 'The Sins of the Fathers,' Whelpdale's helpful narrative in *New Grub Street*, reinforced by Frank Swinnerton's comments on the incident in *George Gissing: A Critical Study* (1912), pointed to the whereabouts of a pirated copy of the Chicago story.⁴⁸ Working independently of Hagerup, George Hastings, with the help of Edith Wade, assistant librarian of the Troy Public Library, discovered that a story had indeed been printed in the *Troy Times* on 14 July 1877, under the title 'The Sins of

⁴⁵ 'The Sins of the Fathers,' 'Gretchen,' 'R.I.P.' and 'Too Dearly Bought.'

⁴⁶ *Sins of the Fathers*, introduction, unnumbered pages three and four.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pages four and three.

⁴⁸ *New Grub Street*, p. 432; Frank Swinnerton, *George Gissing: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1912; new edition 1924), pp. 25-26.

the Father,' thereby confirming authorship of the original publication.⁴⁹ 'R.I.P.' has been accepted on the basis that it resembles the signed stories in its unhappy ending, and its sombre tone. What seems to have gone unnoticed however, is the fact that the heroine is called Marianne, the first name of Nell Harrison, a perhaps more compelling proof of its authenticity. Gissing used Nell's names in their various forms in a number of his American stories. Mary appears in 'Brownie,' 'Dead and Alive,' 'A Terrible Mistake,' 'A Mother's Hope,' 'A Game of Hearts' and 'One Farthing Damages,' Marion in 'The Warden's Daughter,' and Helen in 'The Mysterious Portrait.' The heroine of *Workers in the Dawn*, the author's first novel, is also called Helen, and the fact that the novel focuses on the positive and negative characteristics of two female figures, suggests that Helen and Carrie represent the opposing poles of Nell's nature.

'The Sins of the Fathers,' Gissing's first American story, is a bleak tale of deception and revenge. Leonard Vincent's first glimpse of Laura is a forewarning of the grotesque creature she is soon to become:

The dark, flashing eyes, the long black hair all unkempt and streaming over the girl's shoulders, the face lovely in its outlines, now weird with its look of agony and ghastly pale, made a picture such as he had never looked on, and held him for a moment as immovable as though he had been gazing upon the head of Medusa.⁵⁰

Driven to despair by his father's evil plotting, Laura pursues Leonard to America, and on discovering that he is happily married, she drowns both herself and her faithless lover.

⁴⁹ *Brownie*, introduction, p. 10

⁵⁰ *Sins of the Fathers*, p. 2.

Like ‘The Sins of the Fathers,’ ‘R.I.P.’ and ‘Too Dearly Bought’ are dark, brooding melodramas: ‘R.I.P.’ begins with Marianne’s suicide, and the events leading up to her death are then narrated by her grieving husband, who, after many years of searching, has discovered her tomb in the village where she died; ‘Too Dearly Bought’ is a sorrowful tale of poverty, temptation, theft, guilt and atonement, an early amalgam of themes that recur persistently throughout Gissing’s fiction. Specifically, there are strong echoes of ‘Too Dearly Bought’ in ‘Joseph Yates’ Temptation,’ an attributed American story, and the tale also closely parallels the author’s later *A Life’s Morning* (1888). ‘Gretchen’ is altogether lighter in tone, being a frothy romance about an artist who sees the girl of his dreams in the portrait of a beautiful young woman. After many false trails, he finally meets his ideal in the flesh, whereupon they fall in love, and subsequently marry.

Despite Starrett’s fears for Gissing’s reputation, academic interest in his lost stories has increased over the years rather than diminished, and moreover, the first American recoveries have played a significant part in identifying further unsigned stories. The striking resemblance between ‘The Sins of the Fathers’ and ‘Too Wretched to Live,’ brought to light not only the later Gissing story, but led indirectly to the retrieval of five other *Daily News* publications.⁵¹ ‘Gretchen’ holds the bulk of the evidence supporting Robert Selig’s arguments regarding ‘The Portrait’ and its two companion pieces ‘The Mysterious Portrait’ and ‘The Picture,’ and undoubtedly, the distinctive plot device shared by ‘Too Dearly

⁵¹ *Lost Stories from America*, pp. 11-12. ‘A Game of Hearts,’ ‘How They Cooked Me,’ ‘The Portrait,’ ‘The Mysterious Portrait’ and ‘The Picture’.

Bought' and 'Joseph Yates' Temptation' adds considerable weight to Thomas Mabbott's claim for the latter story.⁵²

Although working independently of Hagerup, Professor Hastings was in fact pursuing similar leads in his search for Gissing's American stories, but the double blow of losing his notes in a house fire in 1924 and the publication of *Sins of the Fathers* in the same year, put an end to his investigations.⁵³ However, in addition to the four tales in the collection, Hastings had found a fifth, the 'G.R.G.' signed 'Brownie,' and a trilogy of unsigned supernatural stories he also attributed to the author.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, prompted by colleague Vincent Starrett's mention of a belief among Chicago journalists that Gissing had also written for the *Chicago Journal*, Professor Thomas Mabbott was following up yet another significant comment in Whelpdale's narrative. Having already mentioned that on arrival in Chicago he had approached the editor of the largest of the city's newspapers, Whelpdale further reveals that '[f]or some months I supported myself in Chicago, writing for that same paper, and for others.'⁵⁵ Believing that 'others' implied at least two papers in addition to the *Tribune*, Mabbott extended his search. Convinced that he would find further Gissing stories within the archives of other city dailies, Mabbott turned his attention to the *Chicago Journal*, which yielded two additional tales.⁵⁶ Further research led him to the *Chicago Post* and 'Joseph Yates' Temptation,' where,

⁵² Driven by poverty and the plight of their dependents, both Tim Ridley and Joseph Yates wrestle with the temptation to steal, but while Ridley yields, Yates is saved by the incorruptibility of a starving child.

⁵³ *Brownie*, introduction, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-38; 75-103. 'Brownie,' 'The Death Clock,' 'The Serpent-Charms' and 'Dead and Alive.'

⁵⁵ *New Grub Street*, p. 429.

⁵⁶ 'The Warden's Daughter' (28 April 1877) and 'Twenty Pounds' (19 May 1877).

bearing in mind Gissing's admiration for the novelist, the tale's resemblance to Dickens' Christmas stories left Mabbott in no doubt as to its authorship.

In 1931, Starrett and his two colleagues edited the *Brownie* collection, containing Mabbott's three attributions, and Hastings' 'Brownie' and supernatural trilogy. Like *Sins of the Fathers*, the stories in *Brownie* are predominantly melodramatic, 'Brownie' for example, being a chilling tale of deception and revenge that has much in common with 'The Sins of the Fathers.' Both Vincent and Denby hide their evil intentions behind a mask of geniality, but unlike Laura, Brownie has never trusted her uncle, and when her sister drowns in suspicious circumstances, she knows instinctively that Denby has killed her. Seeking revenge, Brownie devises a series of unnerving incidents that ultimately force Denby back to the river and a watery grave.

Apart from a remote kinship with the unauthenticated 'Dead and Alive,' there is little to connect 'The Warden's Daughter' with Gissing other than the autobiographical link with its prison setting and harsh punishment of the hero. The story centres upon a crippled girl's pity for a prisoner. Awakening from a coma, as a result of which he has been presumed dead, Aymer Preston escapes from prison with the help of the Warden's daughter. Time goes by and Marion is alone, barely scraping a living as a seamstress; Aymer meanwhile, having proved his innocence, has searched in vain for his trusting accomplice. A chance meeting brings a joyful end to empty years of loneliness.

The unsigned 'Twenty Pounds' shares an affinity with the cyclical pattern of the later 'The Poet's Portmanteau,' and in addition offers an interesting reversal of the redemption theme in 'Joseph Yates' Temptation' - in both tales intractable employers experience a change of heart when made to reflect upon their past lives - but while the anti-hero of 'Joseph Yates' Temptation' makes true atonement, in 'Twenty Pounds' Blendon retracts only under the threat of public exposure. The main thrust of the story is that as a result of a wager for twenty pounds, the loser is instrumental in preserving a young man's reputation. Unfortunately, the anonymous benefactor is an incurable gambler who, having fallen on hard times, embezzles twenty pounds in order to settle a debt. Blendon, the recipient of the original twenty pounds, is now the gambler's employer, but success has cost him his humanity, and he is determined to punish Staining for his crime. Acting as intermediary, the narrator forces Blendon to reflect on his own history, and in return for an assurance that his past will not be exposed, he agrees to exonerate Staining. Blendon's *volte-face* comes too late however, since Staining is already dead. On a lighter note, 'The Poet's Portmanteau' is about a stolen manuscript that, like the twenty pounds, makes a circuitous route back to its owner.

'Joseph Yates' Temptation' focuses on a poor man's desire to give his family a happy Christmas. Like Ridley's in 'Too Dearly Bought,' Yates' theft is motivated by goodness of heart; unlike Ridley however, Yates is spared the agony of guilt through a chance meeting with a starving child. The waif turns out to be the son of Yates' employer, and both men are humbled by the courage of the boy and his deserted mother. Strong elements of 'Joseph Yates' Temptation' are visible in *A Life's Morning*, both Yates and Mr Hood inadvertently find themselves in

possession of their employer's money, but while Hood pays for his crime with his life, Yates is saved from sin by the incorruptibility of the abandoned mother and child.

Undoubtedly 'The Death Clock,' 'The Serpent-Charms' and 'Dead and Alive,' the three supernatural stories attributed by Professor Hastings, represent the most tenuous claim to Gissing authorship. The controversy gave rise to a publicly aired debate in 1987 between Professors Selig and Coustillas.⁵⁷ Selig rejects the trilogy on the basis that nowhere in his fiction does Gissing touch on the paranormal. However, he grudgingly acknowledges that 'Dead and Alive,' which he points out deals with natural rather than supernatural phenomena, does bear a certain resemblance to the author's early work. Nevertheless, he dismisses this on the grounds that since the three stories are inextricably linked by the name Vargrave, a character in the first tale, and the author of the other two, 'Dead and Alive' could not be accepted in isolation.⁵⁸ Coustillas seizes on Selig's partial capitulation to press home the opposing point that since 'the three stories were produced by the same pen ... [w]e can just as well accept the three because 'Dead and Alive' clearly bears the novelist's hallmark.'⁵⁹ Interestingly, 'Dead and Alive' shares the theme of incarceration with 'The Warden's Daughter,' an accepted Gissing attribution that has been authenticated by Selig's later retrieval of the almost identical 'The Warden's Daughter' among the files of the *Chicago Daily News*, the main source

⁵⁷ Robert L. Selig, 'Unconvincing Gissing Attributions: 'The Death Clock,' 'The Serpent-Charms,' 'Dead and Alive,' *The Library*, sixth series, Vol. 9, No. 2 (June, 1987), pp. 168-72; P. Coustillas, 'Correspondence: Unconvincing Gissing Attributions,' *The Library*, sixth series, Vol. 9, No. 3 (September, 1987), pp. 274-77.

⁵⁸ 'Unconvincing Gissing Attributions,' p. 170.

⁵⁹ 'Correspondence: Unconvincing Gissing Attributions,' p. 274.

of his many discoveries.⁶⁰ In 'The Warden's Daughter,' Preston's death-like trance closely parallels Mary Munroe's drugged 'sleep like death' in the disputed tale; both victims are pronounced dead and come back to life, and as Aymer proves his innocence through a dying man's confession in 'The Warden's Daughter,' so does Shakovsky in 'Dead and Alive.'⁶¹

It is possible, by tracing a convoluted route through the unsigned tales, to construct a hypothetical bridge between the anonymous American stories and Gissing's later work. Vincent Starrett detects 'the flavor of the "G.R.G." who wrote under the spell of Dickens' in both 'The Warden's Daughter' and 'Joseph Yates' Temptation,' the latter story having in addition distinctive links with 'Twenty Pounds,' which in turn is analogous to 'The Poet's Portmanteau.'⁶² Since Gissing is known to have written the last story, it is logical to assume that he also penned the rest of the chain. If the noted resemblances between 'The Warden's Daughter' and 'Dead and Alive' have any significance, then the disputed tale must also be a constituent of the connecting bridge. Logically therefore, since the authorial link between 'Dead and Alive' and the other two tales is unequivocal, the supernatural trilogy must form part of the Gissing canon.

A further boost to the author's known American output occurred in 1933, when M C Richter's article 'Memorabilia' established the existence of three more

⁶⁰ Robert L. Selig, 'An Unknown Gissing Story from the *Chicago Daily News*,' *Studies in Bibliography*, Vol. 36 (1983), pp. 206-7.

⁶¹ *Brownie*, p. 100.

⁶² *Ibid.*, introduction, p. 15.

signed stories.⁶³ Through correspondence with Gissing's younger son pertaining to the purchase of a 'G.R.G.' initialled copy of 'Art Notes - "Elaine" - Rosenthal and Tojetti,' the book dealer learned that Alfred's father had also used the pseudonym 'G. R. Gresham,' thus 'A Terrible Mistake,' 'The Artist's Child' and 'An English-Coast Picture' were added to the growing list. There the matter rested until 1979, when Professor Coustillas became convinced that an entry in Gissing's *Commonplace Book* pointed to a hitherto unsuspected avenue of research, which Robert Selig followed up on his colleague's behalf:

There has come to my mind an odd incident in my literary experiences in America. I wrote some stories for a man who combined the keeping of a dry-goods store with the editing of a weekly paper, - & had always, by the bye, to wait about in the shop & dun him for payment due. I told him one day that I had finished a long story for serial publication, & asked if he would have it. One of his chief inquiries was: "Do you tell the *ends* of all the characters?" An odd requirement, & with him, as I saw, a *sine qua non*.⁶⁴

Alfred Gissing had been able to confirm the identity of both the author and the publisher of 'A Terrible Mistake' because a page of the *National Weekly* containing the story was preserved among his father's papers.⁶⁵ Since 'The Artist's Child' and 'An English-Coast Picture' bore the same pseudonym, the *Commonplace Book*'s mention of 'some stories' in a 'weekly paper' suggested that an examination of the Chicago weeklies might bear further fruit. Two additional 'Gresham' stories, 'A Mother's Hope' and 'A Test of Honor' were retrieved from the *Alliance* archives, but an investigation of the *National Weekly* was finally

⁶³ M. C. Richter, 'Memorabilia,' *Notes and Queries*, 165 (7 October, 1833), p. 236. For additional evidence see Gissing's letter to Algernon in *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 238: '... I had a sketch (about 6pp.) in a very good monthly called *Appletons' Journal*, for which I received 45 dollars, i.e. £9. The latter, by the bye, was a story, the scene of which was the Farne Islands, and was chiefly descriptive.'

⁶⁴ *Commonplace Book*, p. 52.

⁶⁵ The newspaper cutting was from *The National Weekly*, dated May 5, 1877, containing the story 'A Terrible Mistake' by G. R. Gresham.

abandoned because only four copies of the paper, one each from 1875, 1876, 1878 and 1880, had survived.⁶⁶ However, an exhaustive search of *The Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago* for 1877 revealed that James M Hill, editor of the *National Weekly*, was the man described in the *Commonplace Book*, and in fact a note in the *American Notebook* connects Hill with both the paper and the clothing business.⁶⁷

Since 1980, Selig has claimed six further attributions and these form part of the collection *George Gissing: Lost Stories from America*, which contains all discoveries made since 1933. Excluding the disputed trilogy, this brings the total to twenty, which as Selig points out, 'is just about "a story a week," as Gissing himself claimed.'⁶⁸ Although he concedes that this seems to be 'a reasonably full account of the intensity and extent of Gissing's literary apprenticeship during his time of exile,' he nevertheless firmly believes that '[u]ndiscovered Gissing fiction most certainly awaits whoever can find an 1877 file of the *National Weekly*.'⁶⁹

Lost Stories from America throws a new light on Gissing's American short stories. While the two earlier collections are in the main, unrelievedly dark and depressing, Selig's collection contains a surprisingly eclectic range of melodrama, comedy, satire, romance and lyrical prose. 'A Terrible Mistake,' Gissing's only

⁶⁶ Robert L. Selig, 'The *National Weekly*: A Lost Source of Unknown Gissing Fiction,' *The Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (January, 1982), p. 2.

⁶⁷ *American Notebook*, p. 21.

⁶⁸ Robert L. Selig, 'Three Stories by George Gissing: Lost Stories from Chicago,' *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1990), p. 281; *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 238. To Algernon: 'I don't think I ever told you how well I got on in America. Whilst in Chicago I wrote a story every week (three columns) for the leading daily paper ...'

⁶⁹ 'Three Stories by George Gissing: Lost Stories from Chicago,' p. 281; *The National Weekly: A Lost Source of Unknown Gissing Fiction*, p. 2.

known contribution to the *National Weekly*, tells of the dichotomy between romantic love and friendship. Two friends, Harold and Robert, fall in love with two sisters. Fearful that they might both love the same girl, the young men are greatly relieved to learn that this is not the case. The friendship suffers a serious setback however, when Harold catches sight of Robert apparently wooing his young lady, and reaches crisis point when Harold's two highly inflammatory letters are accidentally misdirected. Fortunately, with Robert's timely intervention commonsense prevails. Gissing's first attempt at comedy is refreshingly innovative, both in intricacy of plot and economy of resolution. When the theme reappears in 'Lou and Liz,' a story from Gissing's third phase of short fiction, its radically altered form more than realises the potential implicit in the American story.⁷⁰ A tale of two women friends, 'Lou and Liz' is broader in scope than 'A Terrible Mistake,' combining with misconception, the themes of poverty, dependency and conventional morality. Having been abandoned by their menfolk, Lou and Liz live together, and as an unmarried mother Liz is heavily dependent upon her friend for financial support. She is also in awe of Lou's respectable marital status. Although their unconventional lifestyle exposes them to considerable moral censure, this only reinforces their happy, but volatile friendship. This is put to the test however, when Lou unexpectedly meets her estranged husband on a Bank holiday outing, and Liz's fear that she might again have to fend for herself, creates a rift between the two women. Fortunately for Liz, the husband is exposed as a bigamist, leading to a resumption of the friends' bickering, yet

⁷⁰ George Gissing, *A Victim of Circumstances and other stories* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1927), pp. 219-36. 'Lou and Liz' was first published in *The English Illustrated Magazine* in August, 1893.

happy relationship, but, in view of Lou's humiliating comeuppance, thenceforth on a rather more equitable basis.

The theme of misapprehension recurs in many of Gissing's short stories. In addition to 'A Terrible Mistake,' two other American tales centre on the protagonist misconstruing a given situation; when he finally tracks her down, the besotted young artist in 'Gretchen' wrongly assumes that the girl in the portrait is the wife of the painter, while in 'A Game of Hearts' both Clara Vane and Morton Levyllian mislead each other by hiding their love behind a mask of indifference. Variations of the theme reappear three times during the author's second period of short fiction, and frequently throughout his last, most prolific phase.⁷¹

Misconception is also a key theme in several of the author's novels, though in most cases the outcome is serious rather than amusing. In *Workers in the Dawn*, Helen Norman is cruelly misled into believing that Arthur Golding has turned against her, while he, unaware of her visit to his home, assumes that she has accepted Gresham's lies about him. His misinterpretation of the situation leads to a reckless marriage and ultimately to his death at Niagara Falls. Gissing again focuses on the tragic consequences of misconjecture in *Thyrza*, where an overheard conversation leads the heroine to believe that Egremont is a faithful

⁷¹ The three stories from Gissing's second phase are 'An Heiress on Condition' privately printed for The Pennell Club, Philadelphia, 1923; 'My First Rehearsal' and 'My Clerical Rival,' ed., P. Coustillas (London: Enitharmon Press, 1970). Notable examples from the author's third phase are 'The Poet's Portmanteau,' 'In Honour Bound,' 'The Prize Lodger,' and 'Our Mr. Jupp,' in *Human Odds and Ends* (London: 1898; Sedgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1911); 'Topham's Chance' in *The House of Cobwebs*, (London: 1906; Constable & Co. Ltd., 1914); 'A Charming Family' in *Short Stories of To-day and Yesterday* (London, George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1929); 'The Fate of Humphrey Snell' and 'The Schoolmaster's Vision' in *A Victim of Circumstances*.

lover; ultimate disillusionment costs her the will to live. At a less dramatic level, the theme is integral to *Isabel Clarendon* (1886), *Eve's Ransom*, *The Crown of Life* (1899), *Our Friend the Charlatan* (1901), *Veranilda* (1904) and *Will Warburton* (1905).

'A Mother's Hope,' contained in *Lost Stories from America*, is a sombre account of a woman's unshakeable belief in her lost husband's survival, and her desperate efforts to restore their baby son's health in readiness for his father's return. In Selig's view the story is highly derivative of Wordsworth's 'The Ruined Cottage,' both centring on a grieving woman and her dying child, but unlike the soldier in the poem, the lost mariner does return, ironically just too late to see his son alive.⁷² Even greater irony rests in the fact that Mary's utopian dream of her husband's return does materialise; not as a Lazarus-like figure rising from the dead however, but rather as the belated homecoming of a feckless spouse who put profit before duty.

Gissing returns to the wife abandoned in pregnancy motif in *In The Year of Jubilee* (1894), where he explores more fully the implications of desertion and reunion. Secretly married and pregnant, Nancy Tarrant has to fend for herself while her husband seeks his fortune in the West Indies. On his return, Tarrant shows no remorse, rather his selfishness is compounded by his insistence on setting up separate households so that he can alternate between married life and bachelorhood at will. Many of the author's novels focus on marital disharmony,

⁷² *Lost Stories from America*, p. 34.

which probably accounts for his persistent search for workable variations to conventional marriage. These experiments are largely confined to his major works, such as Kirkwood's dutiful marriage to Clara in *The Nether World* (1889), Barfoot's offer of free union in *The Odd Women* (1893), and Alma and Harvey Rolfe's marriage without ties in *The Whirlpool* (1897), while the majority of his short stories incline more towards individual characterisation than gender incompatibility. Nevertheless, several of the later tales reveal some interesting permutations of the marital theme. Laurence Bloomfield's unwitting bigamous marriage drives him to murder and suicide in 'All for Love,' Jim Mutimer plays a fiendish trick on his wife and Bill Snowdon in 'Mutimer's Choice' by condemning them to a life of mutual misery, and in 'Their Pretty Way' the harmony of the Wager and Rush joint household is shattered by the peevish bickering of the discontented wives.⁷³

Bearing in mind Gissing's personal experience, it is not surprising that crime, particularly theft, is the dominant theme in seven of his American stories.⁷⁴ However, 'A Test of Honor' differs from the other six in that the guilt rests with the sinned against rather than the sinner; it judges Mrs Woodlow's lack of compassion a far greater moral transgression than that of her husband. Five of the stories appear to have some bearing on the treatment Gissing received at the hands of his accusers, and in the case of 'A Test of Honor,' one cannot escape the feeling

⁷³ 'All for Love' and 'Mutimer's Choice' belong to Gissing's second phase of short fiction, 'Their Pretty Way' to his third. All three tales are contained in *George Gissing: Essays & Fiction*, ed. P. Coustillas (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

⁷⁴ 'Too Dearly Bought' in *Sins of the Fathers*, 'Brownie,' 'The Warden's Daughter,' 'Twenty Pounds' and 'Joseph Yates' Temptation' in *Brownie*; 'A Test of Honor' and 'One Farthing Damages' in *Lost Stories from America*.

that Mrs Woodlow symbolises the Owens College disciplinary board. Like the College Senate, Mrs Woodlow lacks the humanity to forgive, and so condemns the penitent to exile.

The fact that many of the early short stories extol the spiritual virtues of women suggests that Gissing was somewhat idealistic in temperament, and as such might have seen his attempt to save Nell from the evils of prostitution and alcoholism as the act of a redeemer, a just cause for his crime. Tim Ridley is similarly persuaded in 'Too Dearly Bought.' Anxiety over his grandchild's health overrules moral scruple, and the small pile of coins on his benefactor's desk is impossible to resist:

For his own sake only he would never have dreamt of committing the theft ... It was the essential goodness of his heart that, by so forcibly presenting to him the excellence of the end tot [sic] be attained, blinded him for the moment to the true nature of the means.⁷⁵

Like 'A Test of Honor,' 'Too Dearly Bought' can be seen as a fictional representation of personal experience; Ridley's pangs of conscience parallel the author's emotional conflict between his sense of responsibility to Nell and his sense of betrayal of Owens College.

In addition to the similarities already noted between 'Joseph Yates' Temptation' and *A Life's Morning*, there are strong echoes of 'Too Dearly Bought' in the novel; finding a ten-pound note in a ledger after business has closed for the day, Mr Hood is obliged to take the money home. Next day a series of mishaps force him to spend some of the money, and because he cannot make up the deficit, he decides not to mention the incident. It turns out that Dagworthy, Hood's employer, had

⁷⁵ *Sins of the Fathers*, p. 106.

left the note in order to facilitate a devious scheme to force his employee's daughter into marriage. When she refuses to co-operate in the plan, shame and fear of exposure drive her distraught father to suicide. In 'Too Dearly Bought' Ridley's conscience compels him to return the money, allowing him the peace of atonement. Interestingly, while 'Too Dearly Bought' focuses on the mental anguish of its central character, *A Life's Morning* pays more attention to the psychological effect of Hood's death on his family and employer; Mrs Hood, Emily and Dagworthy all suffer physically and mentally in consequence of Hood's tragic suicide.⁷⁶

Gissing's third story for the *Alliance*, 'The Artist's Child' is a sentimental tale about an unsuccessful artist, whose frustrations are somewhat tempered by the budding genius of his young daughter. As Robert Selig points out, the story's special pleading for the cultured intellectual who lacks the drive to succeed in a competitive world makes it notable as the earliest precursor of *New Grub Street*.⁷⁷ Like Reardon in the novel, Julius Trent is painfully aware that his work is commercially unviable:

He could no longer conceal from himself that he was fated never to exceed mediocrity in his work, and repeated failures began to weaken the inward vision, which had once been sufficient to console him for the want of practical success.⁷⁸

Three months after his return to England, Gissing completely re-wrote 'The Artist's Child,' using elevated prose to intensify the pathos of the aesthetic

⁷⁶ George Gissing, *A Life's Morning* (London: 1888; Home & Van Thal, 1947). Mrs Hood's physical and mental state is described on p. 217; p. 236 reveals Emily's resolve to engage in 'a work of piety' and Dagworthy's inexplicable indulgence in 'self-mockery' is recounted on p. 243.

⁷⁷ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 57.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2

outsider. The second version was published in *Tinsleys' Magazine* in January 1878, demonstrating the author's predilection for recycling old material. In early 1893, Gissing spent some four months working on a new novel, only to abandon it at the point of completion, noting in his diary: 'Though I have only 20pp. to write of "The Iron Gods" I doubt whether I shall ever finish it.'⁷⁹ The book was never finished, but in April 1894, Gissing began work on *Eve's Ransom*, 'using as much as possible of [his] old Birmingham story' - even the original title is immortalised in the later text.⁸⁰

Both versions of 'The Artist's Child' emphasise the parent's pride in his gifted child. Far greater impact is achieved however, when the theme is inverted in the later 'A Victim of Circumstances,' one of Gissing's finest short stories. Rather than acknowledge his own mediocrity, Horace Castledine masquerades as the creator of his wife's exquisite watercolours at the expense of her personal artistic dreams. Even after her premature death he continues the pretence, blaming his now lost talent on his too early marriage and burdensome family. By the time Gissing had reached his third phase of short fiction, he had eliminated melodrama and, for the most part, two-dimensional figures. Having mastered the art of empathetic characterisation, he had become expert at what Wendell Harris describes as 'the unobtrusive but insistent representation,' of individuals ennobled in spirit by 'the necessity of quietly pushing on, uncomplainingly, giving thanks to whatever good comes, and steadfastly rejecting the thought of throwing in one's

⁷⁹ *Diary*, p. 302.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 335; *Eve's Ransom* (London: 1895; Ernest Benn Ltd., 1929), p. 25.

hand.’⁸¹ Like almost all of the fiction propagated from the American era, ‘A Victim of Circumstances’ is testament to the singular and evolutionary nature of Gissing’s work. By fleshing out characters into individuals rather than stereotypes, and importing layers of meaning into commonplace situations within minimal plots, Gissing created a unique style, whereby ‘the warmth of characterization, the avoidance of dire misfortune, and the inclusion of instances of the minor joys of life’ distinguish his kind of realism from the “unbeautiful” realism’ of nineties.⁸² Unlike his contemporaries Arthur Morrison, whose brutalised characters endure a violent existence amid the squalor of London’s East End, and Hubert Crackanthorpe, whose fiction ‘centres on life’s reversals that cause emotional wars and pain, notably in love situations,’ Gissing focused on the ‘unexceptional aspirations, desires, and sorrows’ of the lower-middle classes.⁸³

Robert Selig attributes the unsigned ‘Too Wretched to Live’ to Gissing on the basis of two plot devices that recur frequently throughout his work - death by drowning and the abandonment of one woman for another.⁸⁴ However, whilst the hero of ‘The Sins of the Fathers’ is unwittingly duped by his father into forsaking

⁸¹ Wendell V. Harris, ‘An Approach to Gissing’s Short Fiction,’ *Studies in Short Fiction*, 2 (Winter, 1965), p. 143.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁸³ Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago* (1895; London: Penguin Books, 1946) and *Tales of Means Streets* (1894; Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1983); Hubert Crackanthorpe, *Sentimental Studies* and *A Set of Village Tales* (1895); *Dictionary of Literary Biography: British Short Fiction Writers 1880 – 1914: The Realist Tradition*, ed., W. B. Thesing (London: Gale Research Inc., 1994), p. 61; ‘An Approach to Gissing’s Short Fiction,’ p. 140.

⁸⁴ Death by drowning occurs in ‘The Sins of the Fathers,’ *Sins of the Fathers*; ‘Brownie,’ *Brownie*; ‘Too Wretched to Live,’ *Lost Stories from America*; ‘All for Love,’ ‘The Last Half-Crown’ and ‘The Quarry on the Heath,’ *Essays & Fiction*; ‘The Day of Silence’ *George Gissing: The Day of Silence and Other Stories*, ed. P. Coustillas (London: Everyman, 1993). The novels featuring drowning are *Workers in the Dawn*, *Denzil Quarrier* and *The Odd Women*. The abandonment theme is used in ‘The Sins of the Fathers,’ ‘Joseph Yates’ Temptation,’ ‘A Mother’s Hope,’ ‘Too Wretched to Live’ and ‘Lou and Liz.’ Most notable among the novels are *The Unclassed*, *Isabel Clarendon*, *Demos*, *Thyrza*, *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *Eve’s Ransom* and *Our Friend the Charlatan*.

his first love for a more suitable union, in 'Too Wretched to Live' Arthur Melville abandons Lilian merely because he is fickle, becoming currently even more captivated by the 'beautiful, peerless Jessie,' than he was the previous summer 'by the beauty and grace of Lilian'.⁸⁵ Traumatized by the brutality of Melville's rejection, Lilian writes a pathetic farewell to her faithless lover, and then drowns herself in the lake close by the tree, under which he had once declared his everlasting love. Once read, the letter becomes a symbol of betrayal, although Melville marries Jessie, 'from the hour in which he received Lilian Frasier's letter, he never knew real happiness.'⁸⁶ The psychological effect of abandonment on both the victim and the villain is examined in depth in several of Gissing's later novels.⁸⁷ In *Demos* (1886), for instance, Emma Vine's compassionate nature burgeons after enduring the agony of desertion, while Mutimer's cruel rejection of Emma leads ultimately to a loss of self-worth.

Although Gissing's aptitude for drawing three-dimensional male figures - bringing out both their strengths and weaknesses - gave such as Ridley in 'Too Dearly Bought,' an interesting and credible persona, his tendency to portray female characters as either angel or devil sometimes created an imbalance within a story. In 'Too Wretched to Live' for instance, Lilian's suicide seems overwrought in relation to the story's comparatively undramatic content, while Laura's sadistic seeking out and killing Leonard in 'The Sins of the Fathers' verges on the

⁸⁵ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 101.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁸⁷ In *Isabel Clarendon*, *New Grub Street* and *Eve's Ransom*, the roles are reversed, Kingcote, Reardon and Hilliard being the abandoned victims; Kingcote loses Isabel because he is too sceptical to take a chance on love; when Amy deserts him, Reardon is enfeebled by self-pity; Hilliard, on the other hand, finds the moral strength to forgive Eve when she rejects his love for financial security.

maniacal. As his work matured however, Gissing acquired an instinctive grasp of the female psyche, which enabled him to understand, and reproduce in his fiction, the complexities and inconsistencies inherent in woman's contradictory nature. This ability reveals itself very forcibly in 'A Victim of Circumstances' where, out of concern for her husband's self-esteem, Hilda Castledine suppresses her longing for artistic recognition, allowing him to take credit for her exquisite works of art.⁸⁸

Like 'Too Wretched to Live,' all of Gissing's contributions to the *Chicago Daily News* were published unsigned, possibly, Selig suggests, in order not to prejudice his relationship with the editor of the *Tribune*.⁸⁹ His distaste for unethical practice is evident in a letter to Algernon, in which he anticipates the embarrassing possibility of the simultaneous publication of two of his novels: 'And how about "Mrs. Grundy" now? If she comes out close on the heels of "The Unclassed" there will have to be a complication of explanations.'⁹⁰ Interestingly, Selig's belief that the unsigned 'A Game of Hearts' belongs to the Gissing canon rests principally on an allusion in the text to 'Dame Grundy.'⁹¹ Society's conventional attitude to so-called impropriety was a source of vexation to the author throughout his career; delight at Bentley's acceptance of 'Mrs Grundy's Enemies' for instance, soon turned to disappointment as the novel suffered a succession of delays over its controversial content. The book was subsequently revised in deference to public taste, but in the event was never published.⁹² 'The

⁸⁸ *A Victim of Circumstances*, pp. 3-52.

⁸⁹ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 13.

⁹⁰ *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Volume Two : 1881 – 1885, eds. P. F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young and P. Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1991), p. 198.

⁹¹ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 107.

⁹² *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, pp. 111, 123, 125, 129-30, 155, 160, 173, 210, 245 and 266. Letters to Algernon from December 26, 1883 to November 11, 1884.

Scrupulous Father' from the author's last phase of short fiction, is an amusing satire on the absurdity of outmoded social mores.⁹³ Mr Whiston has created for himself and his daughter an ideal world in which he expects everyone to observe the rules of polite society. What he fails to understand, however, is that when he curtly discourages any contact that fails to meet his rigorous standards, he is himself guilty of gross discourtesy. His socially correct world becomes irreversibly fragmented when his daughter mounts a successful silent protest against his irrational dismissal of a potential suitor.

In an attack on the circulating libraries after Mudie's withdrew his novel *A Modern Lover* (1883) from their range following an objection from two lady members, George Moore's article 'A New Censorship of Literature', published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on 10 December 1884, provoked a lively exchange between irate correspondents, Gissing among them. Following the rejection of his second novel, *A Mummer's Wife* (1885), Moore responded with a second attack on the circulating libraries entitled *Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals*, published as a three-penny pamphlet by Vizetelly & Co. in 1885.⁹⁴ Gissing's contribution to the controversy refers to the preface to *Pendennis* (1850), in which its author frankly admits that he pays lip service to convention. Gissing contends that 'Thackeray, when he knowingly wrote below the demands of his art to conciliate Mrs. Grundy, betrayed his trust [...].'⁹⁵ Gissing always strove to maintain the

⁹³ *The House of Cobwebs*, pp. 88-105.

⁹⁴ Moore's 'A New Censorship of Literature,' the ensuing correspondence on the article and Moore's *Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals*, have since been published in *Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals*, ed. P. Coustillas (Hassocks: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1976).

⁹⁵ *Literature at Nurse*, p. 45.

highest literary standards, reaffirming on many occasions his continued commitment to artistic integrity.⁹⁶

Robert Selig claimed Gissing authorship for 'The Portrait,' 'The Mysterious Portrait' and 'The Picture,' all of which appeared in the *Daily News*, because of the proliferation of artists in the writer's work.⁹⁷ In addition, 'The Portrait' shares a plot device with 'Gretchen' and *Eve's Ransom*, as does 'The Mysterious Portrait' with *The Unclassed*. Like the artist in 'Gretchen,' the hero of 'The Portrait' becomes obsessed with a figure in a portrait, only in this case it is the image of a beautiful child. He learns from his friend Eugenie that the child is her cousin, who, now a grown woman, lives with her mother in 'reduced circumstances' after being cheated of an inheritance by Eugenie's parents. Southey meets his ideal one evening when she seeks his protection from a prowler. On reaching her home, they learn that the girl's mother has discovered a long-lost will, which nullifies the coerced one. Mother and daughter reclaim their rightful home, the villainous relatives receive their just deserts, and within the year Southey marries his ideal.

In *Eve's Ransom*, Hilliard is captivated by the picture of a girl in his landlady's photograph album. The unexpected repayment of a large debt enables him to give

⁹⁶ *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Volume Three : 1886 – 1888, eds. P. F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young and P. Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992), pp. 134-5; *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Volume Five : 1892 – 1895, eds. P. F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young and P. Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 155, 286; *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Volume Seven: 1897 - 1899, eds. P. F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young and P. Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995), p. 267; *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Volume Eight : 1900 – 1902, eds. P.F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young and P. Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996), p.429.

⁹⁷ 'Gretchen,' 'The Artist's Child,' 'An English-Coast Picture,' 'An Heiress on Condition,' 'A Victim of Circumstances,' *Workers in the Dawn*, *Isabel Clarendon*, *The Emancipated*, *Denzil Quarrier*, *The Crown of Life*, *Will Warburton*.

up his job, and sample 'the taste of free life' in Paris, but he finds himself inexorably drawn to London in hopeless pursuit of the girl in the photograph.⁹⁸ Unlike the women in 'Gretchen' and 'The Portrait,' Eve is not idealised, rather her decision to reject Hilliard is hard-headed and practical, a sign of her determination never again to be ruled by passion.⁹⁹ For Hilliard, however, the relationship engenders real moral growth: troubled by Eve's increasingly erratic behaviour, his appetite for the 'free life' soon gives way to concern, releasing a hitherto unsuspected vein of generosity and compassion.¹⁰⁰

Although a very minor figure in 'The Portrait,' Eugenie is clearly recognisable as the prototype for the French sisters in *In the Year of Jubilee*, whose 'minds, characters, propensities had remained absolutely proof against such educational influence as had been brought to bear upon them.'¹⁰¹ The haughty Eugenie is forced to accept her aunt's humiliating largess because:

[s]he felt that it was useless attempting to earn her own living, for she had barely a smattering of any essential knowledge. She could play a few tunes, she had painted a few landscapes, embroidered a few collars and worked a few lamp-mats - there her acquirements ended.¹⁰²

Set in De Crespigny Park, Camberwell, a new development created exclusively to meet the ever-growing needs of the burgeoning middle-classes, *In the Year of Jubilee* is a satire on bourgeois mediocrity. Charting the mixed fortunes of the French sisters, who 'spoke a peculiar tongue, the product of sham education and

⁹⁸ *Eve's Ransom*, p. 23.

⁹⁹ Eve had fallen in love with, and been deceived by, a married man.

¹⁰⁰ *Eve's Ransom*, p. 98. When Eve asks for a loan, Hilliard, knowing that she loves another, selflessly replies: 'Suppose a gift of all the money I have would smooth your whole life before you, and make you the happy wife of some other man, I would give it to you gladly.'

¹⁰¹ George Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee* (London: 1894; The Hogarth Press, 1987), p. 7.

¹⁰² *Lost Stories from America*, p. 133.

mock refinement,' Jessica Morgan, whose brain carried 'all the heterogeneous rubbish of a "crammers" shop' and Nancy Lord, who 'deemed herself ... "cultured,"' the novel documents the dire consequences of superficial education.¹⁰³

Gissing felt passionately about education, particularly women's education, in his view, 'the *one* interest of our time, the one thing needful' - a need, he feared, society would continue to ignore while 'sham' education remained an acceptable substitute for real training for life.¹⁰⁴ It is evident from his numerous letters on the subject, that in his role as self-appointed cultural mentor, Gissing took a keen personal interest in his sisters' intellectual development, urging them to augment their limited knowledge by reading the great works of literature.¹⁰⁵ Hatred of the system, however, went far deeper than personal animus. Published a year earlier than *In the Year of Jubilee*, *The Odd Women* is a bitter indictment of society's iniquitous educational system that made victims of an increasing number of single women who, by dint of circumstances, were forced to earn their own living. The Madden sisters reveal the tragic consequences of inadequate training, each in their own way demonstrating the plight of the unsupported woman in middle-class England. Gissing's only *Yellow Book* contribution, 'The Foolish Virgin,' goes even further, suggesting that Miss Jewell almost drifted into prostitution due to her lack of practical skills.

¹⁰³ *In the Year of Jubilee*, pp. 44, 17, 104.

¹⁰⁴ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 79.

¹⁰⁵ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2. 'To Margaret', pp. 26-7, 42-4, 52-3, 62-4; 'To Ellen', pp. 25-6, 44-5, 72-3.

‘The Mysterious Portrait,’ the second of Gissing’s artist trilogy, is about a painter who is asked to reproduce, from a verbal description, a likeness of his client’s dead daughter. Failing to create a picture out of his own imagination, the artist uses his wife as a model. On seeing the finished portrait the old man joyfully identifies it as an image of his lost granddaughter, the sight of which immediately induces in him a desire to atone for his cruelty to the girl’s mother. As is so often the case with Gissing, he later explores the theme in depth in *The Unclassed* (1884), where, after years spent exploiting the poor as a rookery landlord, Abraham Woodstock’s reunion with his granddaughter engenders a genuine desire to make reparation for his cruelty. Ironically, death intervenes, denying him the restitution he latterly so earnestly sought.

In addition to its similarities with ‘Gretchen’ and ‘The Portrait,’ ‘The Picture’ closely parallels ‘An Heiress on Condition,’ a story written in 1880, but not published until 1923, when a limited edition was privately printed for The Pennell Club.¹⁰⁶ In ‘The Picture’ an artist incorporates into his painting, the images of a beautiful girl and her wistful mother; in the later story, the artist is merely distracted by a mother and her daughter. In both tales the artist and the young girl fall in love, and marry soon after. However, in contrast to the early story, which is a conventional romance, the introduction of a rival suitor in ‘An Heiress on Condition’ allows Gissing to construct a secondary theme around the two men, using their dialogue as a vehicle through which the rest of the tale unfolds.

¹⁰⁶ George Gissing, ‘An Heiress on Condition’ (Philadelphia: privately printed for The Pennell Club, 1923).

Much of the evidence for 'One Farthing Damages,' Selig's last Gissing attribution, rests on a distinctive personality trait shared by the scoundrel of the story and Joseph Snowdon, the villain of *The Nether World*. Arguably, since this marked characteristic is equally pronounced in the villains of two proven American stories, the weight of evidence lies more appropriately with the earlier works. A familiar character in later Gissing fiction, the artful Janus figure, whose wickedness is masked by kindly concern, made his debut in 'The Sins of the Fathers,' and reappeared soon after in 'Brownie.' In the earlier story, Mr Vincent pretends that he approves of his son's betrothed, while at the same time plotting against her; in 'Brownie', Denby hides his murderous plans beneath feigned affection. After embezzling Mary's money, Slythorpe, the scheming lawyer in 'One Farthing Damages,' offers marriage as compensation for her loss, while in *The Nether World*, Snowdon is moved by 'fatherly feeling' to buy a husband for his daughter after having cheated her of her inheritance.¹⁰⁷ The exploitation theme is less explicit in *Thyrza*, and as a consequence more subtle; although Mrs Ormonde is motivated by genuine concern for the well-being of both Thyrza and Egremont, she nevertheless represents the destructive force in the couple's relationship.

While still in Chicago, Gissing submitted 'An English-Coast Picture' to the New York-based, *Appletons' Journal*.¹⁰⁸ The story is an impressive piece of travel writing, interwoven with airy romance. Set in the Farne Islands, drawn, as in 'A Mother's Hope,' from childhood memory, the tale centres on a visit to Longstone

¹⁰⁷ George Gissing, *The Nether World* (1889; Brighton: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1974), p. 329.

¹⁰⁸ 'An English Coast-Picture' appeared in *Appletons' Journal* in July 1877.

Island, the home of Grace Darling, giving full rein to Gissing's gift for lyrical prose:

As we were sailing back toward the mainland, the sail of our boat was blood-red, and we saw the tall Longstone lighthouse standing like a pillar of fire in the glow of the setting sun. The rocks, too, here and there were fiery red. Over our heads wheeled a few gulls, uttering long plaintive cries, and we saw one cormorant stretching its long, black neck in hasty flight as it carried home a great fish in its beak. Save the birds, all was still.¹⁰⁹

The effect on the senses is tangible. Many such passages, recalling his later wanderings in Calabria, invigorate Gissing's diary, from which grew the superlative *By the Ionian Sea*.

Hoping to capitalise on the success of 'An English-Coast Picture,' Gissing left Chicago for New York. In the event, no further offer of work was forthcoming from the journal, so, having seen a pirated copy of 'The Sins of the Fathers' in the *Troy (New York) Times*, he moved on to Troy, where he tried unsuccessfully to persuade the editor of the paper to actually pay for some of his stories.

Thus ended Gissing's literary apprenticeship in America followed by a brief spell of employment as a photographic salesman prior to returning home.¹¹⁰ In October 1877, he arrived back in England as destitute as when he left, having pledged his few possessions as security for the cost of his passage home.¹¹¹ Four years later in a letter to Algernon, Gissing expressed his delight at the return of his belongings:

It is like a present to me, so completely had I forgotten what the boxes contained. ... Among the papers are all my stories published in America, & a vast heap of MSS of, I fear, but little positive value.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *Lost Stories from America*, pp. 93-4.

¹¹⁰ *American Notebook*, p. 60. List of orders.

¹¹¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 86, n. 2.

¹¹² *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 32.

On his return to England, Gissing briefly visited his family in Wakefield, and next day travelled to London, where Nell Harrison joined him shortly afterwards. They were married in October 1879. His early success in January 1878 with the reworked 'The Artist's Child' seemed encouraging, but, with the exception his personally funded *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing had to wait almost six years before *Temple Bar* published 'Phoebe' in March, 1884.

The American stories were a melting pot of ideas in embryo, some of which were given flesh, radically reformed, and regenerated as major themes and characterisations in the author's mature fiction.

CHAPTER TWO

A Promising Start

While disappointed not to find work at the *Atlantic Monthly* on his arrival in Boston, Gissing must nevertheless have been encouraged by the *Boston Commonwealth*'s acceptance of his art review "“Elaine” - Rosenthal and Tojetti.”¹ The piece is interesting in that, instead of limiting his article to commentary on the artistic merit of Tojetti's painting, Gissing draws a comparison with Rosenthal's representation of the same subject. Both paintings depict a scene from 'Lancelot and Elaine' in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859). Stressing the solemn tranquillity of the scene depicted by the poet, in which the brethren have reached the barge and lain Elaine down upon her bier-like bed, whereon she '... did not seem as dead / But fast asleep, and lay as though she smiled,' Gissing suggests that Tojetti failed to capture the poignancy of the moment.² In the critic's view, Tojetti 'labours under a disadvantage in his choice of the moment of departure from the shore' by allowing the brothers to remain at the scene, thus drawing the eye away from 'the dead steered by the dumb.'³ In the reviewer's opinion, Rosenthal adheres more closely to the spirit of Tennyson's poem by focusing on the 'dumb

¹ [George Gissing], 'Art Notes: "Elaine" - Rosenthal and Tojetti,' *Boston Commonwealth*, (October 28, 1876)

² Alfred Lord Tennyson, 'Lancelot and Elaine' from *Idylls of the King* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1903), p. 266.

³ 'Art Notes: "Elaine" - Rosenthal and Tojetti,' third page, column five; *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 52. In a letter to Algernon dated November 13, 1876, Gissing states 'I am doing a little writing for the newspapers and periodicals. Ask Mother to let you see the newspaper I sent her.' An editorial note states: 'Probably the *Boston Commonwealth*, which had published, under the title "Art Notes," his "“Elaine” -Rosenthal and Tojetti” on October 28 (the pages are not numbered, but it appeared on the third page, columns 5 and 6).'

old servitor' quietly steering the barge, 'and gazing the while in the calmness of fixed grief on the beautiful face of the dead.'⁴ Using Tennyson's poetic representation of the woman's grief-marked beauty as the basis of his argument, Gissing finds Tojetti's painting lacking in emotional depth. His Elaine has a face of perfect calm, with no trace of sorrow; Rosenthal, on the other hand, portrays the face of a woman whose pain has been erased by death, and yet retains a faint shadow of past suffering, thus reminding one 'of that part of the story which is unportrayed.'⁵ In addition to its being an innovative approach to the subject, Gissing's review reveals a profound appreciation of the delicate nuances that elevate a painting into the rarefied regions of fine art, and provides an early insight into the author's keen critical eye.

During his American period, Gissing's work spanned many of the popular literary genres, but in particular it revealed the author's intense feeling for art and aestheticism. Of the six tales about painting written at that time, four centre upon the notion of womanly beauty being the inspirational force behind great art. In the first of these, while browsing through an art-dealer's shop, a talented, but rather indolent young art-student is momentarily dazzled by the artistic genius of the creator of 'Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel,' a portrait which conveyed to Paul, '[a]ll that is sweetest in womanly beauty, all that is tenderest in womanly love, all the holiness of innocence,' yet withal revealed a hint of sensuality, in 'the slightly-parted lips.'⁶ There is something incongruous about the last phrase suggesting a

⁴ *Idylls of the King*, p. 266; 'Art Notes,' third page, column five.

⁵ 'Art Notes,' third page, column six.

⁶ *Sins of the Fathers*, p. 35.

conflict of emotions within the observer, an earnest wish to see only the spiritual, yet powerless to prevent physical desire filtering through. Many of Gissing's early works reveal his fascination with the struggle between aestheticism and desire, and having identified the ambiguity in the short stories, his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, addresses the paradox by treating the two opposing facets of womanly beauty – the spiritual and the corporeal – as separate entities, characterised by Helen Norman and Carrie Mitchell.

In 'Gretchen,' Paul's immediate instinct is to possess the painting for its beauty alone, but later he is overwhelmed by a desire to reproduce the purity of spirit captured therein. Inspired by the model's ethereal grace, the young man's work acquires a masterly touch:

... never had he worked so assiduously in his life as he had at this picture. ... Those eyes – it is a desperate attempt to approach their magic fascination; it seemed as impossible to reproduce them as it would be to create real eyes; and yet he strove with all his skill to catch the secret of their beauty, and to one less bent on perfection would have appeared successful.⁷

However, merely to possess the image is not enough; seduced by 'the slightly-parted lips' Paul needs must seek out and possess the original. 'The Picture' similarly focuses upon the power of beauty to inspire genius. Ralph Bertram feels compelled to sketch a mother and daughter seated by a river bank, 'enraptured with the glorious beauty of the faces,' and he too finds complete fulfilment only through marriage with the younger woman, at which time, for him, the spiritual and the earthly become as one.⁸

⁷ Ibid, p. 38.

⁸ p. 141.

As in 'Gretchen,' the narrator of 'The Artist's Child' recounts the story of an imaginative artist who achieves momentary greatness, on this occasion, by capturing the transcendental beauty of his dead daughter. Like 'R.I.P.,' one of Gissing's earliest tales, 'The Artist's Child' is narrated retrospectively; here the present owner of the painting relates its troubled history. Despite his undoubted talent, Julius Trent's true creativity remains dormant until love and beauty enter his life. When his muse dies, his gift dies too, to be resurrected one last time with the death of his only child. As inconsolable grief over the death of his wife had put an end to his creative imagination, it now inspires his masterpiece, a portrait of the dead girl, stamped eternally with 'the hues of childhood and of health' as once he had known her.⁹ While, in the two previous stories, the inference is vague, the tenor of 'The Artist's Child' is unequivocal – only when spiritual and earthly beauty are contiguous does the artist's creative imagination reach the heights of genius. Trent's painting is inspired by a father's love, which empowers him to capture the spark of life even in death.

In addition to giving an insight into Gissing's interest in aestheticism, the pattern of recycling taking place in the artist stories provides an important key thematically, to the evolutionary development occurring at this time, and its relevance to his later fiction. Oswald Davis makes a similar observation about the American tales in his *A Study in Literary Leanings*:

... none of these stories can attract any but the Gissing "fan." One type of adherent will read them with the sort of tenderness felt by a lover given insight

⁹ p. 64.

into a beloved's past, hitherto unknown; the other, the expert, will cherish the texts to trace the origins and foot prints.¹⁰

Although constant recycling could perhaps be interpreted as lack of imagination, in Gissing's case it points to his experimental flair, the driving force behind his persistent reshuffling of themes and ideas. Both 'The Portrait,' the first of the author's art trilogy, and 'The Picture' are derivatives of the earlier 'Gretchen,' the heroes of the two later stories, like Paul, becoming obsessed with the beauty of an unknown girl. However, the central theme of 'The Picture' has a stronger link with reality than the other two tales in that the artist himself makes a sketch of two women, the younger of whom becomes the embodiment of his ideal. Ralph Bertram's fascination for the girl also leads to a futile search, but, unlike Paul, he does it more out of curiosity than passion, and though his chance meeting with the girl has some similarities with that of Robert and Annie in 'The Portrait,' it is an end in itself, swiftly moving on to a logical conclusion, rather than a means to introducing the discovery of a long lost will. With economical ease, the narrative progresses naturally with minimal resource to artifice.

A rather more intricate version of the theme is reconstituted in 'An Heiress on Condition,' written early in 1880 after Gissing had returned from America, but not published until 1923.¹¹ The later story demonstrates the advances in style and construction accomplished by the author in less than three years. 'An Heiress on Condition' derives its freshness from an imaginative secondary theme, which centres on the comic antics of two rival protagonists, thereby providing an amusing

¹⁰ Oswald H. Davis, *George Gissing: A Study in Literary Leanings* (Dorking: Kohler & Coombes, 1974), p. 27.

¹¹ See Pierre Coustillas, 'George Gissing's Short Stories: A Bibliography,' *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1964), p. 72.

antidote to traditional romance. The theme linking the three American tales also provides the framework for *Eve's Ransom*, the first of the author's three consecutive novellas. Here though, Hilliard falls in love with a photograph, rather than a painted image. Unlike the paintings of the three idealised women, Eve Madeley's photograph is that of a rather ordinary-looking girl:

The abundant hair was parted simply, and smoothly from her forehead and tightly plaited behind; she wore a linen collar, and, so far as could be judged from the portion included in the picture, a homely cloth gown. Her features were comely and intelligent, and exhibited a gentleness, almost a meekness of expression which was as far as possible from seeming affected.¹²

The above description is typical of many of Gissing's female characters in his mature short fiction, where he placed more emphasis on strength of character than on physical beauty, for instance Mary Claxton in 'Out of Fashion' or Mrs Burden of 'The Day of Silence.'

It is not surprising that Hilliard is fascinated by Eve's air of mystery, for she is an enigma. To Hilliard she appears fragile and vulnerable, but she grew up in a hard school, and it was this early period of her life that effectively shaped her character. At the age of sixteen Eve had been abandoned, with two sisters and a brother 'to keep and look after.'¹³ However, Gissing makes no effort to sentimentalise her past, or to suggest that she was performing an heroic act by taking responsibility for the children, implying rather that she had no alternative, that is until her father returned, at which time 'Eve left home.'¹⁴ Two years of struggle had made her tough and self-centred, so thereafter she fended only for

¹² *Eve's Ransom*, p. 28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁴ p. 32

herself. There is no sense of sacrifice on Eve's part when she renounces love for material comfort; her decision is firmly rooted in sound commonsense. As an anonymous reviewer in the *Chicago Evening Post* points out:

The end comes somewhat as a surprise, but it has the convincing unexpectedness of truth. Eve acts as such a woman would act. Without being ignoble, she has lost the finer sensibilities in her struggle for existence, and her strongest feeling is terror of the poverty that once dragged her down to be one of life's miserable captives.¹⁵

In his letter to Eduard Bertz, Gissing adopts a rather dismissive attitude towards the novella's principal character: 'To be sure, Eve was not worth it all; therein lies the sting of the story.'¹⁶

Having traced Gissing's continuous recycling technique from 'Gretchen,' through the artists' trilogy and 'An Heiress on Condition,' to the uncompromising realism of *Eve's Ransom*, and noted the rapid changes in structure and style that have taken place, it is easy to spot the innovative strategy underlying his seemingly imitative routine. At each stage of re-use, the author experimented with his themes in various ways, such as eliminating improbable devices, incorporating interesting sub-texts, moving a story forward indirectly, fleshing out two-dimensional characters, and most importantly, exploring the psychological and sociological forces that figure large in the character forming process. *Eve's Ransom* is a powerful study of a girl, whose emotional bankruptcy is the consequence of her early, and continued exposure to the harsh realities of life.

¹⁵ Anon. 'Books of the Week: Tried to Ransom a Woman,' *Chicago Evening Post* (May 11, 1895), p. 5, printed in *The Gissing Journal*, Vol. XXX, No. 1 (January, 1994), p. 27.

¹⁶ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 331.

Returning to the artists' trilogy, 'The Mysterious Portrait,' which focuses on an old man's atonement after discovering that the model for a portrait of his dead daughter is none other than his long lost granddaughter, is yet another example of Gissing's continuous recycling technique. The grandfather is undoubtedly the forerunner of Abraham Woodstock, the rookery landlord in the author's working class novel, *The Unclassed*. Like the old man, Woodstock, whose lack of compassion had condemned his daughter to a life of poverty and prostitution, seeks forgiveness through his granddaughter. Ultimately, it is her love for humanity that engenders her grandfather's remorse for his tyrannical past, but ironically, death forestalls his plan to ameliorate the misery of his suffering tenants. In order to facilitate his preference for inconclusive resolutions, Gissing frequently used the withholding of clemency through death; this particular motif recurs in all three phases of the author's short works.¹⁷

In the 1930s, when relatively few of Gissing's American stories had been recovered, it was thought that his literary output in that country was cast from the same melodramatic mould, but later finds revealed far greater diversity in his early work. The American stories fall roughly into three categories: melodrama, romance and comedy. A fourth group of attributions, a supernatural trilogy, has yet to receive academic consensus and therefore will not form part of this study. Of this early phase, Gissing's humorous tales were undoubtedly the most skilfully crafted, revealing a certain ebullience of style that largely refutes the generally held view that the author's early fiction reflects his depressed state of mind at that time.

¹⁷ 'Too Dearly Bought,' 'Twenty Pounds,' 'Too Wretched to Live,' 'A Mother's Hope,' 'Mutimer's Choice,' 'Letty Coe,' 'A Son of the Soil.'

In fact, his few surviving letters from 1877 tell a quite different story, revealing a most enthusiastic attitude towards the American way of life.¹⁸ A likelier explanation of the author's predilection for melodrama is that this sort of story, in the manner of Edgar Allan Poe, was in greater demand.

'A Terrible Mistake' is one of Gissing's earliest comic tales, the moral of which is that one should never jump to conclusions. A jealous eavesdropper misconstrues an innocent conversation; thereby prompting a chain reaction that threatens to destroy the bond between two close friends. 'The Sins of the Fathers,' which hinges largely on causality, is the first example of a persistent theme that resonates throughout the early stages of the author's short fiction. Although in the comic tale the consequences are minimal, the laws of cause and effect are nevertheless essential to the outcome of the story.

In 'A Terrible Mistake,' written about midway through his stay in Chicago, Gissing reveals a hitherto unsuspected flair for comedy and an increased confidence in developing an individual style rather than imitating that of Poe or Dickens.¹⁹ Although intricate, the plot is plausible, orderly and skilfully resolved. The two male protagonists are in love with two sisters, but the more volatile of the two

¹⁸ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, pp. 47, 52-3. To William: 'I have got a splendid boarding house. There are about 10 people in the house, all very pleasant. Of course we all take meals together, & excellent meals they are too. Meat & Potatoes we always have for breakfast.' To Algernon: 'We have a glorious public Library here. It is free to all to use, & I can assure you is excellently patronized, for here, you know, everybody reads. There are very few books that one would be at all likely to want that it does not contain. Altogether Boston is a splendid place, I should be very sorry ever to leave it for good.'

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 229. Gissing was still tending to imitate after his return to England: 'I have to-night finished a horrible story - "Cain and Abel," the writing of which has made me shiver. It is rather in Poe's style, be it said'. However, most of the stories from the author's second phase show a rapidly developing individuality of style.

young men suspects that they might be in love with the same girl. Consequently, the sight of his friend and his beloved in close proximity sends him into paroxysms of jealous rage. Two hastily written, misdirected letters merely add to the confusion and impending disaster, which is ultimately averted by the timely intervention of the young lover's pragmatic friend. Throughout, the story adopts a mock-serious tone, elevating the plight of the seemingly rejected lover to the heights of high drama. For good measure, Gissing even adds a touch of irony. Bearing in mind the four protagonists' differing temperaments - Harold's 'easy-going disposition' compared to Mary's 'reserved and proper manner' and the contrast between the 'firmness and decision' stamped on Robert's jaw line and Fanny's 'confounded' flirtatiousness - it is left to the reader to decide whether or not the two couples could possibly have 'lived happily ever after.'²⁰ From the beginning of his career, Gissing rebelled against editorial constraint, so, in response to the editor's insistence that he 'tell the *ends* of all the characters,' his story appeared in the *National Weekly*, capped by an ironical, fairytale ending.²¹

As noted in chapter one, Whelpdale narrates a fictional account of Gissing's time in America in *New Grub Street*. It was through Whelpdale's story, and the tracking down of the pirated tale in the *Troy Times*, that 'The Sins of the Fathers' became identified indisputably as the author's work. In this bleak and chilling tale the threat of menace predominates from the outset. Notably, the 'agonized weeping' of the girl 'did not at first produce a very startling effect upon Leonard Vincent,' rather 'his interest was more vividly awakened as he caught a glimpse of

²⁰ *Lost Stories from America*, pp. 25, 27.

²¹ *Commonplace Book*, p.52.

the upturned face ... now weird with the look of agony and ghastly pale [...].'²² It is significant that Leonard is not drawn to the girl out of sympathy, but is made 'immovable' by her likeness to 'Medusa.'²³ Compulsion rather than compassion moves Leonard to help the weeping girl. As the two regard each other, he perceives that she 'belonged to the lower class; yet he almost quailed before her, and felt unconsciously that in nature she was not beneath him.'²⁴ Like the mythical Medusa, Laura's gaze robs Leonard of willpower, metaphorically turning him to stone.

On hearing the girl's pitiful story, Leonard helps her to get work as a seamstress, and although, to her credit, she tries to dissuade him, he cannot resist the temptation to see her again. Ultimately, 'obedient to an impulse which had now become too powerful for restraint,' he asks Laura to marry him, and even though she begs her lover 'to reflect before he committed what might prove an irreparable error,' recklessly, 'heedless of the consequences,' Leonard ignores her warning.²⁵ Throughout, the language stresses Laura's obsessive personality and the young man's inability to resist her hypnotic power: after confessing that he is married, he is 'terrified at her look' and although he could not see where he was, in 'the utmost perplexity he still followed.'²⁶ In 'Brownie,' a story from the same period, Brownie's eyes have the same paralysing effect on her luckless victim:

Sometimes, when Denby was about to commence his meal, he would raise his eyes and find them met by Brownie's and so unbearable was the look to him

²² *Sins of the Fathers*, pp. 1, 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁴ p. 3.

²⁵ p. 8.

²⁶ pp 28 and 30.

that he often rose up deadly pale, declaring that he felt suddenly sick and could not eat.²⁷

On being told of the proposed marriage, Leonard's father feigns approval. Cunningly he devises a plan to separate the couple, so when Leonard agrees to go to America, Laura is made welcome in the family home, where Mr Vincent can control the relationship by intercepting Leonard's letters. Meanwhile, he writes to his son of Laura's sudden death, at the same time sending a forged letter to the girl breaking off the engagement. From Leonard's unemotional response to the news, it is clear that distance has negated Laura's hypnotic power, and before long he falls in love with, and marries, an American girl.

On a bleak, winter evening, Leonard and his wife are at the theatre when there is a commotion on stage. Looking at her husband, Minnie 'saw a pale anxious look on his face that she had never before seen there.'²⁸ He makes an excuse to leave, persuading Minnie to go home alone, and as the snowstorm worsens he waits for Laura, the girl who had fainted on stage. She is overjoyed to see him, but when he speaks of his marriage, the 'light of half reproach, half joy that had shone from her eyes was suddenly changed into a glare of madness.'²⁹ With enormous effort she regains self-control, and in a voice 'he could not resist' persuades Leonard to walk her home. He follows blindly through the driving snow, oblivious to danger until they reach the river. Too late he cries out in alarm, but 'with a wild shriek of laughter,' she:

²⁷ *Brownie*, p. 34.

²⁸ *Sins of the Fathers*, p. 25.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

... clasped him fiercely round the neck, and dragged him down the steps. In vain he tried to struggle, for she was nerved with the strength of frenzy. There was a plunge, a cracking as the thin layer of ice gave way, a splashing of the water on the lowest step, and then all was still. ... the hidden depths bore witness to the edict that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children.³⁰

From the title and unequivocal ending, it is natural to assume retribution to be the central theme. From a psychological viewpoint however, the story focuses on obsession and its appalling consequences, and while Gissing rarely returned to biblical themes, he went on to explore fully the psychological impact of obsessive behaviour in many of his later stories and novels. In 'The Scrupulous Father' for instance, Mr Whiston is obsessed with propriety, to the extent that, without the proper formalities, he shuns all contact with the outside world. While on holiday with his daughter, he is deeply offended when a young man unwittingly intrudes upon their privacy. Consequently, the young man's letter requesting permission to call on him, only serves to intensify his sense of outrage, but, after trying to justify his injured feelings, it is the hint of mockery in his daughter's smiling forbearance that delivers the mortal blow to Whiston's parental pride: '[n]ot easily could he perceive the justice of his daughter's quarrel with propriety.' Nevertheless '[i]t was by silence that Rose prevailed ... her mute patience did not lack its effect with the scrupulous but tender parent.'³¹ *Born in Exile* (1892), one of Gissing's finest novels, centres on Godwin Peak's obsessive belief that his working-class roots deprive him of the social status to which his intellect entitles him. By spurning family and faithful friends, and building new relationships among the upper classes,

³⁰ pp. 29, 30-31.

³¹ *The House of Cobwebs*, p. 105.

Peak believes that he can erase his plebeian background, and take his rightful place in society. To bring this about Peak turns to exploitation and deceit, which ultimately bring about his shameful downfall.

The rejection of a faithful lover is yet another persistent theme throughout Gissing's fiction.³² Although, in 'The Sins of the Fathers,' Leonard does not knowingly desert Laura, his instinctive reaction to the news of her death is one of relief, and in view of the increasing disquiet he is beginning to feel about their relationship, it is probable that his father's intervention merely pre-empts its inevitable breakdown. Consequently, although not directly responsible for abandoning Laura, Leonard is nevertheless severely punished. Similarly, in 'A Mother's Hope,' Jemmie's decision, after being ship-wrecked, to join a ship's crew bound for China in the hope of 'earning a good sum of money,' instead of returning to his pregnant wife, is tantamount to desertion. His lost letter of explanation in no sense mitigates the pain and suffering the year-long silence has caused, and when he does finally return home it is at the very moment of his baby son's death.³³

Gissing continued to explore the idea of abandonment, but from the point of view of its consequences upon the victim as well as the villain. In 'Too Wretched to Live,' Arthur Melville falls in love with, and becomes engaged to Lily within the space of six weeks, but by the time summer comes round again he has fallen in love with, and become engaged to, Jessie. Arthur's letter ending the relationship is

³² In addition to 'Too Wretched to Live' and 'A Mother's Hope' noted in chapter one, later examples include Emma Vine in *Demos*, Thyrsa in the novel of the same name; Jane Snowdon in *The Nether World*, Constance Bride in *Our Friend the Charlatan*.

³³ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 41.

brutally frank: 'In alluding to your little flirtation of last summer, which we were foolish enough to end by an engagement ... it was only a passing fancy. Since meeting beautiful Jessie Earle, I know what real love is.'³⁴ It was of course, 'no passing fancy' to Lily, and after sending a heart-rending letter to her faithless lover, she seeks oblivion in the 'calm, still water' of the lake that bordered a once happy meeting place.³⁵ Arthur's lasting punishment resides in his knowledge that his treachery was compounded by folly: 'I feel the brand of Cain upon my heart! ... I was fascinated by another, but my heart was Lily's all the time, I know it when, alas, it is too late.'³⁶ At this stage in Gissing's career, the link between deed and consequence is generally implied rather than stressed, subsequently however, the theme of causality effectively dominates much of his second phase of short fiction.

As noted in the previous chapter, some of the incidents that occur in Leonard Vincent's life are based loosely on the author's own experiences of meeting and finding work for a street-walker, starting a new life in America, teaching there, and, according to evidence uncovered by Pierre Coustillas and more recent research, falling in love with one of his students.³⁷ This tendency to make oblique literary reference to events that had a catalytic effect on his own life, emerges at an early point in Gissing's career; Mr Page, Ridley's only customer in 'Too Dearly Bought' seems to have much in common with Gissing's benefactor at the *Chicago Tribune*:

³⁴ Ibid., p. 103.

³⁵ p. 104.

³⁶ pp. 104, 105.

³⁷ 'Gissing's Short Stories: A Bibliography,' p. 64; *A Life in Books*, p. 22, quoted from Chapter III of Coustillas' unpublished 'George Gissing: The Dynamics of Frustration,' GEN. MSS. 286, Materials collected by P. M. Stone about Gissing's residence in Waltham, Mass.

Mr Page was one of those rare individuals who are not only content to be charitable when a chance is thrown in their way, but will even go out of their way to find an opportunity of relieving [sic] the wants of others ...³⁸

Clearly the manner in which Gissing left England weighed heavily upon him, and it is interesting that of the seven stories about theft, three empathise with the wrongdoer, revealing parallels, either with his personal feelings about the morality of his crime, or with the harsh treatment meted out to him by the Owens College hierarchy. In 'Too Dearly Bought,' Ridley firmly believes that in some situations, the ends justify the means; 'A Test of Honor' demonstrates that it is morally wrong for Mrs Woodrow to go on punishing her husband after he has paid for his crime; and the hard-hearted employer in 'Twenty Pounds' lacks the humanity to feel compassion for his unfortunate employee.

Not only have Gissing's American stories been invaluable to scholars as a source of autobiographical detail, but, as noted above, they also served the author well as a proving ground for some of the material that recurs in revised form in his later work. By taking an isolated theme from one story, and interweaving it with one or more others, and at the same time eliminating undue complexity, the author gradually developed an economy of style that ranked him alongside the finest short story writers of the late nineteenth-century. A worthy example of the writer's experimental flair is demonstrated by the links between three stories from his American period and one from his third phase, which reveal the author's innate gift for purposeful intertextuality. In 'Too Dearly Bought,' Tim Ridley steals ten gold sovereigns from his benefactor in order to take his frail granddaughter to live in the country, in the belief that the goodness of his motive mitigates his crime.

³⁸ *Sins of the Fathers*, pp. 94-5.

However, when the girl dies, Ridley becomes convinced that her death is a punishment for his sin, and he knows no peace until he is able to repay the money, whereupon he collapses and dies. The theft theme is reversed in 'Joseph Yates' Temptation,' in that the crime is stillborn owing to the moral example of a starving waif. Joseph's request for an advance on his wages is refused, so when he finds himself in possession of a large cheque he is tempted to steal it. It takes the courage in adversity of a destitute mother and child, to make him realise the superficiality of his desire to provide his family with a little temporary Christmas cheer.

In 'Twenty Pounds,' Gissing again combines the theft motif with that of the stonyhearted employer, but here, by toning down the melodrama, he creates a wholly plausible tale of human fallibility. The story is about a man who had in the past, embezzled twenty pounds, but had been saved from disgrace by the generosity of an anonymous donor. The donor, a compulsive gambler, has since fallen on hard times and has himself stolen twenty pounds from his employer, none other than the man he had once helped. The narrator, acting on behalf of his friend, tries in vain to reason with the employer, but only the threat of exposure will induce him to withdraw his charge. Earlier in the story, as he is about to hand over the money that will save the young thief, the narrator hints at the ironical outcome:

That is the man ... whose proceedings have been dubious, and who will, I trust, be rescued by Staining's £20. Well, if the wheel should turn, and this poor man should ever be in a position to deliver a fellow creature from such trouble as he himself is now in, by the surrender of £20, I wonder whether he'll do it? Smith,

you surely know human nature well enough to answer your own question. Not he - not a bit of it.³⁹

'The Poet's Portmanteau,' from Gissing's third phase of short fiction, maintains the theft motif, but takes as its focal point the cyclical theme of an object circulating back to its starting point, an idea present – the gold coins, the cheque, the twenty pounds – but not stressed in the three earlier tales. Through an error of judgment, the struggling poet foolishly leaves his portmanteau in the care of a desperate young girl, who pawns it in order to buy a railway ticket. However, the manuscript within, having no monetary value, remains in her possession. Many years later, an enigmatic stranger, claiming to be a friend of the now dead girl, returns the document to its owner, who, ironically, has achieved fame despite his terrible misfortune. The dim sense of recognition the poet feels as he talks to the woman adds an interesting touch of ambiguity to the story – is she, or is she not, the former thief?

The development visible in the above four stories reveals an ongoing process of experimentation and refinement, which ultimately led to the creation of a new breed of commonplace heroes, whose successes or failures cause barely a ripple in their uneventful lives. Paradoxically, these characters are in no sense pathetic victims of life's struggle for survival; rather they are resolute individuals, ready to meet life's reversals with patience, courage, and occasionally even humour. Henry James wrote of Gissing: 'He has the strongest, deepest sense of common humanity, of the general struggle, and the general grey, grim comedy.'⁴⁰

³⁹ Brownie, pp. 48-9.

⁴⁰ Adeline R. Tintner, 'Some Notes for a Study of the Gissing Phase in Henry James's Fiction,' *The Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. XVI, No. 3 (July, 1980), p. 6. Quotation from James' short essay 'London Notes' in *Harper's Weekly* (July 1897), p. 443.

By pursuing a strategy of thematic distillation, finely wrought characterisation, rigorous elimination and subtle irony, Gissing ultimately developed an economy of style uniquely his own, one that derives its interest and veracity solely from the resilience of ordinary characters to extraordinary circumstances. ‘Humplebee,’ one of the finest stories in *The House of Cobwebs* (1906), a posthumous collection from the author’s third phase, demonstrates cogently the singularity of Gissing’s realism in short fiction. Through a reckless act of heroism, Humplebee earns the gratitude of Mr. Chadwick, the father of a boy he saves from drowning, and ironically becomes a hostage to good fortune. Prior to the accident, the boy had attracted little attention:

... a short, thin red-headed boy of sixteen, whose plain, freckled face denoted good-humour and a certain intelligence, but would never have drawn attention amongst the livelier and comelier physiognomies grouped about him. This was Humplebee. Hitherto he had been an insignificant member of the school, one of those boys who excel neither at games nor at lessons, of whom nothing is expected, and rarely, if ever, get into trouble, and who are liked in a rather contemptuous way.⁴¹

Unlike the sketchy descriptions of character in earlier stories, these few lines conjure a vivid picture of the boy’s unprepossessing appearance and diffident personality, indicative of his extreme vulnerability to the influences that are shortly to determine his future. Humplebee is average in every way, never seeking the limelight, always just one of the crowd. At school, like all those who have no outstanding qualities, staff and pupils alike largely ignore him, and doubtless that is how things would have remained throughout his life, had it not been for his one, uncharacteristic act of heroism. His sudden notoriety is anathema to Humplebee, making him ever more reticent and self-effacing. It is the boy’s taciturnity that

⁴¹ *House of Cobwebs*, p. 69.

leads Mr Chadwick to assume that he has no personal plans for his future.

However, in this assumption Chadwick is totally wrong:

Harry Humplebee had in his soul a secret desire and a secret abhorrence. Ever since he could read his delight had been in books of natural history; beasts, birds and fishes possessed his imagination, and for nothing else in the intellectual world did he really care. ... When at school the boy had frequent opportunities of pursuing his study ... but neither the headmaster nor his assistant thought it worth while to pay heed to Humplebee's predilection. ... Humplebee was marked for commerce ... Yet the boy loathed every such mental effort and the name of 'business' made him sick at heart.⁴²

Sadly, when Chadwick urges Harry to have the courage to speak his mind, the boy's innate sense of parental loyalty compels him to utter 'I should like to please my father, sir,' thus he is catapulted into a world he hates.⁴³ Although courage appears to be totally lacking in Humplebee's character, this faculty is in fact his greatest attribute, the one thing that drives him to struggle on when all seems lost. 'Humblebee' centres on its namesake's steadfast refusal to be downcast by adverse fortune. Even though Chadwick's patronage deprives him of a fulfilling career in natural history, drives his father into bankruptcy and an early grave, and, when his cause is taken up by Chadwick's son, he narrowly escapes arrest, at the end of the story Humplebee remains philosophical, calmly accepting that he 'had to begin life over again - that was all.'⁴⁴

Little trace remains of the melodramatic, mid-Victorian style typical of the early Gissing, rather 'Humblebee' is notable for its acutely perceptive characterisation and benign irony, which bring out the pathos inherent in the natural dignity with

⁴² Ibid., pp. 74-5.

⁴³ p. 71.

⁴⁴ p. 87.

which ordinary human beings meet life's constant setbacks. As O H Davis puts it in his short study of the author:

Each of the best stories is the dramatic outcome of the character of the participants. Gissing's power is in the ease with which human issues, often complex or of high tragedy, are brought to the due conclusion; this gift is in pleasant contrast to the habit, associated with much famous fiction, of couching a short story in a murk of multifarious detail, of puzzling atmospherics, or of pathological miasma. On the other hand, there is never apparent in him the tight-lipped scurry, as of a man bustling across a conflagration, found in much American short story writing. Gissing remains tranquil and lucid.⁴⁵

As Davis shrewdly notes, Gissing's singularity lies in his unique ability to present characters such as Humplebee, unembellished and true to life, whose actions never rise above the mundane, and yet are dramatic enough in their own right to capture the hearts and minds of the reading public. Such is undeniably the case in 'The House of Cobwebs,' another story from Gissing's third phase, where Mr Spicer is content to live in a derelict house, which is his for one year only, due to the sheer pleasure he gets from owning his own property and being able to cultivate a crop of Jerusalem artichokes in his weed-infested garden.⁴⁶

The third group of American stories, comprising the artist trilogy, 'How They Cooked Me,' 'A Game of Hearts' and 'An English-Coast Picture' qualify loosely as romance, the latter tale being particularly interesting in that its combination of romance and lyrical prose reveals one of Gissing's finest talents. As Robert Selig points out, several of Gissing's early stories begin with an atmospheric description of the surrounding scenery, at times drawn, as were many of his novels, from personal knowledge of the physical landscape.⁴⁷ The seasonal changes in 'A

⁴⁵ *A Study in Literary Leanings*, pp. 24-5.

⁴⁶ *House of Cobwebs*, pp. 1-27.

⁴⁷ *Lost Stories from America*, pp. 98-9. Notable examples of the novels - *Thyrza* (Lambeth), *A Life's Morning* (Wakefield), *The Nether World* (Clerkenwell), *The Emancipated* (Rome).

Mother's Hope,' symbolising the woman's fading hopes of her husband's return, are, for instance, painted from childhood memories of two family holidays, one on the Northumberland coast in Summer 1868, the other at Seascale in the winter of 1870.⁴⁸ A letter to his father, written from Seascale at the tender age of twelve, clearly reveals Gissing's early fascination with nature:

There is plenty of Thrushes and Blackbirds about and if it was only bird-nesting season we should have a rare picking. Today we have been amongst the periwinkle stones and kept falling headlong into puddles till a [sic] last we came home dripping like drowned water rats. The other day we found a thing in the sands of which I have sent you a sketch as it lay flat on the water and Algy at once said it was a sea mouse and that there was a picture in his "Common Objects" but if you will please to tell us I shall be very pleased.⁴⁹

Gissing again draws on his holiday memories for the descriptive passages of 'An English-Coast Picture,' using the actual name of the house in which his family stayed, as well as that of its owner. The story opens with a fine description of Bamborough and its surrounding area, followed by an evocation of its historical past:

The village of Bamborough itself was delightful; the broad, tile-paved streets handly [sic] ever disturbed by vehicles, and echoing to the footsteps of the rare passers-by. ... it seemed like living in a dream of mediaeval times; and it would hardly have surprised us to see the gates of the old castle open, and a stream of knights issue forth, armed and equipped for border warfare.⁵⁰

If additional proof were necessary to establish the authorship of the unsigned 'R.I.P.' one need look no further than the above passage, which almost replicates the earlier story's opening paragraph. Describing 'a strange little market-town' situated 'at the foot of the Pyrenees,' the narrator of 'R. I. P.' continues:

The crazy old houses on each side of the narrow, crooked streets lean over each other as if they were passing the hours in whispering tales of all they had seen in the years long, long ago ... As one walks along the streets, where the sound of

⁴⁸ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, pp. 4-5, 7-10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 83.

passing wagons is seldom heard, and grass luxuriates among the broken fragments of the old tile paving, one seems all at once to have been carried back into the Middle Ages, and it would occasion no surprise to suddenly meet two of the Monks of Froissart; their presence would be entirely in keeping with their surroundings.⁵¹

The above passages seem to express the author's longing for a calmer, simpler world. Gissing's gift for evoking images of the past within a present-day context, reaches a high point with his critically acclaimed *By the Ionian Sea*, a masterly piece of travel writing. Moreover, three periods of extensive travel in Italy and Greece stimulated a desire to write an historical novel about ancient Rome, the outcome of which was *Veranilda*, the author's last, unfinished work. His imagination was steeped in the past, and his sense of affinity with ancient times grew in parallel with his increasing antipathy to modern day industrialisation, commercialism and mass culture. A letter to sister Nelly written in 1886, expresses unequivocally his attitude towards modernity: 'With me, it is a constant aim to bring the present & the past near to each other, to remove the distance which seems to separate Hellas from Lambeth.'⁵²

Gissing's classical education had engendered a deep affinity with the past, while from his father he learned to love and respect the marvels of nature. At nineteen he was content just to express this passion in lyrical prose, but in later years his increasing alarm at the spread of industrialisation and mass culture and the evils they spawned, became the guiding principle of much of his mature work. By implanting critical social issues within a fictional framework, Gissing is able to demonstrate their effect on society at large without excessive didacticism: *Demos*

⁵¹ *Sins of the Fathers*, pp. 57-8.

⁵² *Collected Letters*, Vol. 3, pp. 48-9.

takes a satirical look at democracy; *In the Year of Jubilee* foresees the long-term effects of advertising and large-scale land development; *New Grub Street* exposes the commercialisation of literature and literary production; *The Odd Women* attacks the inadequacy of women's education; while the major concern in *The Whirlpool* is London's financial maelstrom. The novel also takes issue with the jingoism of Rudyard Kipling's *Barrack-Room Ballads*, which, in the hero's view, ferments militarism to the point where 'the average Englander ... itches to kick somebody, to prove his Imperialism.'⁵³ *The Crown of Life* carried such a powerful anti-war message that Gissing suspected that due to the outbreak of the Boer War, Methuen deliberately under-advertised the book's publication:

Now as to Methuen. I will say plainly that I feel altogether dissatisfied with their mode of advertising "The Crown of Life." Of course the moment is bad for the book-trade, but I am not at all convinced that it is fatal to the prospects of a book ... for there is an anti-war party in England, & this book should appeal to such people very strongly.⁵⁴

Social issues also impact upon much of Gissing's short fiction, for instance the woman question is addressed in 'The Foolish Virgin,' 'A Charming Family' and 'Comrades in Arms,' poverty rears its ugly head in 'Too Dearly Bought,' 'The Last Half-Crown' and 'The Day of Silence,' commercialisation of the arts is dealt with in 'The Lady of the Dedication' and 'The Muse of the Halls,' industrialisation in 'Mutimer's Choice,' democracy in 'The Firebrand' and social mores in 'A Poor Gentleman' and 'The Scrupulous Father.'

Despite his predilection for addressing contemporary issues, Gissing never lost his love for, and fascination with the past, and, as noted above, after many years of

⁵³ George Gissing, *The Whirlpool* (London: 1897; The Hogarth Press Ltd., 1984), p. 450.

⁵⁴ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 7, p. 401.

preparation he achieved his long held ambition to write an historical novel. Due to his untimely death, *Veranilda* was published in its unfinished state, lacking its final three chapters. In his preface to the novel, Frederic Harrison judged *Veranilda* to be:

The most important book which George Gissing ever produced: that one of his writings which will have the most continuing life. It is, in my opinion, composed in a new vein of genius: with a wider and higher scope, a more mellow tone than the studies of contemporary life which first made his fame.⁵⁵

Time proved this not to be the case: the ‘more mellow tone’ that Harrison claims distinguishes the novel, could perhaps be used more accurately to describe Gissing’s later short stories.

Through the machinations of Samuel Slythorpe, ‘One Farthing Damages,’ one of the later American stories, reveals just how effective the author’s flair for characterisation had become in less than five months. By the mid nineties his ability to define character through dialogue and descriptive detail, had become the lynchpin of the author’s short fiction, clearly evident from his seemingly inexhaustible supply of distinctive human figures, who have but one characteristic in common - the capacity to come to terms with misfortune, and resolutely struggle on.⁵⁶ Samuel Slythorpe is one of the first examples of Gissing’s unique ability to draw fully rounded figures; although the villain of the piece, he is far and away the most convincing character in ‘One Farthing Damages.’ Compared to the scant attention paid to his co-protagonists, Slythorpe’s unappealing persona is described in graphic detail:

⁵⁵ George Gissing, *Veranilda* (1904; Brighton: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1987), pp. vi, vii.

⁵⁶ Noteworthy examples are Humplebee in the story of the same name, Miss Childerstone in ‘Comrades in Arms,’ Mr Spicer in ‘The House of Cobwebs,’ and the two principal characters in ‘Lou and Liz.’

And, in truth, Mr. Slythorpe was not precisely the person to win a lady's fancy. Under-sized, high-shouldered, with blinking, lashless eyes, and a general angularity, not to say knobiness, of feature, he might have been expected to rise superior to weakness as to personal appearance, but such was by no means the case. ... He was obtrusively, we might say offensively, clean. ... He was always profusely scented, and his short, scrubby hair was tortured by the combined use of the brush and the pomatum into the semblance of the split almonds wherewith tipsy cakes are wont to be decorated.⁵⁷

Given the fulsome description, the reader readily forms a mental picture of a conceited, rather shifty character, whose obsessive cleanliness masks something dark and unwholesome in his nature.

Prior to these revealing details, the reader has been made aware that as the sole trustee of her father's will, Slythorpe has taken charge of Mary Hope's small inheritance, and of late begun to pay her unwelcome attention. In view of this, the language suggests that the lawyer's ulterior motive in taking such pains with his appearance is to create a good impression on his client. After pointing out Slythorpe's many physical defects, Gissing imputes that though he 'might have been expected to rise superior to weakness as to personal appearance ... such was by no means the case,' implying that it was unlikely that he would rise superior to any weakness.⁵⁸ And indeed such is the case. When next he calls on Mary, he appears ill at ease:

He evidently had something on his mind – some piece of rascality, a physiognomist would have conjectured, which he either had recently perpetrated, or was about to perpetrate.⁵⁹

Again the implication that Slythorpe is not all he seems. Having speculated with and lost Mary's money, he has the temerity to offer marriage: 'My affection ain't of

⁵⁷ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 153.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ p.154.

the mercenary sort; in fact, as I got you into the mess (though with the best of intentions), it's only fair I should get you out of it.'⁶⁰ The story ends happily; having been declared missing in action, Mary's fiancé miraculously returns from the dead, and on discovering that no investment on her behalf had ever been made, gives Slythorpe the thrashing of his life. It turns out that the lawyer had invested the money in a thriving mine in his own name. He had lied to Mary, believing that her straitened circumstances would force her to accept his offer of marriage. For all its drama, 'One Farthing Damages' is essentially a comic tale, and obnoxious though he is, Slythorpe's aptitude for reconciling outright fraud with his heart's desire, makes him easily the most engaging character in the story. Paradoxically, the sheer audacity of his preposterous lawsuit ranks Slythorpe as one of Gissing's earliest examples of strength in adversity.

In his preface to the posthumous collection of Gissing's *Stories and Sketches*, Alfred Gissing recalls that his father 'always maintained that plot without character in a story was like a vehicle without passengers - a mere wooden show.'⁶¹ He argues that it is as sketches of character and temperament that his father's stories should be regarded:

... the vehicle, or narrative, is with him no more elaborate than a small piece of common everyday life; in his mature work indeed, its simplicity cannot be exceeded. As to his characterisation, it is hardly necessary to comment upon the skill with which he uses his conversations as expressions of individuality.⁶²

Gissing's flair for realistic representation was grounded in his power to generate intense feeling for the minor dramas experienced by ordinary people living simple,

⁶⁰ p. 155.

⁶¹ *George Gissing: Stories & Sketches*, ed., A. C. Gissing (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1938), p. 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*

everyday lives, a strength which he perfected during his third phase of short fiction. Indeed, even at the outset of his career, Gissing had already begun experimenting with the use of dialogue as an insight into character, and Slythorpe's self-justifying confession to Mary's fiancé aptly illustrates Alfred's point that conversation is an essential component in the art of characterisation:

"I'll tell you. Between ourselves, I've taken an uncommon fancy to Miss Hope, and I had made up my mind to make her Mrs. S.; but somehow she didn't take to me quite so kindly as I could have wished. Now, the other morning, when I took up the *Times*, almost the first thing I caught sight of was the smash of the Wheal Marina, and the similarity of names gave me quite a turn, for just at that moment I thought it was the Wheal Mary Ann. And the thought struck me, 'If it only had been, my lady, you'd been glad enough [sic] to say "Yes" to Samuel Slythorpe.' And then I thought I'd try it. It was *roose d'amour*, sir; a mere *roose d'amour*." And Mr. Slythorpe smiled.⁶³

Few could miss the patronising tone, which corresponds precisely with the unsavoury image created by Gissing's graphic description. Denby, the villain in 'Brownie,' murders his niece in order to gain her inheritance, but unlike Slythorpe, he is never more than a symbol of evil, the story being, as Gissing put it, 'a plot without character ... a mere wooden show.'

It is generally recognised that the jottings and quotations contained in Gissing's *American Notebook* (covering the period he spent in America and the first few months of his return to England) have been invaluable to scholars for their autobiographical content. The two quotations noted in chapter one reveal the author's need to reconcile his feelings about Nell, while an extract from Matthew Arnold's Preface to the 1874 edition of *Higher Schools and Universities in*

⁶³ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 159.

Germany, suggests that even at this stage in his career, he had a strong sense of artistic integrity:

The functions of a disinterested literary class - a class of non-political writers, having no organized and embodied set of supporters to please, simply setting themselves to observe and report faithfully, and looking for favor to those isolated persons only, scattered all through the community, whom such an attempt may interest - are of incalculable importance.⁶⁴

Many years later, in a letter to his agent, William Morris Colles, Gissing declares unequivocal loyalty to the discriminate reader:

What I am *bent* on doing, is to write books which will be read, not only to-day, but some years hence. ... I dare not lose the respect of the highest class of readers for the sake of immediate profit.⁶⁵

By this time his short stories were in great demand, and he was soon to express concern to Morley Roberts that his serious work would suffer if he spent too much time on work he regarded as less important: ... 'I have got into the very foolish habit of perpetually writing against time & to order. The end of this is destruction.'⁶⁶

The *American Notebook* is equally important for its function as the source of many of the ideas and themes found in Gissing's later work. A note stressing the physical and psychological shortcomings of a character in Catulle Mendès' 'Hesperus,' brings to mind Widdowson in *The Odd Women*, who differs only marginally from the figure thus described:

Ugly, despised and miserable man has trances in which he seems to possess love and treasures. Sees a girl who resembles something seen in dreams. Pursues her, and her scorn kills him.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *American Notebook*, p. 33.

⁶⁵ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 286.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

⁶⁷ *American Notebook*, p. 42.

Although Widdowson makes no mention of having prior visions of Monica, when he first meets her she does seem to fulfil his dreams of submissive womanhood. Monica's scornful resistance to her husband's domestic tyranny kills him metaphorically, reducing him to a pitiless shell. After watching Monica die, Widdowson 'went into his own chamber, death-pale, but tearless.'⁶⁸

Interestingly, the *Notebook* also contains the outlines of plots clearly intended for the American market, such as:

Man becomes adept at poisoning. Teaches his mistress. They poison his wife and proceed to the other members of the family. The mistress insists on marrying the man, and proceeds to kill her own husband. The man however keeps him alive by antidotes. At length he narrowly escapes poisoning; flees for his life, and lives in constant terror.⁶⁹

The plot is very Poe-like, and its atmosphere of dread evokes faint echoes of 'Brownie.' However, by the time 'Brownie' was published the author was already seeking to achieve originality in his work, and there was no room for horror in the unique style of realism that ultimately became the hallmark of Gissing's mature short fiction.

Given that Gissing's *American Notebook* proved to be a valuable source of material for his later works of fiction, the importance of his American stories in performing a similar function cannot be overlooked. Like the poisoning plot, much of the author's American output was discarded, but there remained a skeleton of ideas on which he continued to work, developing them finally into stories that revealed, with uncompromising realism, the inequities suffered by social misfits in

⁶⁸ George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (London: 1893; Virago Press Ltd., 1980), p. 334.

⁶⁹ *American Notebook*, p. 27.

an intolerant world. The author's gift for creating life-like figures had much to do with this striking transformation, but an equally important factor in his drive to achieve parity with the leading exponents of realistic fiction, was his conversion to the plotless story. In her discussion of plotless fiction in *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880 – 1980*, Clare Hanson argues that:

... short fiction writers of the 1890s had to move away from conventional narrative prose towards the more suggestive language of image and symbol. Their stories were structured around mood rather than event, and details of setting or scene were consciously devised to act as 'objective correlatives' for abstract states of mind or feeling.⁷⁰

Practically all of Gissing's mature short stories are psychological studies of the human condition, visualised through the author's eyes, and recorded by him in the language of the commonplace. His stories are notable for their lack of dramatic incident, tending to focus rather on a relatively trivial happening, which has significance only in terms of its disproportionate impact on a character's state of mind.

Frank Swinnerton, one of the few critics to express a view on Gissing's short fiction, comments somewhat derisively on the author's subjectivity:

... the stories ... contain frequent portraits of Gissing's inveterate foes - landladies. Gissing, whenever he writes about landladies does so from first-hand knowledge. He writes of them always with feeling ... it would be possible to marshal such a collection of landladies as to reveal the species in hideous array. ... Well does Gissing cry from his heart ...⁷¹

⁷⁰ Clare Hanson. *Short Stories and Short Fiction, 1880 – 1980* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1985), p. 7.

⁷¹ *George Gissing: A Critical Study*, p. 133.

Swinnerton's observation is undeniably correct, but in his essay 'The Place of Realism in Fiction' Gissing makes no apology for his subjectivity, believing that it is incumbent upon a writer 'to show life its image as he beholds it':

What the artist sees is to him only a part of the actual; its complement is an emotional effect. Thus it comes about that every novelist beholds a world of his own, and the supreme endeavour of his art must be to body forth that world as it exists for him. The novelist works, and must work, subjectively. A demand for objectivity in fiction is worse than meaningless ... all is but dead material until breathed upon by the 'shaping spirit of imagination,' which is the soul of the individual artist.⁷²

America gave Gissing the time and freedom to experiment with his art, and his early scribbles, immature though they may be, are, as Vincent Starrett observed, 'not negligible,' revealing as they do the importance to his future work of that crucial apprenticeship year.

⁷² *George Gissing on Fiction*, eds., J. & C. Korg (London: Enitharmon Press, 1978), p. 85.

CHAPTER THREE

The Formative Years

During the period 1880 to 1884, which covers the second phase of Gissing's short fiction, the author's most successful output was in fact non-fiction, and because of its significance in terms of the author's shifting political and philosophical beliefs, this forms a crucial part of his development as a writer of fiction. In addition to political and philosophical articles, the author also tried his hand at poetry and descriptive essays, and these too had considerable influence on later literary themes, for example poverty and urban decay. In view of its ongoing significance, it is important, at this stage, to pay some attention to Gissing's non-fictional work during the early eighties.

On impulse Gissing sent a copy of *Workers in the Dawn* to Frederic Harrison, President of the English Positivist Committee.¹ In his letter, the author claimed that it was the writings of Auguste Comte and Harrison himself that had inspired the novel. Subsequently he became an active member of the Positivist Society. Through his friendship with Harrison, Gissing was introduced to John Morley, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, who published three of the author's articles during September 1880, under the heading 'Notes on Social Democracy'.

The three articles were written while Gissing believed himself committed to the Socialist cause, at which time he attended lectures and open-air rallies, spoke at a

¹ George Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn; Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 289.

workingmen's club on 'Faith and Reason,' and prepared a further paper on 'The State Church from a Rationalist's point of view,' which in the event was not presented.² *Workers in the Dawn*, in Jacob Korg's view 'a novel of vigorous social protest,' was published just prior to Gissing accepting Morley's commission.³ Furthermore, the author had, in 1878, formed a friendship with Eduard Bertz, a German political exile who had been driven from his country by the oppressive regime then in control, and his input in the essays is self-evident. The 'Notes' focus almost exclusively on events leading up to and following the German Anti-Socialist Law of 1878, contrasting the fervour of Germany's working classes with the inertia of their British counterparts.

The first article begins with a reference to a long piece on Great Britain in the second issue of a Socialist 'Year Book,' which recalls to Gissing's mind 'the celebrated chapter on the snakes of Ireland [sic], the sum of it being that Social Democracy is still non-existent in our country.'⁴ The author then cites Germany as the most active participant in the Socialist movement, whose 'Gotha Programme' of 1875 proclaimed that by 'every legal means' the party would strive for the achievement of:

... universal suffrage with secret voting; direct legislation by the people; the establishment of a national militia in place of the standing army; perfect freedom of speech; universal free education; a progressive income tax in place of all other taxes; fixed hours of labour; sanitary control of workmen's dwellings and of manufactories, &c.⁵

² *Workers in the Dawn*, p. xxi.

³ George Gissing, *Notes on Social Democracy*, (London, Enitharmon Press, 1968), p.iii. Introduction by Jacob Korg.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1. There is a misprint in *Notes*. The quotation is from James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, vol. 3, p. 279 (13 April, 1778) and was referring to Iceland.

⁵ pp. 3-4.

The second and third articles report on events after the passing of the Anti-Socialist Law. Despite the prohibition of all associations, meetings and publications, and the Draconian measures taken to force Socialists into exile - members living in Berlin were banished from that city for a year - the movement gathered momentum and by March 1880 a number of Socialist candidates had been elected to the Reichstag. However, dissatisfied with what was seen by some as the non-combative stance of the leaders, the dissenting voice of Johann Most, exiled anarchist leader and editor of the London based *Die Freiheit*, 'advocated propagation of Socialist views by every possible method, even that of violence.'⁶ A new central party organ, *Der Sozialdemokrat*, was established in opposition to Most, urging continued commitment to the Gotha programme, to which the Socialist members of the Reichstag re-affirmed their support. Nevertheless, in June 1880, eight of these members signed a *Flugblatt*, condemning both factions and re-opening the controversy. In a final paragraph, Gissing notes that subsequently, at a Congress held in Zurich, Herr Most's advocacy was endorsed when supporters of *Der Sozialdemokrat* 'resolved to proceed in future not by "any legal means," but by "any means."⁷

In the first article, referring to the Gotha Programme's demands, Gissing notes rather complacently that 'legislation has already secured to the English operative such of these reforms as more immediately affect him in his every-day labour; whilst our poor laws, theoretically embody something like the Socialist principle.'⁸ Here it is useful to recall that although he embraced Socialist ideals

⁶ p. 10.

⁷ p. 14.

⁸ p. 4.

regarding poverty, he had little sympathy with democracy *per se*. As far back as October 1876, Gissing wrote disparagingly of the American political system:

They carry democratic notions here to a great extent. It is quite a common thing for a workman to go up & slap his master on the back & ask him how he is. Worse than that, no servant-girl will think of cleaning boots, so we have to have them blacked in the streets, & the result is that the Americans have almost always dirty boots on.⁹

At the end of the final article, Gissing asks: ‘how far are the theories of scientific Socialism really grasped by the masses of German revolutionists? ... how many working men would be found possessed of that self-reliance, self-control, self-respect which such a society inevitably presupposes?’ In his view:

Before the Socialist state is possible, the masses must be taught what they really need, why they need it, and how they must act to obtain it; in other words, it is not enough to agitate them with vague ideals: they must be, in every sense of the word, educated to progress.¹⁰

In essence, much as Gissing desires reform, he sees little hope for it in the hands of the masses. The articles clearly demonstrate the author’s divided loyalties, his conflict between social conscience and culture.

Shortly after publication of ‘Notes on Social Democracy,’ Gissing received an invitation to write quarterly political and cultural articles for the Russian journal, *Vyestnik Evropy*, which he gratefully accepted:

I was astonished this morning to receive a letter from Professor Beesly (of Univ. College), saying that he had been requested by Tourgenieff (the great Russian novelist,) to find someone who would supply a quarterly article of some 30pp. on the political, social & literary affairs of England to a periodical published in Petersburg, & called “Le Messager de l’Europe.” Beesly thought of me. My articles would of course be translated, & I should receive £8 for each! I have written to say I should be glad of the work.¹¹

⁹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 46.

¹⁰ *Notes on Social Democracy*, pp. 13-14.

¹¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 309.

Ivan Turgenev had been asked by Mixail Stassulevitch, editor of *Vyestnik Evropy*, to assist him in recruiting foreign correspondents for the journal, and in this capacity the Russian novelist wrote to Harrison for possible suggestions. However, according to Pierre Coustillas, the letter was never received.¹² At the suggestion of another friend, Maksim Kovalevsky, Turgenev then wrote to Edward Beesly, one of Harrison's Positivist colleagues, who at once recommended Gissing.¹³ On his acceptance of Beesly's offer, Turgenev wrote to the author confirming the assignment and the publication dates of the quarterly articles, reminding him that the Russian calendar lagged twelve days behind the English one, which meant that his articles should be posted twenty-one days in advance, the first contribution falling due in barely three weeks.¹⁴ However, Gissing's alarm at the closeness of the deadline was quickly assuaged on receipt of a second letter from Turgenev extending the despatch date by a further two weeks.¹⁵ Entitled 'Correspondence from London,' Gissing wrote eight articles in all, which were translated into Russian and published between February 1881 and November 1882. Unlike the somewhat ambivalent attitude the author adopts in 'Notes on Social Democracy,' in his London Letters Gissing is generally very forthright in his views on Government policy.

In the main the essays confine themselves to parliamentary business, particularly Irish Land Reform, which Gissing covers by summarising important speeches, and quoting from newspaper reports. Frequently however, he ventures a personal view on the issue in question, revealing his intensely radical stance at this

¹² Pierre Coustillas, *George Gissing and Ivan Turgenev* (London: The Enitharmon Press, 1981), p. 6.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ pp. 8-9.

¹⁵ pp. 7, 10-11.

time. This is evidenced, not only in his unqualified praise of Gladstone, his support of the Parnellites and belief in the freedom of the press, but also in his fierce criticism of the House of Lords, the Conservative leader Disraeli and imperialism.

Although the original texts are lost, an English translation from the Russian has since been made and incorporated in H E Preble's unpublished doctoral thesis 'Gissing's Contributions to *Vyestnik Evropy*.' As Preble points out, the double translation has inevitably created some inaccuracies, but these are not numerous, and the general import of Gissing's views remains intact.¹⁶

The main thrust of the first article, which was completed prior to the opening of the new parliamentary session, is directed at the iniquitous distribution of land in Ireland among a comparatively small number of English landowners, whose forefathers had received it as a gift from the Crown. It was common practice for these landowners to rent small, uneconomical parcels of land to Irish farmers on one-year contracts, the tenant being responsible for the erection and maintenance of his dwelling and outbuildings. Subject to importunate rent rises and eviction if unable to meet the increased payment, the farmer, as a consequence, had no security of tenure. In view of the urgency of the situation, Parliament was to meet a month earlier than usual, when a proposed new land law, designed to eliminate the difficulties between landlord and tenant, would be discussed. Meanwhile, the growing unrest in Ireland, encouraged by the Parnellites, who were striving for ultimate independence for Ireland, prompted the introduction of a Coercion Bill

¹⁶ Harry Eldon Preble, 'Gissing's Contributions to *Vyestnik Evropy*,' University of Illinois Ph.D., 1960 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms), pp. 129-131.

intended to restore law and order to the country. In each of his eight articles, Gissing provides detailed reports on the Irish question, demonstrating his genuine dismay at the continued exploitation by the English of agrarian Ireland.

Other matters covered in the first article include the Queen's speech, which addresses not only the volatile situation in Ireland, but also current developments in troublesome South Africa and Afghanistan. In addition Gissing applauds the postmaster-general's introduction of an innovative penny-savings scheme designed to encourage the habit of thrift among the poor, and his setting up of a system whereby ordinary people could purchase shares in public funds, and vilifies the church and court for the imprisonment of two clergymen who refused to obey a law governing church ritual.¹⁷ The essay ends with a scathing criticism of Disraeli's *Endymion*, which focuses on the absurdity of the novel's crudely disguised fictional characters, and its general lack of literary merit.¹⁸

Commenting on the author's literary works as a whole, Gissing claims:

English historians of the nineteenth century will find in them much information concerning curious instances of political ambition and success, and a strange period when the country's policy was guided by so-called "imperialism."¹⁹

Gissing deplored his country's aggressive foreign policy, never failing to express his deep concern whenever England flexed her imperial muscles, for instance in his letter to Clara Collet at the time of the relief of Mafeking:

As for Mafeking, why, of course, I am as glad as anyone else that the place is relieved. I fear I have not made clear to you that my quarrel is not with *England*, but with the people who are doing their best to change, & perhaps destroy, that English civilization which, on the whole, is the most promising the world as yet seen. Do you really approve of the spirit which has for

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 163-169.

¹⁸ pp. 169-175.

¹⁹ p. 175.

immediate result those outbreaks of brutal lawlessness throughout our country – a country hitherto renowned for its sober pursuit of the just ideal?²⁰

Both *The Whirlpool* and *The Crown of Life* are fiercely anti-war, and ‘Tyrtaeus,’ the author’s review of Swinburne’s sonnet, ‘The Transvaal,’ reviles the poet for inciting men to war, contending that ‘the poet of our day who sounds the Tyrtaeon note sets himself against the supreme ideal of civilisation.’²¹

Two issues that Gissing clearly felt represented a threat to personal liberty appear in Article II. The first concerns the right of Charles Bradlaugh, radical politician and freethinker, to take his seat in the House of Commons as member for Northampton without taking the oath of allegiance. Initially, a parliamentary committee rejected his demand that a simple affirmation should be accepted in its stead, but the Prime Minister intervened, thus allowing Bradlaugh to make his declaration. However, a prosecution brought by a member of the opposition, and upheld at appeal by the House of Lords, overturned Gladstone’s decision. Bradlaugh lost his seat, but was re-elected by his Northampton constituents, at which time he announced his intention of introducing a bill that would allow an affirmation.²² Much as Gissing sympathises with Bradlaugh’s invidious position however, he points out that the achievement of such a bill was ‘not as important as the firmness of conviction [Bradlaugh] would display by refusing to accept a seat in Parliament which he would have to purchase at the price of a hypocritical concession.’²³ Gissing continued to cover the controversial Bradlaugh case throughout his spell as *Vyestnik Evropy*’s London correspondent. On several

²⁰ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 8, p. 50.

²¹ Pierre Coustillas, ‘Gissing on Matters of War and Ethics: Two Half-Forgotten Essays’ *The Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. X, No. 3 (July, 1974), p. 2.

²² ‘Gissing’s Contributions to *Vyestnik Evropy*,’ pp. 202-204.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

occasions the Northampton representative was forcibly ejected from the Chamber, and it was not until 1886 that he was finally allowed to take his seat.

A second important issue raised in Article II was the author's concern over the arrest and imprisonment of Johann Most, Socialist dissident and editor of *Die Freiheit*, whom Gissing had already identified as a powerful revolutionary voice in his 'Notes on Social Democracy'. A former member of the German Reichstag, Most eventually settled in England and founded the anarchist newspaper, *Die Freiheit*. Most was arrested on 18 March 1881 for having published an alleged inflammatory article concerning European monarchs, reported in the *Spectator* as 'exulting ferociously in the assassination of the Czar, and recommending a similar deed every month [...].'²⁴ Initially, the editor was charged with 'the printing of vile libels about the deceased Russian emperor and ... the incitement toward killings in Europe,' but this was later changed to 'attempting to incite the assassination of Alexander III, the Emperor of Germany, and others.'²⁵ Gissing's major concern in this instance is not so much the plight of Johann Most, but rather the imposition of press censorship:

The absolute freedom of the press in political arguments is a right which Englishmen obtained by means of a hard struggle and in spite of occasional setbacks: it is precious to such a degree that, rather than infringe upon it, we are ready to tolerate accidental extremes.²⁶

Gissing stresses the point that an insignificant paper such as *Die Freiheit*, whose circulation rarely exceeded 300, hardly represented a serious threat to national security.²⁷ In his view it was better to counter 'foolish aspirations with other remedies than simple barriers to their opportunities for self-expression,' since

²⁴ p. 205, n. 72.

²⁵ p. 205.

²⁶ p. 207.

²⁷ pp. 205, n. 72; 207.

‘[l]ong experience has taught us that to hinder anyone’s right to speak is not only useless, but harmful.’²⁸ Recalling a similar occasion when the introduction of a Conspiracy to Murder Bill resulted in the resignation of Lord Palmerston and his cabinet, Gissing concludes ‘there can be no doubt that every government which takes it into its head to repeat the form of Palmerston’s actions will also meet with just as little sympathy in the mass of the population.’²⁹

In his third article, Gissing reports on the Most trial, quoting the judge’s direction to the jurors:

The jurors must examine ... whether the accused’s article may be called exalted and virtuous, and in case they think it can be so called let him be acquitted. But if, on the other hand, they find it opposed to law and morality they must find him guilty.³⁰

The author claims that a literal interpretation of this statement suggests that ‘every printed thing if it cannot conscientiously be called “exalted and virtuous,” may actually be subject to prosecution for libel,’ thus putting any press publication at risk of criminal proceedings.³¹ His argument is perhaps rather fanciful, but it clearly indicates his strength of feeling at this particular time.

Gissing’s deep antipathy towards the church comes to the fore in Article III, when he discusses the May Day meetings held annually in London, which functioned chiefly as fund raising events. While he concedes that the clergy do much that is good, he wryly comments:

It is wonderful to spread the gospel to the inhabitants of the Azores, but this in no way improves the position of the 90,000 destitutes who swarm London, and anyone who is to any degree acquainted with the life led in the impoverished

²⁸ p. 207.

²⁹ p. 208 and n. 76.

³⁰ p. 249

³¹ p. 249.

quarters of London cannot think without bitter laughter and great dissatisfaction of those thousands of pounds which are spent to send missionaries to China or Africa. Such stupidity is purely in the English spirit, and I will speak of it in my time.³²

The last phrase was no empty promise, since in *The Nether World* Gissing pours scorn on the ineffectiveness of philanthropy to ameliorate the suffering of the poor, and the Church's efforts in this regard, which are conspicuous by their absence.

Contrary to the doubts expressed in his *Pall Mall Gazette* essays about the ability of the working classes to assimilate true democracy, in Article IV Gissing fully endorses the achievements of the trades union movement, claiming that the rapid change in English attitudes towards such organisations 'loudly bears witness to the successes made by English democracy and to the political progress of England in general.'³³ As in earlier reports of the author's 'Correspondence from London,' the bulk of this article is devoted to Irish affairs, but other issues discussed concern the granting of self-government to the Boers in the Transvaal, which received Gissing's unequivocal support, the Indian budget deficit about which the author comments '[t]his helps one understand what the "Imperialistic" policy is costing England,' and the Bradlaugh case.

The remaining four articles are primarily concerned with the Irish question. However, in Article VII, Gissing reports that public attention has been temporarily diverted from this issue by even more serious events occurring in Egypt, where the activities of Egyptian anarchists threaten the safety of the Suez Canal. The

³² pp. 243-4.

³³ p. 280.

author again reveals his deep-rooted anti-imperialism by pointing out that though a majority approve of strong intervention in Alexandria, a more intelligent and far-sighted minority are opposed to English interference in countries that are not part of the Empire in the belief that the call for armed intervention is motivated by financial interests. In Gissing's view, after the overthrow of the Egyptian government:

England should have sought order through entering into agreements with other powers, and not by sending its navy to defend the privileges of the deposed caste in complete disregard of abstract justice or the interests of the Egyptian people.³⁴

In the meantime the Egyptian military proceeded to fortify the port of Alexandria, which prompted an ultimatum from the British government that if work did not cease they would open fire on the port. After the bombardment, John Bright resigned his Cabinet post in protest, which action Gissing applauded in the hope that it would 'to some extent cool the enthusiasm of those who demand the application of crude force in spite of the consequences.'³⁵

Article VIII begins with the news that the Egyptian campaign has ended in victory for England. The author notes with a degree of cynicism that the church has been particularly vocal in its support of the government's action - in a special prayer, the Archbishop of Canterbury expressed thanks to God for the victory - suggesting that '[t]o have *everyone* thank God for its success displays the pretense all too obviously.'³⁶ Concerning the subsequent discussions on the measures required for maintaining control over the situation in Egypt, Gissing is of the opinion that 'self-government, even in its lowest form, is more practical for a

³⁴ p. 389.

³⁵ p. 394.

³⁶ pp. 397-8.

people than the highest form of foreign control.’³⁷ Other reports in Article VIII concern the passage of a bill designed to ameliorate the plight of the many Irish farmers whose rent arrears prevented them from benefiting from the Land Bill, and the Married Women’s Property Bill, which sought to rectify anomalies contained in the current law.³⁸ In addition, Gissing again notes the increasing influence of the trades unions, whose annual congress introduced a resolution demanding reform of English land ownership in Ireland, which in essence amounted to nationalisation.³⁹ The author’s comments on the surge of interest in the resolution among representatives of the democratic party stand in sharp contrast to his view expressed in ‘Notes on Social Democracy’ that socialism was non-existent in England.

Evident from his letter to Algernon referring to the despatch of his first article, Gissing initially found his work on the journal stimulating and meaningful, since it provided a prestigious medium through which to air his radical views:

It makes 36pp. of large octavo MS., & has cost no little trouble, I can assure you. Happily, the division on Parnell’s Amendment took place on Friday night, so that I was able to bring my report up to a definite period. It goes to-morrow morning for the land of Nihilism. I have dealt very fully with the Irish question, then with the English Agricultural depression, Fawcett’s Post-Office reforms, the so-called “crisis” in the English Church, & - “Endymion,” the last coming in for not little severe criticism, as you may imagine.⁴⁰

The letter continues with the author’s personal views on the Irish problem, revealing his unequivocal support for the cause: ‘I should not be sorry if it led to

³⁷ p. 408.

³⁸ pp. 408-413.

³⁹ p. 419.

⁴⁰ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, pp. 2-3.

open Revolution in Ireland. Certainly no good will be done till the Home Rulers have their way.’⁴¹

At the time Gissing undoubtedly held strong political views, but by the end of 1882 his radical sentiments were being undermined both by a strengthening sense of his role as a writer, which he believed demanded a total commitment to art, and an innate core of conservatism, born of a profound distrust of so-called progress. Inevitably, the work became a chore, and what proved to be his last contribution to the journal was completed under protest: ‘I ought to have already begun my Russian article for this quarter, but, alas, I [‘delay’ blotched] & delay, & have not the courage to sit down to it.’⁴² Another, less apparent reason for Gissing’s disenchantment with politics is nonetheless clearly discernible in his articles for the Russian journal. From the outset, they express extreme frustration at Parliament’s lack of political will to expedite urgent business. In concluding his report on the Irish Land and Coercion Bills, both of which were subject to interminable delays, the author comments:

There has been much talk about the necessity and possibility of introducing into the lower house some means of closing debates ... We have just been informed that a certain now-forgotten parliamentary rule which had been made in the era from 1610 – 1670 gives to the speaker absolute power in this matter ... In the course of time, this question may become much more important than it seems to be now.⁴³

Essay III reports that a Bill concerning the bribery of electors had had to be abandoned, together with an amendment to the Ballot Act, and a measure calling for county government in Ireland. In Gissing’s view ‘[s]uch a state of affairs may indeed be called desperate, and it shows once again that the machine of

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴² p. 101.

⁴³ ‘Gissing’s Contributions to *Vyestnik Evropy*,’ p. 160.

parliamentarianism is not strong enough to cope with the problems placed before it.’⁴⁴

Essay VII again addresses the current stasis that constantly subverts governmental power:

Besides Irish affairs, there accumulates each year a number of problems which are primarily important to England, and the examination of each must result in the indefinite deferment of others. ... Obviously the only answer can be that though action is difficult, inaction is absolutely intolerable. In Ireland complete social revolution is taking place, and if the responsible leaders of this nation continue to doze, a still more serious political upheaval will soon occur in England itself.⁴⁵

Finally, Essay VIII reports that during the present session, except for bills on the suppression of crime in Ireland, the bearing of arms, and the relief of arrears, all other important matters were left almost untouched. The author contends that it had become a matter of public concern that members of Parliament spent half a year achieving nothing while there were vital issues awaiting resolution. He asks: ‘Are such absurdities made possible only out of respect for routine?’⁴⁶

Gissing’s frustration at Parliament’s archaic procedures, which exacerbated its inability to bring matters of national importance to a speedy conclusion, was clearly a contributing factor to his disillusionment with politics. This, coupled with his reservations about social democracy, his inborn conservatism and growing conviction that his future work should concern itself with literature in its purest form, undoubtedly explains his abrupt departure from the political arena.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 220, 221.

⁴⁵ pp. 355-6.

⁴⁶ p. 412.

Although it is generally acknowledged that Gissing held strong radical views during his early twenties, there is one dissenting voice that casts doubt on the author's sincerity at this time. In 'Gissing and the Positivists: The *Vestnik Evropy* Articles,' Martha Vogeler avers somewhat cynically that the author accepted the commission merely because he was desperately short of money, a view hardly borne out by the fact that in his letter telling Algernon of his unexpected assignment, Gissing slightly misquotes a verse from James Graham's 'Montrose to his Mistress,' suggesting that his attitude towards the venture was that of '*carpe deum*' rather than material:

He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dare not put it to the touch,
To win or lose it all!⁴⁷

It should be remembered also that Gissing's 'Notes on Social Democracy' had recently been published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and, while not revealing particularly strong personal leanings towards Socialism, these certainly indicate a deep interest in political issues, both at home and abroad.

Professor Vogeler is of the opinion that Gissing gleaned his ideas and information for his articles from his Positivist friends, a rather scurrilous suggestion bearing in mind that Professor Beesly had himself been asked to contribute to the editor of *Vyestnik Evropy*'s proposed new daily paper *Porjadok*, thus making plagiarism easily detectable.⁴⁸ Under the circumstances, it is hardly feasible that Gissing would have dared to poach material from this, or the movement's own publications *Positivist Comments on Public Affairs* and

⁴⁷ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 310.

⁴⁸ 'Gissing and Turgenev,' p. 9.

Harrison's 'Bulletin: Grande Bretagne,' which appeared in the Paris Positivist organ, *La Revue Occidentale*.⁴⁹ Also, from the author's later correspondence with his siblings, it is clear that the quarterly articles became extremely time-consuming and burdensome. This would hardly have been the case had he been merely recycling already published material.

Martha Vogeler's article argues that since Gissing had regular access to Harrison's home and attended Positivist meetings, he would have no doubt kept the group informed of his progress, and in consequence would have been unlikely to publish controversial opinions. Actually, bearing in mind that Gissing was attracted to Positivist thinking, it is unsurprising that he should hold similar political views. However, the article contends that the fact that Helen Norman of *Workers in the Dawn* espoused Comtean ideas suggests that Gissing originally sought Harrison's help because he thought their views of society were compatible. This, the article suggests, accounts for the similarity between 'the main topics Gissing covers in his London Letters' and those to be found in 'Harrison's *Revue Occidentale* Bulletins and the *Positivist Comments on Public Affairs*.'⁵⁰ What Professor Vogeler omits from her argument is that Helen Norman also assimilated the ideas of Schopenhauer, by definition therefore, indicating a potential divergence in the author's philosophical thought well before the advent of 'The Hope of Pessimism,' Gissing's self-confessed attack on Positivism.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Martha Vogeler, 'Gissing and the Positivists: *The Vestnik Evropy* Articles,' *The Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (January, 1985), p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 104.

The article makes particular reference to the fact that six of Gissing's London Letters contain anti-imperialist material, asking whether it can be considered purely coincidental that eight of Harrison's Bulletins contain similar material.⁵² One has only to read *The Crown of Life*, *The Whirlpool* and the essay 'Tyrtaeus' to dispel any doubts that Gissing was other than vehemently anti-war and anti-imperialist, quite capable of expressing his own disquiet and disgust over British intervention in Afghanistan, the Transvaal and Egypt.

Attention is then drawn to the similarities between Harrison's and Gissing's comments on the Bradlaugh case, claiming that 'Gissing's dismay at Parliament's punitive treatment of Bradlaugh was like that expressed in the Positivist's [sic] endorsement of the Affirmation Bill ending the controversy in 1883.'⁵³ Gissing's anti-theological stance is well documented – consider the outrage felt by his friends when it was claimed that he recanted on his death bed – so what would be more natural than that he should support Bradlaugh's claim as an atheist to make an affirmation rather than take the oath.⁵⁴ Incidentally, Gissing's final report on Bradlaugh appeared in the November 1882 issue of *Vyestnik Evropy*, well before the passing of the Affirmation Bill of 1883.

Contrary to Professor Vogeler's assertion, citing Preble's quotation from Morley Roberts' generally considered unreliable *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, that Gissing was 'not in the habit of reading newspapers regularly,'

⁵² 'Gissing and the Positivists,' p. 8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁴ See H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, Vol. II (London: 1934; Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 580; *The Collected Letters of George Gissing: Volume Nine 1902 – 1903*, eds. P. F. Mattheisen, A.C. Young and P. Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1997), p. 232. Letter from Eduard Bertz to Gabrielle Fleury; *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, pp. 284-9.

Preble's thesis indicates that during the author's years of radicalism he 'showed an extensive acquaintance with magazines and newspapers.'⁵⁵ Preble nominates the politically independent *Times*, the *Daily News*, organ of the Liberal party, and the radical *Pall Mall Gazette* as his principal sources of information, going so far as to suggest that the *Times* was 'the workhorse of the Russian articles'.⁵⁶ Undeniably newspaper reports provided the groundwork for Gissing's articles, but on issues of keen personal interest, the opinions he expressed were invariably his own.

Despite Martha Vogeler's comprehensive account of the seeming parallels between Harrison's Bulletins and the articles in *Vyestnik Evropy*, it is impossible to disregard the fact that all of Gissing's work, in any field whatsoever, bears the stamp of integrity; it follows therefore, that having taken on the journalist's role he would carry it out conscientiously to the best of *his* ability, not that of others. In 1882 he was still desperately short of money, so if the fee had been his main reason for accepting the commission, why give it up if all that was required was sight of Positivist publications? Clearly Gissing began the assignment with immense enthusiasm, but as he developed a more focused, philosophical approach towards his writing, he found that he was unable to sustain his interest in political journalism.

At approximately the same time as Gissing severed his connection with *Vyestnik Evropy*, his interest in Positivist philosophy also came to an abrupt end, the author having found himself increasingly drawn towards Arthur Schopenhauer's doctrine of pessimism. Pierre Coustillas believes that the

⁵⁵ 'Gissing and the Positivists,' p. 3; 'Gissing's Contributions to *Vyestnik Evropy*,' p. 36.

⁵⁶ 'Gissing's Contributions to *Vyestnik Evropy*,' p. 37.

author's interest in the German philosopher was generated by his friend Eduard Bertz, who was closely involved with the creation of *Workers in the Dawn*, and, in fact, assisted with the passage on Schopenhauer in chapter fourteen of the first volume of the novel.⁵⁷ Coustillas also suggests that 'there is an undercurrent of Schopenhauerian thoughts and attitudes in Gissing's most characteristic works' such as *The Unclassed*, *Isabel Clarendon*, *Thyrza*, *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903).⁵⁸

It is well documented that Schopenhauer was an ardent disciple of the teachings of Immanuel Kant, whose fundamental concept was that:

Our whole experience of the world ... is subject to three laws and conditions, the inviolable forms in which all our knowledge is effectuated. These are time, space and causality. But they are not definitions of the world as it may be in and for itself, of *Das Ding an sich*, independently of our appreciation of it; rather they belong only to its appearance, in that they are nothing but the forms of our knowledge. All variation, all becoming and passing away is only possible through these three. ... In other words, time, space and causality are mechanisms of the intellect, and ... we call immanent the conception of things which is vouchsafed to us in their image and conditioned by them; while that is transcendent which we might gain by applying reason upon itself, by critique of the reason, and by dint of seeing through these three devices as mere forms of knowledge.⁵⁹

For Schopenhauer, as for Kant, the true reality lay beyond the phenomenon, therefore he appropriated Kant's notion of the *Ding an sich* and defined it as the ego, the Immanent Will, which 'existing outside time, space and causality, blind and causeless, greedily, wildly, ruthlessly demanded life.'⁶⁰ In Schopenhauer's view the will controlled the mind, not the reverse as was generally believed, and since the will creates desire, craving and unrest, dissatisfaction and unhappiness

⁵⁷ *Essays & Fiction*, p. 17.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.23-4.

⁵⁹ Thomas Mann, *The Living Thoughts of Schopenhauer* (London: Cassell and Company Limited, 1946), p. 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

are the inevitable outcome. Only through selfless, ascetic resignation, renunciation of the will to live, might man achieve the opposite state of quietism.

However, as Thomas Mann points out, there is one other temporary release from misery, which exists through the aesthetic state:

... when genius appears in an individual, a far larger measure of the power of knowledge falls to his lot than is necessary for the service of an individual will; and this superfluity of knowledge, being free, now becomes subject purified from will, a clear mirror of the inner nature of the world.⁶¹

Having achieved an aesthetic state, the artist loses himself in the object and forgets his will. As Schopenhauer puts it in *The Will and the Idea*, 'genius is the power of leaving one's own interests, wishes and aims entirely out of sight, thus of entirely divesting oneself of one's own personality for a time so as to remain *pure knowing subject*, clear eye of the world.'⁶²

Bryan Magee argues that 'Schopenhauer was the first major Western philosopher to be openly and explicitly atheist,' thus he 'placed the arts higher in the scheme of things,' as a consequence of which 'his influence on creative artists of the front rank has exceeded that of any other great philosopher of the modern era.'⁶³ Gissing's work was undoubtedly influenced both by Schopenhauer's views on the impersonal, disinterested aspect of aesthetic contemplation, for instance in his revised version of 'The Artist's Child' and *The Unclassed*, while the philosopher's doctrine on submission of the will, is clearly present in 'The Last Half-Crown' and *New Grub Street*. Regarding the latter concept, as David Grylls points out, therein lies the paradox in Gissing's thought, since the author's

⁶¹ pp. 10-11, 66-67.

⁶² Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, ed., D. Berman (London: Everyman 1998), p. 109.

⁶³ Bryan Magee, *The Great Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 213.

work 'is packed, from beginning to end, with warnings against weakness of will,' while 'Gissing himself was fanatically industrious.'⁶⁴ Grylls accepts however, that when such activity involves the intellect, Schopenhauer's philosophy is not always inconsistent with labour and endeavour, because '[r]egular, exhausting, artistic work is recommended as the only defence against the grimness of life.'⁶⁵ In his later work where resilience often replaces resignation, Gissing rightly sees this as energy, rather than a justification of the will to live.

In 'The Hope of Pessimism,' a weighty polemic denouncing the sophistry of Positivist philosophy, Gissing mounts a vehement attack on the Religion of Humanity, which, contrary to Christianity, is, in his view, 'a creed essentially optimistic' where 'there is no comparison instituted between the imperfection of the present world and the glory of one which is to come.'⁶⁶ Having discarded supernaturalism, 'in the new religion, man is the beginning and the end; in himself is precept and sanction; moreover, in himself is the reward.'⁶⁷ In an agnostic philosophy there can be:

... but one reward, and that the simplest of all, being nothing else than the pleasure of a good conscience. For what else is the joy of self-perfecting in altruistic thought and performance? The inward pleasure derivable by a philosopher from the possession of what he deems a good conscience will naturally assume nobler forms than the same pleasure in beings of less large discourse; to his reflective mind the consequences of a good action extend themselves in ever-widening circles till they touch the very limits of humanity, and, in fact, he attains to the conception of that subjective immortality which is to replace the heaven of old creeds.⁶⁸

But, Gissing argues, if the agnostic optimist sees life as something good and for its own sake, it stands to reason that man will not concern himself with the good of

⁶⁴ David Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp. 6-7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁶⁶ *Essays & Fiction*, p.77.

⁶⁷ p. 78.

⁶⁸ pp. 78-79.

others, but will make it a first priority to secure his own happiness; altruism then becomes simply a euphemism for egoism. If man's fundamental instinct is self-interest, what chance is there of converting him to the doctrine of humanity? Yet, the writer asserts:

... instinct can be overcome by reason; a man may, in a solitary instance, be capable of sacrificing his life at the prompting of reason, even though life seem to him an absolute good; or he may go further than this, and, by the practice of the severest asceticism, prove that the conquest of instinct has become the habit of his life, that he has attained to *die Verneinung des Willens*. Life is no longer a good to him; he is a Pessimist.⁶⁹

Gissing attributes to Schopenhauer the metaphysical definition of egoism: 'It is the outcome of what he calls *die Bejahung des Willens zum Leben*, the affirmation of the will to live, as opposed to that *Verneinung des Willens* with which alone genuine self-forgetfulness is compatible.'⁷⁰ Taking the philosopher's view, the writer sees life as a journey through a vale of tears, salvation from which lies only in pity for the whole human race:

We enter the gates of life with wailing, and anguish to the womb which brings us forth; we pass again into the outer darkness through the valley of ghastly terrors, and leave cold misery on the lips of those that mourn us. The interval is but a feverish combat, the commonplace of moralists. ... Our passions rack us with the unspeakable torment of desire, and fruition is but another name for disillusion.

In the pity of it we must find our salvation. The compassion which each man first feels for himself, let him extend to his fellow-sufferers.

It is in the pessimistic philosophy as developed by Schopenhauer that we find the true successor of pure Christianity. In former times the world had to be taught the lesson of salvation through the medium of a myth; hereafter, the developed understanding of mankind will grasp it in the abstract form. The establishment of the kingdom of righteousness can only ensue upon the destruction of egotism, and egotism only perishes together with optimism, together with "the will to live." ... The prospect of happiness on earth is a chimera ... The grave will become a symbol of joy; those who have departed

⁶⁹ p. 91.

⁷⁰ p. 91

will be spoken of as the happy ones, and the tears of the mourner will be checked by his bitter reason.⁷¹

The most extreme example of the pessimistic creed occurs in *New Grub Street*, where Reardon, crushed by failure, welcomes death as a joyful release from the sorrows of life. Equally, 'The Last Half-Crown,' the first of the author's second phase of short stories, focuses strongly on the notion of non-resistance. However, Gissing appears to have had reservations about the grave being the ultimate 'symbol of joy,' for in 'Phoebe,' written in 1883, survival is the braver option; to meet adversity with resilience rather than resignation still involves submission of the will, but here it affirms, rather than abnegates life. Gissing's third phase of short fiction abounds with characters like Phoebe, for instance Mr Spicer in 'The House of Cobwebs,' Mrs Jaffray in 'The Peace Bringer' and Humplebee in the story of that name.

In the concluding passages of 'The Hope of Pessimism' Gissing refers to the one exception Schopenhauer found acceptable within his pessimistic creed - the optimism of the artist during the act of creation:

The artistic mind ... is *das reine Subject der Erkennens*, the subject contemplating the object without disturbing consciousness of self. In the mood of artistic contemplation the will is destroyed, self is eliminated, the world of phenomena resolves itself into pictures of absolute significance, and the heart rejoices itself before images of pure beauty.⁷²

In Pierre Coustillas' view, 'Schopenhauer's comments on the privileged position of the artist helped Gissing to clarify his own position regarding his art,' enabling him ultimately to become 'a novelist who kept his distance from all political and philosophical movements, endeavouring to record without passion the life around

⁷¹ pp. 91-2, 94, 96-7.

⁷² p. 95.

him.⁷³ Thus, by a circuitous route that briefly encompassed the ideals of radical politics and Positivism, the author finally discovered that the true significance of his role as an artist lay within the Schopenhauerean creed.

Gissing's interest in the teachings of Schopenhauer remained with him for the rest of his life. In Autumn XIII of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, immediately following his reflections on the solace of death, the narrator's thoughts turn to philosophy: 'fatalism is not mere resignation; one has not only to accept one's lot, whatever it is, as inevitable, but to accept it with joy, with praises.'⁷⁴

In the event, 'The Hope of Pessimism' was not submitted for publication. In a letter to his brother, Gissing stated: 'The pessimistic article is finished, but I shall not even try to get it published, seeing that it has developed into nothing more or less than an attack on Positivism ... I should feel uncomfortable at the thought of Harrison reading it.'⁷⁵ Nevertheless, in the first edition of *The Unclassed*, Maud Enderby's views, although fundamentally Christian, have resounding echoes of Schopenhauer's doctrine of pessimism:

To feel and enjoy the fulness of life, to assert your existence, to hope and fear for the future, - these things were forbidden to whosoever sought the higher ends of being. Abnegation, mortification of the desires, this alone could save. We were sent into the world only that we might renounce it, and our renunciation must extend even to the instinct which bids us to cling to life.⁷⁶

⁷³ p. 22.

⁷⁴ George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903; Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982; rep. 1983), p. 185.

⁷⁵ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 103.

⁷⁶ *Essays & Fiction*, p. 23, n. 44. Pierre Coustillas points out that this passage only occurs in Vol. 3, Ch. 3, of the original edition of *The Unclassed*.

Following a discussion of the novel with Harrison, Gissing found it necessary to write a letter of apology and explanation for his apparent ‘wanton disregard of [Harrison’s] feelings and opinion’:

I am sure you will believe me when I say that I was astonished at your view of this book; that possibility never occurred to me. I had thought that you might disagree with this or that, but was so far from imagining it could excite such strong feeling that one of my pleasantest anticipations was the thought that you would recognize my progress & enjoy reading the story.⁷⁷

From the tone of Gissing’s letter, Harrison had clearly raised several objections to the book, almost certainly to the sentiments articulated by Maud Enderby. When the revised edition of *The Unclassed* was published in 1895, the passage was omitted.

By the time he wrote *The Unclassed*, Gissing had lost interest in political and social reform, his duty as a writer being to observe life objectively, and to represent it simply and truthfully. In a letter to Algernon, written less than a year after his last *Vyestnik Evropy* article, the author signals a dramatic shift in perspective:

My attitude henceforth is that of the artist pure & simple. The world is for me a collection of phenomena, which are to be studied & 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, & able to regard everything as a picture. I watch & observe myself just as much as others. The impulse to regard every juncture as a “situation” becomes stronger & stronger. In the midst of desperate misfortune I can pause to make a note for future use, & the afflictions of others are to me materials for observation. This, I rather think, is at last the final stage of my development, coming after so many & various phases. Brutal & egotistic it would be called by most people. What has that to do with me, if it is a fact?⁷⁸

In essence, Gissing has made a decision to distance himself from worldly concerns in order that he might present a disinterested, objective account of life as

⁷⁷ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, pp. 230-31.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.146.

it reveals itself to him. *The Unclassed*, the author's second published novel, discloses a distinct aesthetic shift from the deeply confused emotions felt by Golding about moral duty and art in *Workers in the Dawn*, to the pragmatic attitude taken by Waymark towards social injustice, in the later work. Both characters see poverty as a social evil, but while Golding feels it is his moral duty to try to alleviate the suffering of the poor, Waymark uses the medium of art as a means of distancing himself from the problem.

When Algernon suggested that the Waymark character was autobiographical, Gissing hotly denied it, yet it is difficult to dissociate the author's views from those Waymark sought to defend when discussing his manuscript with Julian Casti:

There was a time when I might have written in this way with a declared social object. That is all gone by. I have no longer a spark of social enthusiasm. Art is all I now care for, and as art I wish my work to be judged.

...

You know pretty well the phases I have passed through. Upon ranting radicalism followed a period of philosophical study. My philosophy, I have come to see, was worth nothing; what philosophy is worth anything? It had its use for myself, however; it made me by degrees self-conscious, and brought me to see that in art alone I could find full satisfaction.⁷⁹

Surely this is Gissing announcing to the public that his 'attitude henceforth is that of the artist pure and simple.'⁸⁰

In addition to his political output during this period, Gissing produced two descriptive essays, 'On Battersea Bridge' and 'Along Shore,' the former achieving publication in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in November 1883. The manuscript of

⁷⁹ George Gissing, *The Unclassed* (1884; Hassocks: The Harvester Press, reproducing text of revised edition of 1895, 1976), pp. 211, 212..

⁸⁰ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 146.

‘Along Shore’ was found among the author’s papers after his death, and there is no evidence to suggest that it was published in his lifetime.⁸¹ Both essays, which touch on the evils of industrialisation, reinforce the argument that, among other things, Gissing’s radicalism fell victim partly to his innate core of conservatism. No longer able to sustain his belief in political reform, the author turned his attention to social and environmental issues, concerns that were to inform much of his future work. From *Demos* onwards, Gissing’s conservatism formed the sub-text of nearly all of his major novels. With the short stories however, length alone demanded the exclusion of such material from tales that concentrated essentially on individual characterisation.

As Pierre Coustillas points out in his notes to *Gissing at Work: A Study of his Notebook ‘Extracts from My Reading’* (1988), Extract No. 104: ‘I have seen a man of true taste pause for a quarter of an hour to look at the channellings that recent rain had traced in a heap of cinders,’ stresses the gulf between the cultured individual and the unobservant masses, and has strong links with the ending of ‘On Battersea Bridge.’⁸² The story’s narrator is leaning on the parapet of the bridge gazing at the dying sunset, watching the ‘[g]reen and purple, amber and gold, all conceivable colours wax and wane, marking their change on the mirror of the stream [...]’.⁸³ Meanwhile the flow of London workers passes by indifferent to the spectacle, ‘too weary to spend one thought upon the noble picture to be seen

⁸¹ *Essays & Fiction*, p. 26.

⁸² *George Gissing at Work: A Study of His Notebook ‘Extracts from my Reading,’* eds. P. Coustillas and P. Bridgwater (Greensboro, North Carolina: ELT Press, 1988), p. 110 - quotation from John Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*, Vol. II, Ch. 25

⁸³ George Gissing, *Selections Autobiographical and Imaginative*, with notes by Alfred Gissing (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), p. 57.

for the turning of the head [...].'⁸⁴ One man alone of the human tide pauses to lean over the parapet, seemingly a fellow admirer of natural beauty, but ironically the man merely remarks: 'Throws up a deal of mud, don't it?'⁸⁵ Although the story is principally founded on the notion that the industrial world has robbed man of his ability to see, there is a subtle suggestion in the contrasting views held by the two men, that the object in question is, after all, a matter of individual perception; who can say that the narrator's aesthetic appreciation has greater value than the workman's pragmatic evaluation of the scene?

The publication of 'On Battersea Bridge' seemed at the time to indicate a revival of Gissing's fortunes, it being his second acceptance within a month.⁸⁶ His delight at getting the piece published, is warmly recollected in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*:

... I stood yesterday watching a noble sunset, which brought back to my memory the sunsets of a London autumn, thirty years ago; more glorious, it seems to me, than any I have since beheld. It happened that, on one such evening, I was by the river at Chelsea ... I loitered upon Battersea Bridge – the old picturesque wooden bridge, and there the western sky took hold upon me. Half an hour later, I was speeding home. I sat down, and wrote a description of what I had seen, and straightway sent it to an evening newspaper, which, to my astonishment, published the thing next day – 'On Battersea Bridge'. How proud I was of that little bit of writing.⁸⁷

A brief note to Algernon, expressing pleasure at his brother's flattering response to the essay, also affirms that '[t]he incident at the end is a fact.'⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.55.

⁸⁵ p. 58.

⁸⁶ The poem 'Song' was accepted in October 1883 for publication in the November issue of *Temple Bar*.

⁸⁷ *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, pp. 211-2.

⁸⁸ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 184.

The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft was the last and generally most highly acclaimed of Gissing's other works. It first appeared in 1902 as a four part serial in the *Fortnightly Review* entitled 'An Author at Grass,' and was revised and published by Constable in 1903.⁸⁹ Purported to be the memoirs of an author friend, the book nevertheless contains many experiences that can be linked to Gissing personally through his diary and letters, and which often have clear parallels with events that occur in his novels and short stories. In this regard the *Private Papers* give an interesting insight into the significance the author attached to certain incidents that occurred in his life, which he felt were worthy of recounting to the public through his fiction. Brief reference to these striking parallels will be made whenever they arise in the short stories.

Returning to Gissing's non-fictional output during the early eighties, like 'On Battersea Bridge' the setting for 'Along Shore' is the River Thames. However, while the earlier essay focuses on human attitudes towards natural phenomena, with only an implied reference to social change, 'Along Shore' is a starkly realistic portrayal of the desolation that followed in the wake of industrialism.

The season is Winter, the time evening, and in the city 'the tumult of the day has ended,' except in London's dockland, where 'forms are moving among dimly-lighted piles of barrels and bales' and 'the intermittent thud of hammers guides you to ... a dry dock, where men with lanterns are working late at the repairing of a vessel,' suggesting the presence of an industrial giant that never sleeps.⁹⁰ A solitary figure wanders along 'unpeopled' paths observing the unceasing activity

⁸⁹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 9, pp. xxviii, xiv.

⁹⁰ *Essays & Fiction*, p. 100.

pervading the vast industrial site. Soon he reaches a flotilla of majestic ships, which seem to transmit faint sounds of sadness; 'the sigh of the strong, swift creatures, as they dream of glad conflict with Atlantic billows' moves him to pity as he muses on their plight:

... moored here in the recesses of the narrow Thames, in the shadow of a great city to which they seem nothing akin. It is as though we had robbed them of liberty, perforce constrained them to do our spiriting over the waters, to be our messengers and carriers from land to land.⁹¹

Passing by the imprisoned ships, the narrator nears a dismal neighbourhood of cheek by jowl hovels, where 'the atmosphere at its closest has an ancient and fish-like smell, and where the wind has space to blow, you distinguish flavours of rope and tar, canvas and cargo.'⁹² For workers and ships alike only the smells of freedom remain.

By the 'Stairs at the foot of Old Gravel Lane in Wapping' an assiduous student of maritime history has etched on the adjacent wall, a record of noteworthy events dating back to the Plague, the Fire of London, and beyond. On the opposite wall is painted a list, spanning more than one hundred years, of 'the winners of Doggett's Coat and Badge, in the annual rowing match from London Bridge to Chelsea,' a poignant reminder of the hustle and bustle of yesteryear.⁹³ The scene is very different now: at the head of the Stairs a latter-day waterman, victim of the relentless march of progress, laments the lack of business, his solitary, empty boat testimony to the decline of water transport since the coming of the railways. At every juncture, the might of modern dockland is undercut by images of a simpler, less frenetic age - 'sleeping ships' that dream of 'the glory of southern seas,' a

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 100.

⁹² p. 101.

⁹³ pp. 101, 102.

redundant waterman who recalls having known ‘as many as sixty boats lying here at the Stairs, ferrying workmen and others to the south bank,’ the painted wall, recording momentous events from the past.⁹⁴ ‘Along Shore’ is an elegy to a bygone age, one of the earliest examples of Gissing’s biting attacks on social change, reflecting his innate conservatism and nostalgia for the past. Subsequently, through the medium of fiction, Gissing pursued a vigorous crusade against the evils of industrialism, imperialism, commercialism and mass culture.⁹⁵

While his successful output during this period was largely in the field of non-fiction, Gissing doggedly continued to work on both novels and short stories. After *Workers in the Dawn*, the author went on to write ‘Mrs Grundy’s Enemies,’ ‘Watching the Storm Clouds,’ ‘A Highly Respectable Story’ and ‘A Graven Image,’ but while ‘Mrs Grundy’s Enemies’ was accepted and paid for by George Bentley, none of the novels actually achieved publication.⁹⁶ In addition the author completed ten short stories, which, with the exception of ‘Phoebe,’ also remained unpublished. Although, on the face of it, the years 1880 to 1884 bespeak a catalogue of failure, they represent in fact a most crucial period in terms of Gissing’s development, through a series of philosophical shifts, towards the objective stance of the disinterested artist, the essence of which is articulated by Waymark in *The Unclassed*.

⁹⁴ pp. 100, 102-3.

⁹⁵ The most notable examples are to be found in *Demos*, *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *The Whirlpool*, and *The Crown of Life*.

⁹⁶ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, pp. 76, 88, 117 & 195.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Time of Transition

Gissing's success in America turned out to be short-lived and within a year he was back in England, determined to settle in London and pursue a serious literary career.¹ A reconstituted version of 'The Artist's Child,' written after his return and published in *Tinsleys' Magazine*, is the most idealistic of Gissing's short stories about art.² Again told retrospectively, the narrator of the second version is in no doubt as to the calibre of the artist at his moment of epiphany: 'Did not genius guide the painter's hand here, if ever?'³ Nathaniel Pendle's life followed a similar pattern to that of Julius Trent; he fell in love and married, whereupon his work became inspired, until his muse died. As in the first version, there is a frail daughter, who too inherits and surpasses her father's artistic talent, and dies from grief at the loss of it. As the girl lay dead, her father:

... painted his child, not as she then looked, wan and colourless as a faded lily; but sketching the outline from the face before him, made it live and breathe with the warm hues of health. The eyes which then were closed forever, memory, aided by imagination, pictured forth as they once had been, eloquent with the light of genius ere yet it was quenched in eternal darkness.⁴

Although, in death, the girl's face is 'wan and colourless as a faded lily,' her inner beauty is undimmed, momentarily bestowing upon the artist the imaginative power to reproduce from memory the living image of his beloved daughter. In a sense Gissing is already instinctively drawn to Schopenhauer's notion of the primacy of the aesthetic state, but at this early stage from an essentially idealistic

¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 238.

² *Lost Stories from America*, p. 67.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴ p. 76.

point of view. Each of the artist stories discussed here and in chapter two, insists upon the spiritual and transcendent qualities of womanly beauty as the enabling power behind artistic genius; love of the beautiful generates in the artist, poetic feeling and the desire to capture the inner essence of his subject, to reveal the soul. However, earthly love as well as spiritual, is essential if the spirit of genius is to stay alive.

In a contemporary text, 'Woman in her psychological relations' in *Embodied Selves* (1998), the anonymous author asserts:

The relations of women are twofold; material and spiritual - corporeal and moral. By her corporeal nature she is the type and model of Beauty; by her spiritual, of Grace, by her moral, of Love. A perfect woman is indeed the most exalted of terrestrial creatures - physically, mentally, morally.⁵

But, he hastens to add:

... rarely, if ever, is the ideal perfection of the Divine mind attained; here or there some imperfection mars the grand design; the mind of woman, or the body, or both suffer deformity. Yet we cannot but think that the most beautiful and perfect, physically, are the most excellent and perfect mentally.⁶

The article is typical of a wide range of publications in the latter half of the nineteenth-century given to postulating on the complex relationship between the female mind and body, and, bearing in mind his prolific and eclectic taste for literature, Gissing would undoubtedly have come across some of these. His first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, effectively endorses the above theory through the medium of high and low culture, represented by Helen Norman and Carrie Mitchell, and the psychological effect these influences have on the mind of Arthur Golding, a gifted artist. Both women are beautiful, but while Helen's beauty is

⁵ *Embodied Selves*, eds. J. Bourne Taylor and S. Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 171.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.171.

illuminated by the qualities of purity and tranquillity, Carrie's is marred by the taint of corruption.

From a sense of duty to his dying friend, Edward Norman feels responsible for the upbringing of the man's son. The boy however, refuses his benefactor's help and disappears without trace. Norman's exhaustive attempts to find Arthur Golding end in failure, but on his death he appoints his friend Gilbert Gresham as guardian to his daughter Helen, and leaves a legacy of £5000 to the young man with instructions to Gresham to conduct a further search. Arthur's whereabouts are eventually discovered through a chance sighting of a watercolour in the shop window of the house where he now lives and works. Helen meanwhile has travelled to Germany to study the philosophical writings of Schopenhauer, Comte and Shelley, returning after two years to her guardian's home, where Arthur again meets her and falls deeply in love.

At the wedding of Gresham's daughter, Arthur, uninvited, waits in the church for a glimpse of Helen, and then, with the memory of her beauty burning in his mind, returns to his room inspired by an overwhelming desire to reproduce her perfect features:

Even as a vision of the sweet-faced Madonna may have floated before the eyes of Fra Angelico, and held his mind in a state of pious rapture till he took his pencil and, almost without the exertion of his will, embodied the tender outline in a tangible form, so Arthur sat, brush in hand, gazing into vacancy, unable to think of anything but the chaste features of Helen Norman, till, scarcely knowing what he did, he took up a fresh sheet of paper and began slowly and lovingly to outline what he saw. ... For a moment he had a glimpse into the regions of immeasurable exaltation which genius alone admits to; he felt that the world was within his grasp.⁷

⁷ *Workers in the Dawn*, Vol. I, pp. 314-5.

Helen's beauty has the power to release the spark of genius lying dormant in Arthur's art, and thus elevate it to the cultural high ground. Like Fra Angelico, Golding is in a state of grace, his disembodied self in perfect unison with the spirituality of his muse. But the moment of genius is ephemeral, unsustainable in Arthur's struggle with his destructive *alter ego*, whose needs are sensual rather than aesthetic.

Despite his idealistic dreams, Arthur is attracted to the low, and when Helen seemingly rejects him, he seeks consolation in an unwholesome relationship with Carrie Mitchell, in whose arms the memory of Helen dims and with it 'the use of those noble faculties and the aspirations towards which they tended [...].'⁸ Inevitably, the marriage is a disaster and when Carrie leaves him he sinks into self-pitying depravity. The tension throughout the novel rests with Arthur's ceaseless conflict between the sensual and the sublime. Gissing's *American Notebook* contains a telling extract from 'The Artist of the Beautiful' in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse*, that might well have been in the author's mind when creating the flawed hero of *Workers in the Dawn*:

But when the ethereal portion of a man of genius is obscured, the earthly part assumes an influence the more uncontrollable, because the character is now thrown off the balance to which Providence had so nicely adjusted it [...].⁹

While under the spell of Helen's peerless beauty, the spirit of genius illumines Arthur's art, however Carrie's beauty too is mesmeric, and without his muse to guide him, he falls victim to her animal magnetism and his own baser instincts.

⁸ Ibid., Vol. II, p. 95.

⁹ *American Notebook*, p. 49.

Carrie is an irredeemable degenerate, dragged down by addiction to men and drink, yet her beauty arouses in the artist both compassion and desire. Though Arthur has revered Helen since childhood and is dedicated to his art, he forsakes the moral high ground for sexual desire. When Carrie deserts him, the earthly side of Arthur's nature takes control, plunging him headlong into drunken debauchery.

Referring to J G Millingen's *The Passions, or Mind and Matter*, the introduction to Section III (The Sexual Body) of *Embodied Selves*, states: 'In the hierarchy of being, man was assigned to the central place of rationality, and woman came to inhabit the two poles of difference, the body and spirituality.'

The extract from Millingen's book further asserts that:

If the corporeal agency is thus powerful in man, its tyrannic influence will more frequently cause the misery of the gentler sex. Woman, with her exalted spiritualism, is more forcibly under the control of matter; her sensations are more vivid and acute, her sympathies more irresistible.¹⁰

Analogous to this concept is the view, mentioned above, that 'rarely, if ever, is the ideal perfection of the Divine mind attained.' Furthermore, an extract from Thomas Laycock's *Mind and Brain* contends that '[t]o a man of high moral purity an immodest woman, however attractive corporeally and sensually, is an object of repugnance.'¹¹ Seduced by Carrie's sensual beauty, Arthur's ethereality is temporarily displaced. She seems to him something approaching the ideal, but she is 'more forcibly under the control of matter,' her mind and body are warped, and when ultimately, he regains his moral perspective, her sensuality becomes repugnant to him. Helen and Carrie combined represent Millingen's notion of woman as the inhabitant of the two poles of difference - Carrie, the body, Helen,

¹⁰ *Embodied Selves*, pp. 165, 169.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.177.

the spiritual. Carrie is the stimulant that appeals to Arthur's carnal appetite, Helen the enduring passion that guides his hand. When his muse dies, Arthur, like the artists in both versions of the 'The Artist's Child,' no longer possesses the will either to paint, or to live.

Workers in the Dawn was completed in November 1879. While going the rounds of publishers, Gissing turned again to short fiction, alluded to in his letter to Algernon dated 2 January 1880: 'At present I have gone to work on a few short stories & novelettes, which I mean to sow broadcast among magazines & papers, hoping that *some* at least may take root.'¹² His novella 'All for Love' was submitted to the *Novelist* at the editor's request in January 1880, but was not accepted. His short stories also failed to attract the interest of publishers. Algernon began selling off his brother's manuscripts in 1912, but the majority of stories from the author's second phase were not published until 1970.¹³

The early years following Gissing's return to England were clearly ones of intense self-analysis. Not only did his changing political and philosophical beliefs impact on his fictional output, but also his ventures into other literary fields added their weight to his development. In addition to articles and essays, Gissing wrote a novella entitled 'All for Love,' a successful poem called 'Song,' and 'Madcaps,' a play in four acts, of which no trace remains.¹⁴

¹² *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 229.

¹³ *Essays & Fiction*, pp 10-11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8; *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, pp. 173-4, n. 1 and p. 204.

In the sphere of poetry Gissing was quite at ease, having composed his first poem, 'Epitaph on the Tomb of Don Quixote and Sancho Pancho,' when he was eleven years old, and in excess of fifty all told, written mostly during adolescence.¹⁵ At the age of sixteen Gissing proved his poetic worth by winning the Owens College English Poem Prize for 'Ravenna,' an epic poem chronicling the rise and fall of a proud State, and in 1876 he composed six sonnets on Shakespearean heroines, two whilst still in England, the remainder during his stay in America.¹⁶ In 'Miranda,' the hero, like Dr Faustus summoning Helen of Troy, desires Ariel to metamorphose Miranda, the brainchild of Shakespeare, into a living being:

O perfect maiden, thou who ne'er hadst dwelling
 Save the rich temple of a poet's brain,
 Could some bright Ariel summon thee how fain
 Were I to gaze upon thy beauty, quelling
 All passion 'neath thine eyes forever welling
 With wonder, joy and love that knows no stain.
 Of what sweet peace thy soul, untouch'd by pain,
 In that one look to my soul would be telling!
 Vain wish! The fancy can but view thee far,
 Lull'd with the sighing of a scented gale
 And magic memories of thy 'sea-sorrow';
 Yet may our hearts which so the world doth mar
 E'en from the music of thy wond'rous tale
 Some notes of purity and meekness borrow.¹⁷

As with the later artists' stories, Gissing idealises spiritual beauty; the simple act of gazing upon Miranda's beautiful face is all it would take to cleanse and unburden the poet's soul. Knowing that Miranda never can materialise, the hero appeals instead to her creator, in the hope that he and all mankind can from the

¹⁵ *An Exile's Cunning*, pp. 189-90, 179.

¹⁶ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, n. 6, p. 28; George Gissing, *Six Sonnets on Shakespearean Heroines* (London: Eric & Joan Stevens, edition of 250 copies, 1982), introduction.

¹⁷ *Six Sonnets on Shakespearean Heroines*, 'Miranda'.

‘wond’rous tale ... [s]ome notes of purity and meekness borrow.’ The poem’s idealism is no more than one would expect from an eighteen-year-old youth bearing the guilt and shame of theft and punishment, while suffering enforced separation from the girl he loved. Extract 23 in *Gissing at Work*, is a quotation, transcribed from the author’s *American Notebook*, from Shelley’s translation of Plato’s *Banquet*:

For any particular action whatever in itself is neither good nor evil; what we are now doing, - drinking, singing, talking, none of these things are good in themselves, but the *mode* in which they are done stamps them with its own nature; and that which is done well, is good, and that which is done ill, is evil.

In a note to the quotation, Gissing offers his personal interpretation of the philosopher’s rationale: ‘(... Plato of course means the *spirit* in which things are done. It is quite possible that what men call a crime may often, from the higher standpoint, be a virtuous act.)’¹⁸

That Gissing felt harshly treated by Owens College is clearly demonstrated in two of his earliest stories: in ‘A Test of Honor,’ although Mr Woodlow has paid his debt to society, his wife refuses forgiveness; Tim Ridley steals money in ‘Too Dearly Bought’ because his granddaughter is wasting away in the city grime, firmly believing at the time that the goodness of his motive mitigates his crime. Reading between the lines, ‘Miranda’ would seem to be an outpouring of Gissing’s personal anguish, he yearns for the sight of the loved one who lives in his mind, but since her perfection does not exist outside his imagination, he must seek consolation in reality, and find strength in the pathos of her wretched story.

¹⁸ *Gissing at Work*, p. 42.

Moreover, should not the tale soften the hearts even of those who so readily condemn? 'Miranda' would seem to be an attempt to purge a painful memory.

The poem 'Song' was published in *Temple Bar* in November 1893, and from the exuberant tone of his letter to Algernon, Gissing was clearly delighted with its success: 'Have you seen *Temple Bar*? The thing brought me a guinea. Time spent in composition - seven minutes.'¹⁹ For all its speedy creation, the poem merits critical attention. All three verses begin with the same line, slightly rearranged, which shifts meaningfully, from naivety to gullibility:

O maiden, simple, sweet and pale,
I gaze into your eyes with wonder.
Behind their beauty hangs a veil,
O maiden pale,
The soul within ere long shall sunder.

O maiden simple, pale and sweet,
You know not of the soul that's growing;
You could not else so calmly meet,
O maiden sweet,
The passion in my own eyes glowing.

O maiden sweet and pale and simple,
When once the spirit parts the veil,
The glad child-smile no more shall dimple,
O maiden simple,
Your cheek, but that shall still be pale.²⁰

In the first verse, as the seducer gazes into the young virgin's eyes, he sees signs of her latent sexuality. Bent on exploiting her innocence and vulnerability, he ruthlessly assails the maiden's senses with burning looks of inflamed passion, which she meets with trusting innocence. The third stanza presages the girl's impending fall from grace; in the fourth line 'simple' now means gullible, rather

¹⁹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 173.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-8, n. 2.

than naive, while the last line foresees the pitiful consequences following her inevitable fall. She will no longer be sweet and simple, but her shame will ensure that her cheek 'shall still be pale.' A sense of mediaeval conquest resonates through the poem, bringing to mind 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' in *The Canterbury Tales*, and Keats' 'The Eve of St Agnes,' and foreshadowing the chauvinistic nature of Lionel Tarrant's relationship with Nancy Lord in *In the Year of Jubilee*. At a deeper level, however, the poem can be seen as a metaphor for social injustice, predatory society exploiting and degrading the most vulnerable class in the social strata.

In addition to his early poetry, Gissing's juvenilia comprise two essays, an account of a rambling holiday entitled 'Walks about Ilkley,' a short story, and several plays. In each literary sphere, the youngster's work demonstrates a highly developed mind and the promise of greater achievements to come. His essay attacking Goldsmith's critique on Hamlet's fifth soliloquy for instance, reveals an early grasp of the principles of constructive literary criticism, which was honed to perfection in the author's *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (1898). With the exception of the poetry, the young Gissing's works are as yet unpublished, therefore transcripts of these early pieces are contained in appendices A to H.

In his essay 'Answer to Goldsmith's criticism of Hamlet's Soliloquy,' written in 1872, the young critic takes issue with Goldsmith's suggestion that the lines:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind, to suffer
The slings & arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And, by opposing end them

indicate that the prince has deviated from his first proposition, and ‘the exerting his faculties in order to surmount them’ renders ‘death no longer the question.’²¹ Gissing argues that such a reading is inconsistent with Hamlet’s line of thought; in his view the phrases ‘to take arms’ and ‘To die – to sleep – no more’ are clearly intended to convey the idea of suicide.²² Gissing next attacks the critic’s assertion that since he expressed dread as to what happens after death, Hamlet must be a Pagan. Goldsmith bases this claim on the fact that as ‘Hamlet had just been conversing with his father’s spirit, piping hot from purgatory,’ he should be fully aware of the state that follows death.²³ But, as Gissing points out, the ghost had been forbidden to reveal the ‘secrets of his prison house,’ thus increasing rather than diminishing the prince’s fear.²⁴ The writer is of the view that the word *something* in the line ‘But that the dread of something after death,’ in some way offended the critic, and counters ‘have we ever been told what the *something* is that immediately follows death?’²⁵

There follows a discussion of the critic’s comment: ‘This soliloquy is not less exceptionable in propriety of expression than in the chain of argumentation.’²⁶ Goldsmith argues that the line ‘To die – to sleep – no more’ confounds interpretation: ‘It may signify that to die is to sleep no more’ or alternatively, ‘the expression “no more” may be considered an abrupt apostrophe in thinking, as if [Hamlet] meant to say “no more of that reflection.”’²⁷ Gissing dismisses the latter

²¹ George Gissing, ‘Answer to Goldsmith’s criticism on Hamlet’s Soliloquy,’ GEN.MSS. 286, Folder No. 100, Box No. 6 at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, p. 1.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²³ p. 2.

²⁴ p. 2.

²⁵ p. 2.

²⁶ p. 3.

²⁷ pp. 3-4.

interpretation out of hand, asserting 'it would hardly be consistent in Hamlet to say "I'll think no more on't," and straightway to go on with the same thought. But it is very plain to me that the line means "to die, - to sleep, - only that, no more."'28

The last paragraph of the essay reveals the extent of the young Gissing's regard for Shakespeare and his indignation at Goldsmith's ungracious comments on the hero of the playwright's greatest work:

No figure can be more ridiculously absurd than that of a man taking arms against a sea, exclusive of the incongruous medley of slings, arrows & seas jostled within the compass of one reflection.²⁹

The writer responds heatedly: 'He here attacks a most expressive poetical image, "a sea of troubles," & calls those two most beautiful lines "an incongruous medley,"' and thereafter dismisses the remainder of the poet's article as 'not worthy of notice.'³⁰

Although the essay smacks of the arrogance of youth, the argument is lucid and well thought out, revealing a remarkable depth of understanding for one so young. Equally impressive is Gissing's eulogy on 'John Milton,' which praises Milton's 'sublime contributions to English poetry.'³¹ The paper was written at Lindow Grove School in 1871. Attached to the manuscript is a letter of authentication from Ellen Gissing, the writer's sister, to the purchaser Raphael King.

²⁸ p. 5.

²⁹ p. 5.

³⁰ p. 5.

³¹ George Gissing, 'John Milton,' p. 1. Manuscript held in the Berg Collection at New York Public Library

After positing that Milton's purpose in writing poetry was to 'carry the mind beyond the dull routine of everyday life, & to impart life to material objects,' the young Gissing makes the point that '[t]he present life is full of the elements of poetry' therefore 'it is the business of the poet to collect these & bring them to the light,' an early indication of the realism that would later dominate the mature writer's short work.³² The language, too, points to maturity beyond the youngster's years, for instance, in describing the poet's intellectual qualities, he states:

Of all poets he is the sublimest, no subject is so vast as to intimidate him, he both describes Hell with its appropriate awfulness, & our first parents in all their purity before sin entered their hearts. This character of power & sublimity runs throughout all his works. With a few touches he impresses his mind on the work.³³

Furthermore, the paper gains added weight from the writer's perceptive comments on the anti-hero of *Paradise Lost*, which reveal a remarkable grasp of Satan's tormented psyche: 'He calls up from the depths of Tartarus his mighty hosts ... & incites them to eternal war with heaven. But at the sight of the vast host he weeps – glimpses of good appear even in his character.'³⁴

In the writer's discussion of Milton's style, there is already a hint of the mature Gissing's intolerance of the uneducated masses. Quoting Samuel Johnson's view that 'Paradise Lost' is a work '[t]hat the reader admires, & lays down, & forgets to take up again,' the writer argues that the poem is beyond the understanding of the general public: 'It cannot be thoroughly admired by any but those who have learning enough to see the great learning of the author.'³⁵ In conclusion, the

³² Ibid., p. 1.

³³ p. 1.

³⁴ p. 2.

³⁵ p. 2.

writer briefly touches on Milton's noble spirit, suggesting that despite his blindness he did not yield to melancholy: 'In his Penseroso, where he was tempted & had every chance of accumulating images of gloom, we yet learn that the gloomiest views he took of nature, were only adapted to bring on earnest [sic] & wholesome musing.'³⁶ The essay pays unstinted homage to the great poet, an early sign of the mature Gissing's love of the intellectual and cultural high ground.

'Walks about Ilkley' was written in July 1872, following a fortnight's holiday spent rambling over the Yorkshire moors. In his Preface, Gissing warns that such excursions are 'only for those gentlemen who have a real love of nature, & who do not mind giving a little toil in return for the very great pleasure they will receive.'³⁷ The walks are indeed very long and arduous, but the rewards of such endeavour are elegantly rendered in the writer's oft-times lyrical prose, for instance:

Right below us is Keighley in its smoky canopy & farther down the valley we see Bingley, & through all, the river Aire flowing in a quiet, lazy manner, what a contrast to its neighbour, the tumbling, foaming, roaring Wharfe!³⁸

At the beginning of his career, when Gissing was writing short fiction, he frequently opened his tales with vivid descriptions of the local landscape, and in later novels, his meticulous attention to detail added a quasi-visual dimension to the otherwise unrelieved greyness of many of his settings. Towards the end of his life, of course, he wrote the acclaimed *By the Ionian Sea*, a memorable account of his travels in southern Italy. It would not be inappropriate to suggest therefore,

³⁶ p. 3.

³⁷ George Gissing, 'Walks about Ilkley,' GEN. MSS. 286, Folder No. 126, Box No. 6 at the Beinecke Library, Yale University. Preface.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

that 'Walks around Ilkey' reveals the seed of talent that stood the author in good stead throughout his literary career.

'The Grandfather's New Year's Story' is dated *circa* 1873, at which time Gissing was fifteen years old. The story, though bearing a slight resemblance to that of the Struldbruggs in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, already reveals that stamp of individuality so characteristic of the author's later work. The tale opens with an old man about to tell his three grandchildren about an experience he had one New Year's Eve. Feeling rather disgruntled at being too old to dance and go to parties, he was sitting alone gazing into the fire, when he noticed that the burning coals had begun to look like a wooden Father Christmas that one of the children had given to him. Suddenly the figure jumped out of the fire and began to talk to him, saying that since he had been remiss in not leaving him a Christmas present, he had decided to invite him to see the christening of the New Year. Conscious of his age, the old man asked if they had far to go: "'Oh no!" cried Father Christmas, "just step with me into the fire & we are there in a minute."³⁹ They jumped into the fire, and Grandfather found himself in a long, brilliantly lit passage with flags of all colours hanging from the walls. At the entrance to an antechamber they were met by a porter: "'He was the very image of the old man with the hour-glass that I have shown you so often in my scrap-book; in fact he was Time himself."⁴⁰ The porter led the visitors into a large banquetting hall, in the centre of which was a font, while alongside one of the walls stood a row of old men, who appeared 'to get older and older as they got farther off.'⁴¹ Intrigued by the sight of a crowned

³⁹ George Gissing, 'The Grandfather's New Year's Story,' GEN. MSS. 286, Folder no. 110, Box No. 6 at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴¹ p. 5.

figure seated on a throne, who appeared to be just a little younger than the nearest of the men in the row, Grandfather asked Father Christmas who these old people were:

“Those,” said he “who stand there in a row are the Years. They have all sat on the throne where old 1873 now sits, & they have all had to get down to make place for another, as he will have to do directly for the New Year.”⁴²

Just then a cloud appeared high above, from which descended the New Year ‘supported on each side by a clock with wings,’ the hands of which pointed to five minutes to twelve.⁴³ With stately grace old 1873 stepped down from his throne and led 1874 to the font and christened him. At the stroke of midnight, 1873 placed the crown on 1874’s head and the new king ascended the throne. There followed a night of merry-making, during which the former years expounded upon the momentous events that had happened in their time, for instance, as he congratulated the New Year and wished him a lucky reign, old 1564 added proudly: “‘You’ll do well no doubt, but of course you can’t be expected to give the world another *Shakespere*.’”⁴⁴ Finally, 1874 called for a song, the noise of which awakened the old man to the sound of bells ringing in the New Year.

‘The Grandfather’s New Year’s Story’ is in a sense an innovative reversal of Gulliver’s depressing account of the Struldbruggs. Though the Years and the Immortals are similar in their ability to live forever, the Struldbruggs physically, the Years in memory, the contrast lies in their behaviour. While the ancients of Luggnagg are ‘opinionative, peevish, covetous, morose, vain, talkative ... incapable of friendship, and dead to all natural affection,’ the old Years, at the

⁴² p. 5.

⁴³ p. 6.

⁴⁴ p. 7.

stroke of midnight, joyfully welcome the new into their fold: 'All the old years gathered round the throne & began to offer presents to the young King.'⁴⁵ For the writer to make such a conceptual leap shows enormous promise in one so young.

Gissing's four plays, 'Rabba, the Wizard of the Alps,' 'The Hidden Treasure,' 'The Little Dove,' and 'The Smuggler's Cave,' were written during 1868 and 1869, and in view of the writer's extreme youth and the difficulties surrounding the composition of drama, are understandably less skilful than his later juvenilia. Nevertheless they reveal an aptitude for diversity that became one of the greatest strengths of the writer's later years. 'The Little Dove,' in fact, demonstrates yet another talent, it being a translation from a German play.

'Rabba, the Wizard of the Alps,' tells of a young peasant who covets the wealth and powers of the local sorcerer, unaware that old man is really a lord who has been cast from his land by an evil giant. The following is a synopsis of the play in the young Gissing's own words:

Rabba is a wizard who lives in the wildest part of the Alps. In a little village near him lives Ricardo a peasant who is envious of the respect paid to Rabba. One night he goes to Rabba's house and hides whilst Rabba calls up spirits and asks them why Ricardo watches him and what will come of it. He watches him and suddenly Rabba calls out "come out Ricardo you cannot hide anything for [sic] me". He rushes out horror [sic] stricken and falls down at his feet he rises [sic] him and bids him go. This only increases his desire to be as powerful as Rabba. One night whilst he Rabba [sic] reading he comes behind with a knife and raises his hand to stab him but a spirit appears with a sword guarding him. He makes a plunge at Rabba and stabs him A great noise is heard and the room is filled with spirits they drive out Ricardo. The report spread about the village and though Ricardo is in Rabba's place he gets no rest but is haunted with horrible ideas one night the gohst [sic] of Rabba comes in [sic] warns him to give up his place, he does not do it. Now Rabba had when he lived a ring which when put on he could call spirits. Ricardo one night when Rabba's

⁴⁵ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726: London: Penguin Classics, 1985), p. 257: 'The Grandfather's New Year's Story,' p. 6.

ghost came put it on a spirit stands before him and Ricardo orders him to sieze [sic] Rabba, but Rabba brings out another ring with wich [sic] he orders the demon to bind Ricardo the spirit advances and siezes [sic] Ricardo he struggles in vain and is carried away striving Rabba exits in the midst then enters a living man dressed like a lord which he really is.⁴⁶

The play moves at a furious pace, full of murder, magic and mayhem, exactly what one would expect from a young, imaginative mind.

'The Smuggler's Cave' is a seafaring adventure about a naval officer and his men who, in trying to capture Bill Myers and his band of cutthroats, find themselves at the mercy of the infamous smuggler. After a terrifying night when death seems certain, Myers pardons O'Flaherty and his men, and they return to their ship still intent upon mounting a search that will finally put an end to the smuggling exploits of the notorious Bill Myers. Like 'Rabba,' 'The Smuggler's Cave' is very obviously the work of a child, yet there are already signs in the play of the thinking that went into the composition of 'The Grandfather's New Year's Story,' written some five years later. For instance, although both the story and the play are undeniably flights of childish fancy, each carries the seeds of plausibility; the magic of the 'New Year's Story' is explained away as a dream, while the sailors discover the smugglers' lair by means of an informant O'Flaherty had arranged to meet: "I cannot have mistaken the spot or the hour it was just here the man Langdon appointed to meet me."⁴⁷ Just then the man is found dead, murdered by the smugglers, and consequently the excise men are suddenly at the mercy of Myers and his men.

⁴⁶ George Gissing, "'Rabba' the Wizard of the Alps," GISSING MSS, Box No. 1, The Lilly Library, pp. 1-2. Transcript: Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

⁴⁷ George Gissing, 'The Smuggler's Cave,' Gissing MSS, Box No. 1, The Lilly Library, Indiana University, p.6.

'The Hidden Treasure' is yet another dramatised variation on the theme of exile and adventure. It is interesting to note that exile, a dominant motif in the adult Gissing's stories and novels, appears so early in the author's life. Below is the writer's own synopsis of the play:

Rodrigo [sic] a gentleman living in Spain has been exiled from his own country for holding a certain religion. Before he left he had hidden a large treasure in some mountains in France and being anxious to recover it one day walking in the garden he meets a band of pilgrims whom he resolves to join and go as a pilgrim into France. He has a daughter called Cleopatra in love with a young Spanish gentleman called Don Diego When they were exiled he went with them into Algiers and the king hearing of them sent for her. She persuaded her lover to dress as a woman which he did and she afterwards, having a chance escaped leaving him ther. [sic] But the ship in which she was going back was taken as a pirate and Don Gregario the Admiral of the fleet, was going to hang her when she tells her tale with the rope around her neck and he pardons her Whilst she is telling her tale her father disguised as a pilgrim comes onto the vessel and recognises her and begs for her life. They afterwards determine to send a ship to Algiers to rescue Don Diego they succeed and they are married.⁴⁸

In terms of locations 'The Hidden Treasure,' is by far the most ambitious of the young Gissing's plays; it follows the fortunes of the exiles through three countries, revealing a tolerable grasp of the customs and religions practised by each.

The writer's fourth drama provides a sharp contrast to 'The Hidden Treasure,' contradicting the latter play's implication that pilgrims are trustworthy men.⁴⁹ 'The Little Dove' is about a widowed noble woman and her daughter, whose land is under siege from two neighbouring knights. The lady enlists the protection of Sir Theobald, and his threat of war forces the would-be usurpers to give up their demands. As a token of friendship, Theobald's daughter gives to Lady Rosalind's

⁴⁸ George Gissing, 'The Hidden Treasure,' GISSING MSS, Box No. 1, The Lilly Library, p. 1. Transcript: Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

⁴⁹ George Gissing, 'The Little Dove,' GISSING MSS, Box No. 1, The Lilly Library, Indiana University.

daughter, a little dove. When the lady learns that a murderous gang, disguised as pilgrims, threatens Theobald's life she sends a warning attached to the leg of the dove.

As already noted, 'The Little Dove,' is not an original work, but it does confirm Gissing's early gift for languages. In *George Gissing at Alderley Edge*, Pierre Coustillas quotes from T T Sykes' article 'The Early School Life of George Gissing,' which points out that, while still residing at Lindow Grove School, the young Owens College scholar actually taught senior pupils at the school, he 'frequently took the more advanced classes in such subjects as Greek, Latin, French, German, and higher mathematics.'⁵⁰

It was March 1884 before Gissing again tried his hand at drama, at which time he wrote to his brother:

I am at work on a play, which I at present think of calling "Madcaps." I have the 4 Acts sketched out, & think I can make something really good of it. What odds will you take against my having a play out before I am thirty? I *mean* to; & resolutions have as yet borne tolerable fruit with me.⁵¹

Despite his confidence 'Madcaps' never achieved publication, but in June 1898, when facing yet another financial crisis, Gissing made a further attempt at drama: 'In evening hit upon a possible plot for a play. The idea of making money by a play has grown upon me.'⁵² However, the idea was abandoned within the month.⁵³ 'Why I Don't Write Plays,' which appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in

⁵⁰ Pierre Coustillas, *George Gissing at Alderley Edge* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1969), p. 21. Quotation from T. T. Sykes' article 'The Early Life of George Gissing,' published simultaneously in the *Cheshire Daily Echo* and *The Alderley and Wilmslow Advertiser* on 29 January 1904.

⁵¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 204.

⁵² *Collected Letters*, Vol. 7, p. 111; *Diary*, p. 494.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

September 1892 in response to William Archer's article in the *Fortnightly* on drama and the novel, goes some way to explaining the author's instinctive reluctance to ally himself with the purveyors of contemporary mass culture:

Conceivably we may some day have a theatre for those who think, quite distinct from the houses sought out by those who are conscious only of crude sensations. But at present we may be grateful that one form of literary art, thanks to the mode of its publication, can be cultivated regardless of the basest opinions. Professed playwrights may be left to entertain their admirers. A novelist who would deliberately contend with them has to study a craft which goes, or ought to go, sorely against his conscience.⁵⁴

Gissing's response is typical of his attitude towards culture; he would never compromise his art for the sake of popular appeal, even though it kept him constantly short of money. While he admitted to Bertz that short fiction was 'not altogether congenial' to him, his stories always bore the stamp of artistic integrity.⁵⁵ In an earlier letter to Bertz, informing him that he had engaged William Morris Colles to act as his literary agent, he indicates his intention to maintain his standards: 'So I am entered upon the commercial path, alas! But I shall try not to write trash.'⁵⁶ In Jacob Korg's view, Gissing 'did succeed very well in balancing the demands of the literary market with his own gifts and character, so that most of the stories he wrote achieved a striking, individual quality [...]'.⁵⁷ The most marked individual quality that distinguished the author's work was his ability to create an infinite variety of authentic figures that sprang to life on the pages of his short fiction. Although a period of comparative failure, the early eighties represented a distinct turning point in the author's career. Having wrestled with practically every known literary form, each adding its weight to an

⁵⁴ *George Gissing on Fiction*, pp. 70, 71, 72.

⁵⁵ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 331.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 149.

⁵⁷ *George Gissing on Fiction*, p. 77.

accumulation of past experience, Gissing at last knew that his true vocation lay in the field of fiction.

At the beginning of September 1882, Gissing had sent the manuscript of his latest novel, 'Mrs Grundy's Enemies,' to Smith, Elder. Their response came as no surprise: 'It exhibits a great deal of dramatic power and is certainly not wanting in vigour, but in our judgement it is too painful to please the ordinary novel reader and treats of scenes that can never attract the subscribers to Mr. Mudie's Library.'⁵⁸ In December 1882 Gissing accepted Bentley & Son's offer of fifty guineas for the copyright, but the controversial nature of the novel gave rise to George Bentley seeking the advice of Evelyn Abbott, fellow of Balliol College. On his recommendation, Bentley asked the author to re-write volumes two and three.⁵⁹ Incensed by Bentley's continuous delaying tactics, Gissing sent his brother a copy of the preface he proposed adding to his novel:

This Book is addressed to those to whom Art is dear for its own sake. Also to those who, possessing their own Ideal of social & personal morality, find themselves able to allow the relativity of all Ideals whatsoever.⁶⁰

Although Gissing received the promised payment, and carried out the revision, the novel was never published.

It was the author's uncompromising realism and seeming indifference to public opinion that had caused publishers to shy away from *Workers in the Dawn* and 'Mrs Grundy's Enemies,' and undoubtedly it was the implicit support of Laurence and Bertha Bloomfield's bigamous marriage in 'All for Love' that prevented its

⁵⁸ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 99. Quoted in letter to Algernon dated 20 September, 1882.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116, n. 2; p. 242.

⁶⁰ pp. 116-7.

publication in the *Novelist*. Although Gissing concedes in the matter of a conventional tragic ending, his sympathies throughout the novella are emphatically with the transgressors, and against the pseudo-morality of their censors. The Bloomfields, mother and son, are highly regarded in Market Leyton society, Laurence being considered a prize catch for all the marriageable daughters in their social circle, but when he marries an outsider, the family immediately becomes victim to malicious gossip and envy. In desperation, Laurence murders Vanstone, Bertha's blackmailing, legal husband, and, driven by fear of the scandal that would ensue, he takes his own life. Paradoxically, his crime is never discovered, and although Bertha dies from shock at the news of her husband's suicide, his mother lives on in merciful ignorance of the deed. Heavy emphasis is laid upon Bertha's weakness of character, timidity and instability, personality flaws that led inevitably to her reckless bigamous marriage, and finally her death. On the other hand, Laurence is an innocent victim, having no knowledge when he married Bertha, of her former life.

With few exceptions, Gissing's sympathies are with the victim, perhaps unsurprising since, in a sense, he was himself a victim, in his case of folly. His headstrong love affair, and two ill-fated marriages, brought him little but unhappiness for a large portion of his life. In his fiction, the sufferer is sometimes a victim of his own lack of moral fibre, as is Reardon in *New Grub Street*, and Shergold in 'A Lodger at Maze Pond,' the former unable to endure the pain of constant failure, the latter too weak to say no; sometimes, like Mr Dunn in 'Spellbound,' and Miriam Baske in *The Emancipated*, they are victims of obsession. Mostly though, they are victims of circumstance. The most powerful

demonstration of the helplessness of those without choice is unquestionably *The Nether World*. With stark realism, Gissing reveals the plight of those in thrall to capitalism, and the demoralising effect their consequent poverty has on their lives.

‘All for Love’ gathered dust for over a decade until September 1891, when Gissing decided to utilise its fundamental concept of bigamy as the basis for his new novel, ‘The Radical Candidate,’ subsequently published as *Denzil Quarrier* (1892).⁶¹ Although the framework of the novel is political rather than domestic, its central theme borrows heavily from the earlier work. Unlike Laurence Bloomfield, however, Denzil Quarrier marries Lily fully aware that she is already married, a reckless action in view of his nomination as Liberal candidate for Polterham. By accepting the candidature, Quarrier not only incurs the envy of Eustace Glazzard and the unwelcome attention of Mrs Wade, but also an increased risk that his bigamous marriage will be discovered. Having been made *au fait* with the couple’s secret, Glazzard, initially out of mere curiosity, hires a firm of enquiry agents to trace Northway, Lilian’s legal husband, but enraged by Quarrier’s constant jibes, he finally determines to contact the man. It is interesting to note, in terms of enlightened editorial practice, that while ‘All for Love’ was clearly rejected on account of its controversial nature, nine years later Lawrence and Bullen accepted its equally outspoken counterpart within a week of completion, with no reservations other than a change of title.

In the decade spanning ‘All for Love’ and *Denzil Quarrier*, some nine Gissing novels were published, and as would be expected, the latter work is more

⁶¹ *Essays & Fiction*, pp. 28-35.

sophisticated in form and style than its predecessor, coincidence and artifice being kept to a minimum. For instance, unlike Vanstone, who discovers his wife's whereabouts through the theft of a writing case containing incriminating letters, Northway's appearance in Polterham occurs quite naturally as a result of Glazzard's peevish desire to put an end to Quarrier's political career. Death is also handled more realistically in the later work; both women are of nervous disposition, but whereas Bertha suffers an improbable fatal seizure at the news of Bloomfield's death, Lilian is driven to suicide by the merciless taunting of a malicious false friend. Of course, as with 'All for Love,' the novel is a severe indictment of Victorian intolerance, but at a deeper level it focuses on the cause and effect of obsessive jealousy. Eustace Glazzard is a man of many talents, whose misfortune it is never to have '*quite* succeeded' in mastering any one of them.⁶² Quarrier, who since boyhood has constantly outstripped his friend in everything, treats him 'with an air of bantering superiority.'⁶³ Small wonder then, that Glazzard, 'rather disposed to pride than to an excess of humility,' should become obsessed with an all-consuming envy of his rival:

Quarrier as an ingenuous young fellow looking up to the older comrade ... was acceptable, lovable; as a self-assertive man, given to patronage (though perhaps unconsciously), and succeeding in life as his friend stood still or retrograded, he aroused dangerous emotions.⁶⁴

Mrs Wade, who poses an equal threat to Quarrier's career, is educated and politically active, but her impoverished widowhood forces her to lead a very narrow and embittered life: 'Her strong highly-trained intellect could find no satisfaction in the society of every-day people, yet she was withheld by poverty

⁶² George Gissing, *Denzil Quarrier* (1892; Hassocks: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1979), p. 8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶⁴ *pp.* 30, 198.

from seeking her natural sphere.’⁶⁵ Relegated to the periphery of society, Mrs Wade deliberately seeks public attention through politics. As the town’s Liberal candidate, Quarrier inevitably becomes the object of her desire; but for his wife, Quarrier could be the means of escape from her dreary existence. Like Bertha Bloomfield, Lilian is characterised as weak and unstable, so, when Denzil’s political career is placed in jeopardy, she falls easy prey to Mrs Wade’s malicious tongue:

You will reproach yourself if [Denzil’s] life’s purpose is frustrated! ... The danger is ... that he may be unjust - feel unjustly - as men are wont to. You - in spite of himself, he may feel that *you* have been the cause of his failure. You must be prepared for that; I tell it to you in all kindness. If he again consents to pay Northway, he will be in constant fear. ... In that case, too, he *must* sometimes think of you as in the way of his ambition.⁶⁶

Persuaded that she will be the cause of Denzil’s downfall, and that his ruin will mean her rejection, Lilian commits suicide.

Neither Glazzard nor Mrs Wade are driven by moral outrage, rather their motivation is purely self-serving, and Lilian proves to be an easy means of gaining their ends. However, Quarrier’s conscious flouting of the law regardless of the risk, coupled with his cavalier attitude towards Glazzard, makes him at least an unconscious agent in his wife’s tragic death. Conversely, in ‘All for Love,’ Laurence Bloomfield is an innocent partner in the bigamous marriage, and when he does become aware, his only thought is to protect his family from scandal; he is driven to murder and suicide by the threat of moral censure. The main thrust of both stories is society’s readiness to condemn, but in *Denzil Quarrier* Gissing pushes the theme even further, exposing the double standards underpinning

⁶⁵ pp. 171, 230.

⁶⁶ p. 305.

Victorian morality. The ex-mayor and his wife are regarded as pillars of Polterham society, but:

[t]hese two people were not only on ill-terms, they disliked each other with the intensity which can only be engendered by thirty years of a marriage such as, but for public opinion, would not have lasted thirty weeks. Their reciprocal disgust was physical, mental, moral. It could not be concealed from their friends; all Polterham smiled over it, yet the Mumbrays were regarded as a centre of moral and religious influence, a power against the encroachments of rationalism, and its attendant depravity.⁶⁷

While the community accept the immorality of the Mumbrays' hypocritical marriage with amused tolerance, they would just as readily condemn the Quarriers for their misguided attempt to conform to the demands of conventional society.

Although *Denzil Quarrier* owes much to 'All for Love,' the theme of obsessive jealousy has its origin in 'The Sins of the Fathers,' Gissing's first short story, and significantly, each of the nine novels published between 1880 and 1892, has links, in terms of suicide, abandonment, or obsession, with several of the author's early stories, both from his American period and his second phase of short fiction. Obsession is a central theme, not only in *Denzil Quarrier*, but also in *The Nether World*, *The Emancipated* and *New Grub Street*, his three preceding novels. As Gissing saw it, obsession grew like a canker in the mind, rendering it bereft of all rational thought and human emotion, a view first expressed in 'The Sins of the Fathers' and stressed very forcibly throughout much of his work. In his later 'A Victim of Circumstances,' 'Spellbound,' 'Christopherson,' 'A Daughter of the Lodge' and 'A Scrupulous Father,' each of the major characters becomes alienated from reality as the result of a fixed obsession. In 'A Daughter of the Lodge' for instance, May Rockett, whose sense of intellectual superiority fuels her

⁶⁷ p. 123.

obsession to escape her menial social background, jeopardises her family's home and livelihood by challenging hierarchical privilege. Principally concerned with class transgression, the story imparts a salutary message to those who strive for social status at any cost, that the consequences of achieving this may impact disastrously both upon themselves and others.

Gissing had already addressed the subject of class immutability in two earlier novels, *Thyrza* and *Born in Exile*, both of which culminate in death for the transgressor. Although Thyrza Trent comes from common stock, her serene beauty has a fatal attraction for Walter Egremont, an upper class intellectual, and, much against his better instincts, he falls in love with her. Alarmed to discover that his love is reciprocated, Egremont flees to Paris. Thyrza disappears, but is eventually found and brought to Eastborne by Mrs Ormonde, an unmistakeable forerunner of Mrs Wade, who persuades Egremont not to attempt to see Thyrza for two years. The girl overhears this conversation, and convinced by it that Egremont intends to marry her, she applies herself to the task of acquiring cultural refinement, which inevitably draws her further and further away from her natural roots. When, after two years in America, Egremont returns to England his passion has run its course, consequently he is eager to accept Mrs Ormonde's view that Thyrza no longer loves him. Unlike Lilian in *Denzil Quarrier*, who to the end is unaware of Mrs Wade's ulterior motives, the pain of rejection opens Thyrza's eyes to Mrs Ormonde's cunning: 'Your kindness to me hasn't been kindness at all. It was all to separate me from him.'⁶⁸ Abandoned by her adopted class, and alienated from her own, Thyrza loses the will to live.

⁶⁸ George Gissing, *Thyrza: A Tale* (1887; Brighton: The Harvester Press, Ltd., 1984), p. 449.

In *Born in Exile*, although not of low birth Godwin Peak nevertheless feels stigmatised by his lower middle class upbringing. Like May Rockett, Peak is driven by an obsessive desire to become a privileged member of society. By means of a hypocritical plan to take holy orders, he ingratiates himself with a well-to-do family with the intention of marrying into wealth and class. Predictably, his scheme ends in disaster, and he dies in guilt-ridden isolation.

In addition to adapting some of the themes running through his short fiction for in-depth development in his novels, Gissing not infrequently reversed the practice, utilising a single strand from a larger work as a major concept in a later short story. Although much lighter in tone than *Born in Exile*, 'A Daughter of the Lodge' similarly centres on the combined themes of obsession and class transgression. May Rockett displays the same intellectual arrogance as Peak, but here the author focuses on the broader ramifications of her delusive behaviour as it resonates on her vulnerable family, rather than the long term consequences it may have for the girl. On the face of it, May, unlike Peak, emerges relatively unscathed from her experience.

Interestingly, *The Nether World*, Gissing's last and bleakest working-class novel, has ties both with 'The Quarry on the Heath,' written in 1881, and 'The Salt of the Earth,' a tale from his last phase of short fiction. The former recounts the story of a clergyman turned bigot and tyrant after his abandonment of his lover and their child, and the tragic consequences that emanate from that one brutal act. *The Nether World* exposes the despotism underlying Michael Snowdon's philanthropic zeal. Obsessed by the guilt he bears for the death of his wife, who

committed suicide to escape his tyranny, Snowdon seeks redemption by distributing his fortune among the poor. For his project to succeed, however, he must persuade his granddaughter to sacrifice her one chance of happiness. Snowdon's charity is just another way of enforcing his tyrannical will. Both Lashmore and Snowdon are driven by an obsessive guilt complex, the consequence of which leads the former character to seek spurious religious atonement, the latter to give his money to the poor.

'The Salt of the Earth' looks at philanthropy from the converse point of view of an unassuming young man who is generous to a fault, and as such is the victim of every improvident scrounger in the neighbourhood. A commercial clerk of adequate income and moderate expenditure, Thomas Bird nevertheless 'found it very difficult to save a sovereign for other needs' for the simple reason that he was incapable of refusing an importunate friend.⁶⁹

Again on the subject of obsession, 'The Quarry on the Heath' has a perceptible link with *The Emancipated* in that both centre on the potentially unwholesome nature of religious zeal. In *The Emancipated*, Miriam Baske's life has reached a stage of joyless inertia, barren of all but obsessive religiosity, but unlike Lashmore, Miriam is redeemable; in Rome she meets Ross Mallard and his love, together with Italy's breathtaking culture, finally open her eyes to the vibrant, living world around her.

⁶⁹ *The House of Cobwebs*, p.267.

In 'The Last Half-Crown' Harold Sansom is, like Edwin Reardon in *New Grub Street*, obsessed by fear of failure, so much so that when made penniless by the loss of a half-crown he chooses suicide as a less painful alternative than life's bitter struggle. Undeniably though, the most obsessive character in the whole of Gissing's work, is *New Grub Street*'s Harold Biffen, whose burning desire it is to create a work that replicates real life. Impoverished and near starvation, he toils unceasingly at 'Mr Bailey, Grocer,' a novel of 'absolute realism in the sphere of the ignobly decent.'⁷⁰ When his lodging-house burns down, Biffen braves the inferno to rescue his precious manuscript, insensible to the plight of a fellow-lodger dying in the flames. Unhinged by the fear of losing his life's work, Biffen, in that moment, loses all trace of humanity. The character most resembling Biffen in Gissing's later work is Christopherson in a story of the same name. Christopherson loves books more than anything else in the world, so much so that, to the detriment of his wife's health, his home has become a mere repository for dusty volumes. Faced with the decision to move to the country or keep his collection, Christopherson turns down the offer of a new home; only when his wife becomes critically ill is he able to contemplate life without his beloved library.

During the early years of Gissing's return to England, causality initiated by some form of morbid fixation figures large in much of the author's second phase of short fiction. In 'Cain and Abel' for example, Cain's murder of his brother is the consequence of an obsession that is born out of Abel Charnock's refusal to name his first son after his brother Eli. Similarly, except that the outcome borders

⁷⁰ *New Grub Street*, p. 173.

on the farcical, the would-be thespian hero of 'My First Rehearsal' is obsessed with the idea of winning fame as a great actor, which leads him into the clutches of a bogus theatre manager who robs him of all his worldly goods as well as his dignity.

Abandonment is an equally powerful theme in Gissing's work, both in his early short stories and later novels. 'The Sins of the Fathers,' 'A Mother's Hope' and 'Too Wretched to Live' all record the doleful consequences resulting from women being deserted by their menfolk. In *Demos* there are two abandoned women, providing the author with an opportunity to test and contrast their resilience under stress; at heart Emma Vine possesses a down-to-earth philosophy which enables her to lessen the pain of her abandonment by Mutimer through the care of others, 'Princess' Mutimer on the other hand lacks that inner strength; after being deserted by her husband she has 'no more control over herself than a terrified child.'⁷¹ As with his American phase, abandonment features from time to time in Gissing's stories from the early eighties. As previously noted, the key to the tragedy that unfolds in 'The Quarry on the Heath,' lies in Lashmore's desertion of the mother of his child. Of significantly greater complexity, in that it reveals the author's growing interest in the human mind, 'Mutimer's Choice' addresses the psychological effect of Mutimer's mental anguish over his wife's dishonesty. In choosing to die Jim Mutimer is symbolically abandoning Bella. A man of strong moral principle, Mutimer likens his discovery of his wife's deceit to a sudden awareness of 'an unexpected flaw in a fine piece of marble.'⁷² At that epiphanic

⁷¹ George Gissing, *Demos* (London: 1886; J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1915), p. 404.

⁷² *Essays & Fiction*, p. 248.

moment Mutimer's sense of repugnance echoes that felt by Arthur Golding for his wife Carrie when his finer instincts regain control. Unable to come to terms with her native cunning, Mutimer, by refusing a life-saving operation, knowingly abandons her to a life of certain misery with his one-time friend.

Death by drowning is yet another persistent theme in Gissing's work, occurring in three stories from his American period, three from his second phase, one from his third, and in four of his novels.⁷³ With particular reference to the author's second phase of short fiction, 'The Last Half-Crown' recounts the story of a young man who drowns because he is obsessed by a pathological dread of failure; in 'All For Love' Laurence Bloomfield drowns himself in a frenzied effort to protect his family's good name; and in 'The Quarry on the Heath' Harold Cuthbertson's watery death is the ultimate outcome of his mother being deserted soon after his birth. Taking an overview it is possible to see that almost every drowning is closely related to the frequently recurring themes mentioned above. Obsession, abandonment, or transgression of the prescribed moral or social code, nearly always, jointly or severally, create the circumstances that culminate in the deaths of the unfortunate victims.

The lean years following Gissing's return to England were for him ones of enormous literary diversification, reflecting his ideological struggle to come to terms with conflicting political and philosophical beliefs. Schopenhauer's notion that '[i]n the mood of artistic contemplation the will is destroyed, self is

⁷³ 'The Sins of the Fathers,' 'Brownie,' 'Too Wretched to Live,' 'The Last Half-Crown,' 'All for Love,' 'The Quarry on the Heath,' 'The Day of Silence,' *Workers in the Dawn*, *A Life's Morning*, *Denzil Quarrier*, and *The Odd Women*.

eliminated' reinforced Gissing's belief in a pure, disinterested aesthetic state, clearly defined in his letter to Algernon: 'My attitude henceforth is that of the artist pure and simple. ... This, I rather think, is at last the final stage of my development, coming after so many & various phases.'⁷⁴ Significantly, as noted in chapter three, the author's commitment to aestheticism is reiterated in *The Unclassed*, essentially signalling the end of the author's most crucial transitory phase. A sure sign of Gissing's growing maturity in the field of short fiction is the fact that by the end of this transitional period, rather than focusing on the causal aspect of man's miserable lot, he had switched to exploring the influential mental processes so crucial to determining a character's outlook on life. By the time he embarked on his third period of short fiction, Gissing had become a highly skilled technician, creating at will life-like figures with the distinguishing characteristic of inner strength, which crystallises into a capacity to confront life's hardships with quiet resolution. Having mastered the art of authorial distance, Gissing was able to observe with insight his characters' psychologically conditioned reaction to adversity, stressing their resilience rather than their capitulation.

Of Gissing's short stories, only two of the eleven he wrote appeared in periodicals during the eighties, these being 'The Artist's Child' and 'Phoebe.' 'Letty Coe,' written shortly after 'Phoebe,' was accepted by George Bentley, but held back until August 1891. A limited edition of 'An Heiress on Condition' was privately printed for The Pennell Club in 1923, 'My First Rehearsal' first appeared in *English Literature in Transition* in 1966 and was then reprinted in

⁷⁴ *Essays & Fiction*, p. 95; *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 146.

1970, along with the unpublished 'My Clerical Rival,' by the Enitharmon Press.⁷⁵ Also in 1970, Pierre Coustillas edited *George Gissing's Essays & Fiction*, which contained, in addition to 'Along Shore,' 'The Hope of Pessimism' and 'All for Love,' a collection of five hitherto unpublished stories.⁷⁶ All ten stories will be analysed in the next chapter in order to identify persistent or closely related themes with a view to establishing the overriding philosophy these themes have in common, and furthermore to reveal the emergence of a powerful counter philosophy that by the end of this second phase, had begun to impact upon Gissing's short fiction.

⁷⁵ George Gissing, *My First Rehearsal and My Clerical Rival*, ed., Pierre Coustillas (London: Enitharmon Press, 1970).

⁷⁶ 'The Last Half-Crown,' 'Cain and Abel,' 'The Quarry on the Heath,' 'The Lady of the Dedication,' and 'Mutimer's Choice.'

CHAPTER FIVE

Changing Values

Recent research at the New York Public Library has uncovered the following fragment of a story written on the verso of a note Gissing sent to Algernon in February 1878, just a few months after his return to England:

... hand upon his head, an action by no means agreeable to the young man's sense of personal dignity. She seemed pleased with his appearance. "Dear me!" she exclaimed, "What a big boy you are! I did not [word missing from fragment] to see you so grown. I have seen you before, my dear; yes & you have me too, though I'll be bound you don't recollect it. Dear, dear! How [partly legible word - possibly 'flies']! Ten, - nay, twelve years, at least, since I passed an *extremely*¹

Whether part of a story or a novel, the fragment is interesting in that it refers to a young boy, an unusual subject for Gissing at this early stage of his career. He expressed little interest in young people until the birth of Walter in 1891, after which time all his personal concerns about the welfare of children are revealed in his novels, for instance *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool*. The fragment also appears to suggest a rather lightweight tone, again uncharacteristic for Gissing at the time.

Whatever the reason, Gissing evidently decided against this particular fictional route, since the majority of the stories written between 1880 and 1884 turned out to be melodramatic in tone. It has since transpired, however, that following his return to England, the author produced three light-hearted stories in relatively quick succession, presumably in a bid to capitalise on his success in getting 'An

¹ Fragment of a short story or novel on the verso of Gissing's note to Algernon dated Feb 1878, contained in The Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

English Coast-Picture' published in the prestigious *Appletons' Journal*, which story, Gissing claimed in a letter to Algernon, 'was mentioned by several papers as the best article of the number.'² When this ploy failed, he clearly fell back on the melodramatic style that first brought him to the attention of the American public. In total, Gissing produced six sombre tales over the next four years, but only 'Phoebe' saw publication during the eighties. While receiving scarcely more recognition than the humorous tales, the melodramatic stories do appear to have offered the author greater scope by way of development and experimentation, a major innovation at the time being his increasing tendency to focus more on character than plot, and, within a simplified narrative framework, to observe impartially the minutiae that constitute and determine a character's life.

Gissing's new low-key approach first made its impact in 'One Farthing Damages,' a late American tale. Lightweight in tone, the story achieves its thrust through perceptive characterisation, drawn from dialogue and physical appearance, that succinctly captures the essence of Slythorpe's duplicitous nature. Moreover, the restrained, wholly credible narrative demonstrates purposefully the undeviating course of the laws of cause and effect. As a consequence of his double-dealing Slythorpe finds himself on the receiving end of a sound thrashing and an award of derisory damages for his injured pride.

In a letter to Algernon, shortly after his return to England, Gissing expressed his personal thoughts on causality:

The immortality of man consists in this reflection - that not a word we utter, not a thought we think, not a battle we win, not a temptation we yield to, but

² *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 238.

has, & *must* have, influence upon those living in contact with us, & from them, like the circles spreading in a pool, extends to the whole future human race. Therefore is it of vast importance to me whether I set an example of an ignorant & foolish man, or of one bent upon using his faculties to the utmost.³

As Gissing later pointed out to his brother, the world was for him a ‘collection of phenomena ... to be studied & reproduced artistically.’⁴ He believed wholeheartedly in ‘Art for Art’s sake,’ and the above thoughts clearly represent his personal intentions regarding literature, and his awareness of its moral and educational values.⁵ But though Gissing expressed confidence in his own ability to achieve the moral and intellectual high ground, he was clearly aware that it was not easy to avoid life’s causal pitfalls. Since, at the time he first broached the subject to his brother, the issue was a matter of deep concern, it seems quite natural that he should try to analyse the concept of causality through the medium of literature, thus the laws of cause and effect figure large in the stories of the eighties.

Interestingly, Gissing’s views on causality effectively reiterate those expressed by George Eliot in her review of R W Mackay’s *The Progress of the Intellect* (1850):

It is Mr Mackay’s faith that divine revelation is not contained exclusively or pre-eminently in the facts and inspirations of any one age or nation, but is co-extensive with the history of human development, and is perpetually unfolding itself to our widened experience and investigation, as firmament upon firmament becomes visible to us in proportion to the power and range of our exploring instruments. The master key to this revelation, is the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world – of that invariability of sequence which is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science ... It is this invariability of sequence which can alone give value to experience and render education in the true sense possible. The divine yea and nay, the seal of prohibition and of sanction, are effectually impressed on human

³ Ibid., p. 265.

⁴ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 146.

⁵ Ibid., p. 223.

deeds and aspirations, not by means of Greek and Hebrew, but by that inexorable law of consequences [...].⁶

Gissing's high regard for George Eliot's intellect is evident from several letters to his sisters recommending her works; in one such to Ellen he urges: 'Read George Eliot with extreme conscientiousness; she will repay it.' Another letter to Margaret expresses pleasure that she is reading *Romola*: 'It is a magnificent book, & gives you a good idea of George Eliot's combination of imaginative power & solid culture.'⁷ Significantly, after the author had managed to secure a publisher for *Workers in the Dawn*, his letter to Algernon, warning him not to expect too much of the novel, implies that George Eliot was the kind of novelist he strove to emulate:

I by no means wish you to conceive great hopes concerning the financial part of the business. I fear very much that the book is far from *popular* in character. Its circulation – if it attain to one – must be among the strictly intellectual classes, - such people, for instance, as read George Eliot; not those who delight in Miss Braddon & Mrs. Henry Wood!⁸

Because he believed that every action, good or bad, had its consequences, Gissing saw it as his moral duty to ensure that his work was of benefit to mankind, a view that closely approximates that expressed in George Eliot's sympathetic review of Mackay's work, that it is the 'invariability of sequence which can alone give value to experience and render education in the true sense possible.' In his fiction, however, Gissing focuses on the damaging rather than the beneficial influences emanating from this undeviating law, particularly from the point of view of the psychological suffering inflicted upon those caught up in the

⁶ *George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*. eds. A.S. Byatt and N Warren (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), pp.270-1.

⁷ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2., pp. 260, 93. Other letters to Margaret and Ellen regarding George Eliot appear on pp. 72, 151, 260, 280, 347, 351, 359 and 369.

⁸ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 240.

spreading circles of the pool. The overriding theme that arose from the author's American period and dominated most of his second phase, was unquestionably that of causality, where a single action precipitates a chain reaction that has inescapable consequences – occasionally comic, as in the case of Slythorpe, but for the most part the outcome is tragic.

Excluding 'All for Love,' only ten new stories were written during Gissing's second phase, thus making it practicable to consider them *in toto* in order that the course of this important stage of the author's development may be analysed in depth. Since four of the tales do not fit into the melodramatic mould, and have little connection with the themes dominating the other six, these will be dealt with at the end of the chapter rather than chronologically. However, where appropriate, attention will be paid to their evolutionary significance.

'The Last Half-Crown,' Gissing's first story of the eighties, is a toned-down melodrama in which a seemingly ordinary occurrence triggers off a series of events, which culminate in tragedy. Throughout, in keeping with the author's growing belief in the primacy of characterisation, the interest rests with the protagonist and his dilemma, rather than intricacy of plot. At the heart of the tale lurks the spectre of poverty, a persistent theme in Gissing's work. A forerunner of Edwin Reardon in *New Grub Street*, Harold Sansom is an impoverished writer, whose spirit has been 'crushed in the brutalizing struggle' for survival in the competitive literary world, for whom the loss of one half-crown literally represents the difference between life and death.⁹ Even before this bleak prospect

⁹ *Essays & Fiction*, p. 182.

became a reality, the demoralised young writer had often thought of ending his wretched existence: 'Why should he endure this unceasing torture when an end might so easily be put to it, at once and forever?'¹⁰

In the event, literary failure is not the principal cause of Harold's despair, rather it is Mrs Higgs, his grasping landlady. It is the psychological effect of her indifference to his plight that compounds his sense of hopelessness and ultimately drives him to suicide; the consequences resonating from Mrs Higgs' greed demonstrate in tones starkly realistic, the 'circles spreading in a pool'. In its simplicity, Gissing's story captures the very essence of realism: a commonplace character, living an ordinary, everyday existence, holds the power of life or death over her impoverished young tenant. The landlady's action in demanding Harold's rent in advance sets in motion a sequence of events, which begin with the loss of the young man's last half-crown, and end, paradoxically, in temporary relief from starvation for a destitute family, and death for the coin's owner.

While Harold is reflecting on his poverty, his last half-crown drops through a grating, coming to rest in front of a basement window. The occupants are not at home, but when the young man returns later to discover them overjoyed at their miraculous find, he cannot bring himself to destroy their happiness. In desperation he takes what he sees as his only course of action:

The coarser natures wear long, resist to the end; those of a more delicate mould are soon driven to strange extremities, and become familiar with dread ideas from which a healthy mind shrinks in horror.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 182.

¹¹ p. 182.

Although, on the surface, the above passage seems merely a perceptive authorial comment on the fragility of Harold's mental state, there is an underlying implication that, as for those of coarser nature, the more creditable course for him would have been to stand resolute in the face of adversity, a notion that has enormous significance in the author's later short fiction. The 'coarser,' more resilient natures of Phoebe, and the commonplace heroes of 'The House of Cobwebs' and 'Humplebee' have the capacity to accept and endure, suicide being out of the question.

'The Last Half-Crown' established causality as a major theme in the author's short fiction of the eighties. In addition, as will be seen from the following stories, the theme had the beneficial effect of adding credibility to what might otherwise have seemed highly improbable situations, 'Cain and Abel' being a case in point. Gissing focuses on a single act, sometimes accidental, though for the most part not, and then allows the consequences to develop naturally through a sequence of plausible events.

In 'Cain and Abel,' the author returns to the retrospective narrative style formerly used in 'R.I.P.' and 'The Artist's Child,' having the convicted murderer relate his story as he awaits execution. Cain's confession is motivated by a desire to make known that it is: 'owing to some fearful and inexplicable destiny rather than to any innate depravity that [he has] come to spend the last days of an early and vigorous manhood in a condemned cell.'¹² According to Gissing's letter to Algernon, Cain's future is pre-ordained:

¹² p. 188.

I have tonight finished a horrible story - 'Cain and Abel' ... It is a tale of two brothers. The elder is christened Abel, after his father; and the younger through a curious circumstance receives the name of Cain. The name haunts him like a Fate, and he ends as the convicted murderer of his brother Abel.¹³

In an ironic reversal of the biblical story, the brothers' characters are transposed; Cain is the good son, Abel the evil one. From the moment Abel becomes the namesake of his father rather than of his uncle Eli, the then unborn Cain Charnock's future is predetermined. When Mr Charnock dies intestate, Eli assumes absolute control of his brother's estate, bringing misery to the dead man's wife and posthumous son. Cain acquires his name as a result of his uncle's warped logic, and step-by-step Eli's irrational desire for revenge is fulfilled. After years of torment, Cain eventually finds happiness through the love of a young girl, but his joy turns to despair when, through an appalling coincidence, Abel marries the girl, whereupon Eli's sadistic joke comes full circle.

Again, as in 'All for Love' Gissing flagrantly subverts Victorian moral values, this time by raising, and to a degree sympathising with, the issue of adultery. Continuing his confession, Cain recalls his frenzied reaction to the news of the marriage:

Urged by some demon, I never rested till I had once again resumed my communication with Winifred; the ruin of my own soul was not sufficient, I must even drag another with me to eternal perdition. Let the details be forever hid, and suffice to say, that the interrupted passion soon became on both sides more violent than ever, till at length I demanded and received the sacrifice of Winifred's honour.¹⁴

Inevitably Abel discovers his wife's adultery. Enraged by her obvious infidelity, he lunges at Winifred, brutally striking her in the face. At that moment Cain loses control:

¹³ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 229.

¹⁴ *Essays & Fiction*, pp. 199-200.

I heard the blow, I heard the poor girl's scream, and the second after I was kneeling upon my brother Abel's breast, squeezing his throat madly, madly with both my hands ... in my ears I heard a sound as though myriads of devils were shrieking "Cain! Cain!"¹⁵

There is, however, a curious twist to the tale, which suggests a more rational explanation of the tragic events. Abel and Eli Charnock match perfectly the personas of the biblical brothers, Abel, like his namesake, of 'kindly disposition,' Eli, like Cain, a 'misanthrope.' From the outset, Eli is seen as a satanic figure, a 'cursed being' of 'scarcely conceivable hideousness' whose distorted eyes 'wore an expression of devilish malice.' The young Abel is similarly 'ugly, even hateful, in his outward appearance, and in disposition as evil as a child can be.' Moreover he bears 'a marked likeness to [Eli], both in body and mind.'¹⁶ Now, when the father names his son Abel rather than Eli, he, in effect, begins the sequence that ends in disaster, his brother's reaction being merely the first of the ensuing series of events. Had the boy been named Eli, certainly more appropriate in view of his looks and temperament, the younger brother would never have borne the mark of Cain. Therefore, it was the father's action, not Eli's, that set the tragedy in motion. Despite Gissing's claim that the biblical name 'haunts [Cain] like a Fate,' this alternative interpretation inclines towards causality as a more likely explanation. Seen in this light, the plot loses its fatalistic significance, and the stereotypical characters become authentic individuals caught up in a tragic web of dysfunctional family relations, totally in keeping with the author's increasingly realistic approach to short fiction.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 200-201.

¹⁶ pp. 189, 193-4.

Of greater relevance to the story than predestination is the arbitrariness of life, the fact that some people are dogged by misfortune, while others remain trouble-free throughout their lives. Eli Charnock, for instance, prospers despite his wickedness, whereas his kind-hearted brother dies young, his business in ruins. Similarly, while the young Abel enjoys unhindered success, Cain's efforts to improve his lowly status suffer constant setbacks.

A brief jotting in Gissing's *American Notebook*, reads: 'Bastard in love, rejected on account of his birth.' Undoubtedly, this plot outline ultimately became 'The Quarry on the Heath,' the author's third story of the eighties. The original idea was clearly intended for the American market, following the pattern of 'The Sins of the Fathers' and 'Too Wretched to Live,' and indeed, with elements of the sensational still manifest in the later story, the horrific death by drowning of Harold Cuthbertson is reminiscent of that of Leonard Vincent in the author's first story. However, it is interesting to note how, within four years, Gissing had acquired the necessary skill to transform what appeared to have the makings of a salacious melodrama into a plausible tragedy.

As with 'All for Love,' which addresses the social and psychological ramifications of bigamy, the author incorporates in the text of 'The Quarry on the Heath,' the unpalatable issue of incestuous love. Nonetheless, no doubt in view of past experience, he took care to treat the subject with some delicacy, ensuring that until the dénouement, neither Bertha nor Harold knew that they were siblings. In the event, the story, like those preceding it, was almost certainly rejected because of its unsavoury content, remaining unpublished until 1970. Gissing subsequently

used the heath and quarry as the setting for James Hood's suicide in *A Life's Morning*, and the deliberate estrangement of Bertha and her mother by Reverend Lashmore recurs in *New Grub Street*, where Alfred Yule purposely destabilises the relationship between mother and daughter. As with 'The Sins of the Fathers,' tyranny is at the root of the tragedy overshadowing 'The Quarry on the Heath.' Since early manhood Lashmore had manipulated and controlled women. The cleric's 'cold, suspicious eyes' and 'stern, even repulsive expression' reveal 'something intensely animal' and strangely incongruous in a man who is 'conscientious in the fulfillment [sic] of his pastoral duties,' powerfully suggestive of the sensualist turned bigot.¹⁷ After seducing his cousin and abandoning her and her child, he seeks atonement in religion, though in truth he is 'feared rather than respected by all his parishioners.'¹⁸ Lashmore's family too are victims of his unchristian zeal; Mrs Lashmore is a timid, self-effacing woman, who regards her husband:

... with a reverence largely tintured with fear; his unceasing toil, his restless asceticism more and more repelled her wifely affections. With daily pain, too, she observed the relations between him and his child; without really comprehending the deep, impulsive, idealizing nature of the latter, she saw that Bertha likewise feared rather than loved her father, and that too often the fear seemed developing into active dislike.¹⁹

Like her mother, Bertha fears her overbearing father, but there is a latent spark of rebellion in her nature, which ignites when she meets and falls in love with Harold Cuthbertson. He is the first contact she has had with a desirable man, and unsurprisingly she finds him the 'embodiment of her ideal'.²⁰ Her father's unaccountable disapproval of the relationship only intensifies her desire to escape

¹⁷ pp. 205, 215.

¹⁸ p. 215.

¹⁹ pp. 215-6.

²⁰ p. 216

the 'crushing monotony' of her life.²¹ Of course, after receiving the letter and then discovering the young couple together, Lashmore had to tell his son that he was his father, but did the telling have to be so brutal? Ironically, from the outset, it was the tyranny, not the sin that generated the suffering. Had Lashmore been more compassionate in his treatment of his young cousin and their child, the letter may never have been written, in which case the lovers would never have met, and the tragedy would not have happened. Here, Gissing is stressing the far-reaching consequences of oppression, yet another example of the many he used to demonstrate the inexorable law of causality. Obsession, abandonment and tyranny are recurring themes throughout Gissing's work, each of which he frequently deployed to create the cause that would ultimately produce the consequences.²² These characteristics are generally symptomatic of a personality defect, which foments the action that invariably ends in disaster.

With each of the stories that emerged from the eighties there is discernible progress in terms of realistic representation, for instance, although 'The Quarry on the Heath' shares a similar theme to that of 'The Sins of the Fathers,' the later story reaches a far more natural conclusion, reflecting the remarkable development during this second phase, of Gissing's skill in bringing verisimilitude to his short fiction. Although both men suffer horrifying deaths, unlike Leonard Vincent, who meets an improbable end trapped in the arms of his deranged former lover, Harold dies by accident as he wanders blindly across the heath in a state of

²¹ p. 216.

²² Examples of obsession occur in 'The Sins of the Fathers,' 'The Scrupulous Father,' *The Emancipated*, *New Grub Street*, *Born in Exile*, *The Odd Women*, and *The Nether World*; abandonment is the major theme in 'Too Wretched to Live,' 'A Mother's Hope,' *Demos*, *Thyrza*, *New Grub Street*, and *In the Year of Jubilee*; tyranny is central to 'Brownie,' 'The Quarry on the Heath,' *The Unclassed*, *The Nether World* (Michael Snowdon and Clem Peckover), and *The Odd Women*.

mental anguish. Similarly with the female protagonists: while Laura's dementia has supernatural overtones, Bertha's violent emotional outburst is a not an uncommon reaction to inconsolable grief. 'The Quarry on the Heath' marks an important step towards the author's eventual mastery of realistic short fiction.

In a article summarising the first issue of the French periodical *Réalisme*, Edmond Duranty outlines the principles of Realism, a crucial point being that:

... in demanding of the artist useful *truth*, it demands of him particularly the intelligent feeling and observation which *sees* a lesson, an emotion in a spectacle at any level, low or high, according to convention, and which always extracts this lesson, this emotion from the spectacle, knowing how to represent it *completely*, and to embed it in its social cadre.²³

Duranty's summary was published on 15 December 1856 in *Réalisme* 2, and since the magazine survived for less than a year, it is unlikely that Gissing was ever aware of its existence. Nevertheless, these were the values that he embraced, strove for and ultimately achieved, in his short fiction. As Jacob Korg points out in *George Gissing on Fiction*, what Gissing meant by 'truthfulness of spirit' in his essay 'The Place of Realism in Fiction' was 'an accurate reflection, not so much of life, as of the novelist's honest conviction about it.'²⁴ At the beginning of his career, the author's avowed aim was to expose social evils by accurate representation of the unpalatable facts of life in all their sordid detail:

I mean to bring home to people the ghastly condition (material, mental & moral,) of our poor classes, to show the hideous injustice of our whole system of society, to give light upon the plan of altering it, &, above all, to preach an enthusiasm for just & high *ideals* in this age of unmitigated egotism & "shop."²⁵

However, in 1884 the author wrote to his brother, cautioning him to avoid the polemic:

²³ *Realism*, ed., L. F. Furst (London: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1992), p. 31.

²⁴ *George Gissing on Fiction*, p. 82.

²⁵ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 307.

It is so hard to adapt moral loathing to literary form. ... I have found by several pieces of unpleasant experience that moral indignation is simply not marketable ... I suppose that is one reason why I am gradually ceasing to express indignation at anything at all.²⁶

Although the author failed to completely eliminate 'moral indignation' from his work, its presence in his later novels and short stories was rather more subtly disguised..

By 1895, when Gissing's essay 'The Place of Realism in Fiction' appeared in *The Humanitarian*, all trace of special pleading had disappeared from his writing, the author having reached the conclusion that the only works of fiction worthy of merit are those that have been 'conceived, fashioned, elaborated, with a view to depicting some portion of human life as candidly and vividly as is in the author's power.'²⁷ In defining what he understands as reality in terms of art, the writer maintains that:

What the artist sees is to him only a part of the actual; its complement is an emotional effect. Thus it comes about that every novelist beholds a world of his own, and the supreme endeavour of his art must be to body forth that world as it exists for him. The novelist works, and must work, subjectively. ... objectivity in fiction is worse than meaningless, for apart from the personality of the workman no literary art can exist.²⁸

In due time Gissing developed a unique brand of realism that deliberately avoided the 'vulgar, base or disgusting subjects' and the 'dullest phases of life' - extremes commonly adopted by contemporary realists - choosing rather to depict in the 'spirit of truthfulness,' the generally unobserved extraordinariness that every so often upsets the balance of ordinary everyday life.²⁹

²⁶ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 253.

²⁷ *George Gissing on Fiction*, p. 85.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ pp. 84, 85.

As with his views on causality, the author's essay again strongly echoes the words of George Eliot, who, in *Adam Bede* (1859) expresses her notion of truthfulness:

... my strongest effort is to ... give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath.³⁰

That Gissing held George Eliot in high esteem, and profited from her example, is implicit in his letter to sister Margaret, which comments on the superiority of such as Trollope, Jane Austen and George Eliot, in the field of realistic representation: 'Think ... of George Eliot. Who reads her to know how her people lived (externally)? No; but to see *what & who* they, individually, were, & to learn men & women at large.'³¹

The idealism that was paramount in the author's earlier short stories, such as 'Gretchen,' 'R. I. P.' and 'The Warden's Daughter' virtually disappeared with the re-written 'The Artist's Child,' principally as a result of his growing interest in realism. Similarly, his concern with the law of consequences was gradually giving way by the mid-eighties to a deepening interest in the psychological and sociological influences that crucially affect the formation of character. 'The Last Half-Crown,' for instance, focuses on the desolation suffered by the demoralised writer, and society's indifference to his despair, rather than the drama of the young man's suicide. Almost all the stories of the eighties have at their core the plight of the outsider, whose life is at odds with the prevailing social code. 'Phoebe,' written roughly a year after 'The Hope of Pessimism,' incorporates

³⁰ George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859; London: Penguin Classics, 1985), p. 221.

³¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p.151.

many of the values contained in the essay. The story reveals both the philosophical principles now guiding the author's art, and the sociological and psychological influences predisposing Phoebe's behaviour.

Gissing must have been heartened by Bentley's acceptance of 'Phoebe,' published in the March 1884 issue of *Temple Bar* - his first successful story since 'The Artist's Child' in January 1878.³² The tale centres on the plight of a young girl, whose last crust of bread, like Harold Samson's half-crown, is all that stands between her and starvation. Unlike Harold, however, Phoebe finds, rather than loses, a fortune, but inured to a life of poverty, her problem is that she does not know how to spend it. Head spinning with ideas, purse filled to bursting, she heads off to the West End, only to find that one by one her plans go awry. Overwhelmed by all the glamour and opulence, the despondent girl's thoughts drift homewards:

A certain vision had been gathering in intensity before her mind's eye, a vision of that little shop in the street "at home," where the big cold plum-pudding stood in the window ... and where you could get meat and vegetables for sevenpence. She fancied she could smell the very steam that at this hour made the windows dim and curled out of the doorway.³³

So, Phoebe returns to Hoxton, to a 'dirty little eating-house' where her dreamed-of 'really good dinner' consists of:

... a very thin red slice of roast beef, swimming in reddish water, two frost-bitten potatoes, a patch of stringy turnip-tops, and, to finish, a suety cut of cold plum-pudding.³⁴

As noted above, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* is full of reminiscences that have their fictional counterpart in the author's novels and short stories. The

³² George Gissing, 'Phoebe,' *Temple Bar*, Vol. LXX (March, 1884).

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 400-401.

³⁴ pp. 398, 401.

following extract from *Spring X*, bears resounding echoes of Phoebe's culinary treat:

I see a winding way by which I went from Oxford Street, at the foot of Tottenham Court Road to Leicester Square, and, somewhere in the labyrinth ... was a shop which had pies and puddings in the window, puddings and pies kept hot by steam rising through perforated metal.³⁵

The implied factuality of this experience reinforces the notion of truthfulness in Gissing's fictional representation.

Too naive and unimaginative to cope with sudden wealth, Phoebe goes from disappointment to disappointment, never achieving her goal. Inevitably she falls victim to a confidence trickster, who cunningly worms her way into her affections and her home, and before the day is over makes off with Phoebe's fortune. The two girls meet accidentally outside the Britannia Theatre, and after a few persuasive words, Jenny takes charge of the situation. First they stop at a wheelk stall, and then move on to the pantomime and a hat shop, the latter two visits aborted at Jenny's insistence, because Phoebe's new friend 'now had the direction of affairs practically in her own hands.'³⁶ Pleading homelessness, she is invited to stay with Phoebe, and, armed with a parcel of tasty things to eat they make their way home. Curious, Jenny asks her friend about the writing on the walls, and foolishly Phoebe reveals how this had led her to the treasure trove on top of the wardrobe. By morning Jenny and the money are gone, and our heroine is penniless once more.

³⁵ George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1983), p. 28.

³⁶ 'Phoebe,' p. 405.

From the outset, it is clear that Phoebe has no conception of what it is like to have money in her purse:

The girls and women of Phoebe's class know nothing of social discontent; starve them, and they scarcely think it hard, so much it is in the order of events; give them just enough to keep together body and soul, and it will not occur to them to be other than satisfied. ... And Phoebe imagined even less of luxuries than other girls of her kind. ... You cannot conceive how hard it was for her to even form precise ideas of what she would like.³⁷

Phoebe was resigned to her position in life; in finding a fortune she gained nothing but frustration, in losing it she suffered the disillusionment of having trusted a false friend rather than distress at the loss. Lifelong exposure to poverty had prepared her psychologically to cope in adversity; consequently her resilient spirit gave her the courage to endure. The story ends ambiguously with the words 'Poor Phoebe!' suggesting not so much sympathy for her loss, but rather that her position in the scheme of things required that she be poor.

In 'Phoebe,' the laws of cause and effect are less significant, superseded by a sense that to rail against circumstance is futile; the only alternative therefore is to accept misfortune with quiet resolve. Harold Sansom's sense of hopelessness cost him the will to live, Cain blamed his disaster on fate, Harold Cuthbertson's mental suffering led him to accidental death, but Phoebe, knowing she is no worse off than before she found the money, bravely struggles on.

Interestingly, new evidence has come to light that there was more to Phoebe's story than appeared in print. In 1996 Pierre Coustillas' article on George Gissing and his Publishers, briefly noted that the published 'Phoebe' was a severely edited

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 397-8.

version of Gissing's original work.³⁸ A recent study of the manuscript at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, has revealed the extent to which Bentley bowdlerised the story.³⁹ Coming near the end of the piece, the excisions and substitutions relate almost exclusively to the calculated way in which Jenny plied Phoebe with the demon drink.

It is after Phoebe's disappointment at missing the pantomime that the bulk of the changes are made. The manuscript reads:

Almost with tears in her eyes, Phoebe followed out of the crush, & they walked slowly in silence. Jenny made a pause in front of a public house.

"Don't you feel as a drop of something warm 'ud do you good after that?" She asked. "I'm almost ready to drop."

The feast of whelks had made Phoebe thirsty, & the proposal tempted her. Her sister had taught her to look on public-houses as places to be shunned, & of her own impulse she would never have entered one. But she felt a chill after the heat of the theatre, & it looked so comfortable inside. She allowed herself to be led in, & Jenny had speedily procured two glasses of "something warm," with little pieces of lemon floating on the top. To Phoebe the first sip was grateful, but the second made her shake her head, & it was with difficulty that she finished her glass. They had sat down on the bench by the wall, & Jenny chatted familiarly.⁴⁰

Bentley's drastically cut version reads:

Almost with tears in her eyes, Phoebe followed out of the crush, and they walked slowly down the street. Jenny, declaring herself revived by the air chatted familiarly.⁴¹

After the girls arrive at Phoebe's home with their tasty supper, there is yet again a huge discrepancy between Gissing's original story and that published in *Temple*

³⁸ Pierre Coustillas, 'Aspects of the Late Victorian Publishing Scene: George Gissing and his Publishers,' *Journal of the Eighteen-Nineties Society*, No. 23 (1996), p. 9.

³⁹ George Gissing, 'Phoebe's Fortune,' Gissing MSS, Box No. 1, The Lilly Library, Indiana University.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴¹ 'Phoebe,' *Temple Bar*, p. 404.

Bar. According to the manuscript, Jenny once more broaches the question of drink:

“But we must have something to drink,” Jenny said, when they were up in the garret at last. “Give me some money, & I’ll go get it, while you light the fire.”

“Can you find your way back?” asked Phoebe, laughing with delight as she turned the mass of animal & vegetable matter out of the paper onto a plate.

“No fear!” replied the other, as she ran off with a shilling.

The fire was crackling up under the kettle when she came back. She had with her a bottle of brown liquid.

“Why, ‘taint the same what we had before,” Phoebe cried, as she took out the cork & smelt the rum.

“You’ll like it better,” said Jenny. “Got some sugar? You’re the right sort, Phoebe, you are. – I say, what’s all that writin’ on the walls? Is it some o’ your larks?”

Phoebe explained as they sat down at the table. She could hardly speak for laughing; everything seemed a source of amusement to her. She sipped at the drink which Jenny had mixed for her, & at every sip grew more confidential.⁴²

Again, the published version is heavily censored:

Phoebe laughed with delight when they were up in the garret at last, and she turned the mass of animal and vegetable matter out of the paper on a plate.

A fire was soon crackling up under the kettle, assisting the feeble illumination of the candle.

“I say,” said Jenny, looking round the room, “what’s that writin’ on the walls? Is it some o’ your larks?”⁴³

After Phoebe relates the story of Mr Quy and discloses the hiding place of her treasure trove, the manuscript continues:

Very soon after that things began to grow dim before Phoebe’s eyes. She still talked & laughed, but in a fitful way, without clearly knowing what she said. The fire seemed to grow very hot, & her limbs ached with weariness; to be sure she had been walking about all day, it was natural she should be tired. An immense weight was oppressing her eyelids; every now & then she all but fell forward off her chair in irresistible drowsiness.⁴⁴

⁴² ‘Phoebe’s Fortune,’ Gissing MSS, pp. 24-5.

⁴³ ‘Phoebe,’ p. 405.

⁴⁴ ‘Phoebe’s Fortune,’ pp. 25-6.

To be substituted by:

Very soon things began to grow dim before Phoebe's eyes, and her limbs seemed to ache with weariness; to be sure she had been walking about all day, it was natural she should be tired.⁴⁵

Next morning, according to the original:

When the sense of daylight once more visited Phoebe's eyes, it blended with a dim consciousness of trouble, a dull pain which made it difficult to raise her lids, & a fluttering at the heart which grew as she became aware of it. She struggled to regain remembrance, & at length, as if by a supreme effort of mind & body, was able to raise herself & look round the room. First Mr. Quay's sign manual on the wall; then all the story that hung thereby.

"Jenny!"

She uttered the name with a start, but there was no one to reply to it. She sprung out onto the floor, & was so possessed with dizziness that she had to support her head on her hands for a moment before she could even stand up. Only the plates & glasses on the table to prove that it had not been an unquiet dream.⁴⁶

Again, all reference to drink is erased from the published text:

When the sense of daylight once more visited Phoebe's eyes, it blended with a dim consciousness of trouble, and a fluttering at the heart which grew as she became aware of it. She struggled to regain remembrance, and at length raised herself and looked round the room. First, at Mr. Quay's sign-manual on the wall; then she thought of all the story that hung thereby.

"Jenny!"

She uttered the name with a start, but there was no one to reply to it. There was no one else in the room; no sign of Jenny anywhere. Only the plates and knives on the table to prove that it had not all been an unquiet dream.⁴⁷

Manuscript Quotations: Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Bearing in mind Bentley's nervousness regarding his anticipation of the public's probable reaction to 'Mrs Grundy's Enemies,' it is not surprising that he

⁴⁵ 'Phoebe,' p. 405.

⁴⁶ 'Phoebe's Fortune,' p. 26.

⁴⁷ 'Phoebe,' p. 406.

balked at the idea of publishing, unabridged, a story that featured two young women engaged in a drinking spree, but unfortunately the excisions achieved nothing other than to render the piece colourless. The censor altered the whole tone of the tale by erroneously casting Phoebe as a gullible fool instead of an innocent abroad, as Gissing intended her to be. In 1938 'Phoebe' was reprinted in its bowdlerised form in the collection entitled *Stories and Sketches*.⁴⁸

In June 1884, Bentley accepted 'Letty Coe' for publication, but in the event it did not appear in *Temple Bar* until 1891. When it became obvious that 'Mrs Grundy's Enemies' would not be published, Gissing offered the story in part payment of the fifty guineas he had received for the novel. Shrewdly hedging his bets, Bentley declined the offer and paid six guineas for the copyright.⁴⁹ Michael Coe is yet another of Gissing's victims of the arbitrariness of life – honest, hard working and a caring father, he nonetheless suffers setback after setback until he and his daughter Letty come close to starvation. The latest and cruellest blow to strike the destitute family since Mrs Coe's fatal accident is the fast approaching death of Pat, their work-worn old donkey. To Letty, losing Pat means the loss of her only friend; to Michael it means the end of his pitiful livelihood and the end of hope, thus making him easy prey to his landlord's persuasive tongue:

"I parss'd that 'ouse again this mornin', Mike," ...

"... It won't be standin' empty much longer ... I couldn't 'elp a-thinking o' that little back door wi' the loose bolt on, an' the hold woman a-sleeping all by herself at the top o' the 'ouse – an' these dark nights an' all. An' me knowing my way about as well a'most as in this 'ere 'ouse o' my own, all o' doing those jobs there. An' then *you* come into my 'ead all at wunst, Mike – s'elp me, you did! – A few pounds wouldn't do you no 'urt, eh, pal?"⁵⁰

⁴⁸ George Gissing, *Stories and Sketches* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1938).

⁴⁹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, pp. 226, 241, 278.

⁵⁰ *Stories & Sketches*, pp. 51, 52.

The colloquial dialogue captures fully the flavour of the nether world, and the imperative manifest in Jarmey's conspiratorial and cajoling tones.

Distressed by Pat's pain, Letty persuades her father to allow the donkey to lie by the fire in the wretched hovel she calls home. While she sleeps, the animal's struggles cause loose pieces of straw to catch fire and spread until clouds of suffocating smoke envelop the room. When Michael returns with his ill-gotten gains, he finds that life's cruel twists have lost nothing of their sting – both his love and his hope lie dead.

Earlier in the story, as she returns from a nightly errand, Letty lingers as usual outside an undertaker's, the windows of which display representations of funerals, ranging from the cheapest to the most luxurious:

For Letty Coe it had an irresistible attraction. It held her attention as a work of art ... and then again the sight of these so various funerals filled her with a sadness which was even a sort of pleasure. She speculated about the occupants of the hearses and the mourning coaches, and had constructed for herself tales about each picture ... Letty was convinced that the last picture represented the funeral of "the Queen." And the first, the humblest of all, the two guinea burial? About that she was equally sure: the poor hearse contained the coffin of a child, and that child – herself.⁵¹

Like Phoebe, Letty is inured to poverty, and the above passage not only symbolises her acceptance of her lowly place in the social strata, but also her awareness that those living on the verge of poverty are likely to die young. Having long known hardship, she asks no more from life than the love of an old donkey. On the other hand, Michael, who never comes to terms with his plight, consequently reaps the whirlwind. Through Michael, Gissing explores the psychological impact of sustained poverty on those who 'by dint of an innate

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 59-60.

sense of moral cleanliness, struggle out of the depths, quite unconsciously to themselves,' but only 'as far as fate allows.'⁵²

Estimated by Pierre Coustillas as having been written sometime between June and July 1884, 'Mutimer's Choice,' the last story of the eighties, testifies to the refinement of style that has taken place in the four years since 'The Last-Half Crown' was completed.⁵³ The innovations noted earlier have developed to a point where melodrama is reduced to a minimum, the story is feasible and concise, and practically all trace of omniscience has disappeared.

'Mutimer's Choice' is a sombre tale about a man who makes a calculated choice between two wretched alternatives. Another such as Cain Charnock and Michael Coe, Jim Mutimer is persistently dogged by bad luck. Loyal and diligent, he has the double misfortune of marrying a vain, ill-natured woman, and suffering a life-threatening accident, which leaves no alternative but the amputation of his legs. Faced with a choice between death and a future of bitter conflict, he refuses the operation that would save his life. The story opens to the clamour of church bells, 'so many spirits of mischief, every throat of them provocative of discord,' their penetrating jangle shattering the unnatural silence pervading the Mutimer household, and foreshadowing the violent quarrel about to break out over Bella's extravagance and deceit.⁵⁴ Wilfully, she accuses her husband of meanness, insinuating that Bill Snowdon, her ex-suitor and Mutimer's friend, thinks the same. Snowdon turns up at the height of the conflict, when 'with miraculous suddenness' Bella's features resume their 'curves of beauty' to be replaced

⁵² p. 51.

⁵³ *Essays & Fiction*, p. 241.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.242.

instantly with 'the look of half-fearful, half-indignant apprehension which had risen to her face when she heard the knock.'⁵⁵ Keenly aware of the attraction between them, Mutimer bans Snowdon from the house, but this only intensifies the couple's marital discord.

After the accident, Mutimer virtually forces Snowdon into a commitment to look after Bella: 'A dying man's words stick in the mind, and they have the power either to bless or to curse.'⁵⁶ Bearing in mind that his native instinct informs him that Snowdon would soon be enduring the misery he is about to escape, there is something calculatedly sadistic about Mutimer's definitive choice. The story's ironic ending is prefigured in Bella's dream, in which she sees her husband 'roll a great piece of stone upon Snowdon and crush him beneath it.'⁵⁷ Mutimer was by nature 'earnest and steadfast, but too unpliant,' consequently when Bella deceived him, her 'dishonesty came upon him like an unexpected flaw in a fine piece of marble' and a 'deep distrust of the woman he loved ... rankled in his nature like a disease.'⁵⁸ The laws of cause and effect are just as relevant in 'Mutimer's Choice' as in the previous stories; Bella's lie brings catastrophe to them all. However, accepting the likelihood that Mutimer's motives were base, it remains the case that his choice was essentially one of resignation rather than revenge; he found the prospect of death an easier option than a life embittered by distrust.

⁵⁵ p. 245.

⁵⁶ p. 253.

⁵⁷ p. 249.

⁵⁸ p. 248.

In addition to the six melodramatic tales written during the eighties, Gissing produced four humorous stories. 'An Heiress on Condition,' 'My First Rehearsal' and 'My Clerical Rival' were among the 'few short stories' the author referred to in his letter dated 2 January 1880, identifiable by the address on the manuscripts, from which property the author removed in July of that year.⁵⁹ Less is known about 'The Lady of the Dedication,' but Pierre Coustillas' research puts its date of composition in the autumn of 1882.⁶⁰ The first three stories have much in common with the author's earlier 'A Terrible Mistake' and 'How They Cooked Me,' sharing, with variations, a general theme of misconception. Each of the three tales centres on the misguided presumptions of a male protagonist, though in 'An Heiress on Condition' it is the anti-hero who gets everything wrong.

Having achieved success with 'A Terrible Mistake,' Gissing again adopted the motif of sexually driven male rivalry in 'An Heiress on Condition.' He also borrowed from 'The Picture,' the idea of an artist hero who becomes physically attracted to one of two women he encounters while sketching a landscape. Unlike 'A Terrible Mistake,' however, where the misunderstanding arises out of jealousy and two misdirected letters, the misunderstanding in 'An Heiress on Condition' stems from the artist's withholding of his real identity.

Philip first notices the two women as they pass-by in the company of a foppish young gentleman. Later, when the two men become acquainted, Philip discovers that they are related, but, because his new friend has revealed that an inheritance is involved, he keeps silent, calling himself Edward Benton. It transpires that Philip,

⁵⁹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 229; *My First Rehearsal and My Clerical Rival*, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *Essays & Fiction*, p. 227.

Frederick and the younger of the two women, are cousins, and as a result of a perverse will, the artist stands to inherit his uncle's whole estate if Frederick fails to marry their cousin Ada before her twenty-second birthday. Through Frederick, Philip finally meets the girl and her mother, and they quickly become firm friends, Ada and he spending much time together under the pretext of his teaching her the art of sketching. Eventually, the artist confesses that he is in love with Ada, which causes Frederick great amusement, since he mistakenly believes that because money is at stake the young man's cause is hopeless. Surprisingly, Philip concedes defeat, seemingly leaving the way clear for his cousin to win the girl and the fortune. But, having based his expectations on his own cynical view of human nature, Frederick completely miscalculates Ada's response to his flagrantly mercenary proposal. Of course she rejects him.

Though aware of his cousin's failure, Philip returns to London without revealing his feelings, choosing rather to let the dust settle. In the meantime, an intentionally emotive package arrives at the Wolstenholmes' containing the landscape painting that brought them all together, followed some weeks later by a visit from Philip. He proposes to Ada and is accepted, and only then, in a note to the girl's mother, does he reveal his identity, which he claims he had concealed because he wished to be taken 'as a simple stranger, one who could not claim the least privilege, and had to be taken purely on such merits as he might have.'⁶¹ Despite its light-hearted tone, the story is unmistakably an attack on materialism. Frederick of course, makes no attempt to disguise his greed, but there is also a suggestion that Mrs Wolstenholme would not have strongly objected to the

⁶¹ 'An Heiress on Condition,' p. 36.

marriage: 'Who can say whether she, as a mother, had been equally free from ambitious hopes?'⁶²

Although intricate, the story unravels plausibly with only minor resort to artificial devices, and through dialogue and description Gissing has created fully realised characters; Frederick, 'with his hideous patterned coat, his chimney-pot, his flashy tie, ostentatious jewellery and unnecessary eyeglass,' is just the sort of popinjay who would constantly utter such colloquialisms as 'the gov'nor was a rummy sort of fellow,' 'The Deuce' and 'Dash it all, you know' - an empty, feckless young dandy, living in total ignorance of the moral imperatives that are intended to inform human behaviour.⁶³ The friendly rivalry between the male protagonists is interesting and highly amusing, but, as with most of Gissing's short fiction, the devil is in the detail. Throughout the tale, Frederick, and presumably the girl's mother, assume that in view of the promised reward, Ada will readily accept the conditions of the dead-hand will; her views on the issue are never sought. Although comic in tone, 'An Heiress on Condition' is a subtle indictment of women's subordinate status in Victorian society.

'My First Rehearsal' was written soon after Gissing's return to England, the manuscript of which was eventually acquired by Yale University Library, where it lay buried in the Beinecke Collection until 1966, when the story finally saw publication in *English Literature in Transition*. In 1970, Enitharmon Press re-published the story, along with the unpublished 'My Clerical Rival,' in their

⁶² p. 34.

⁶³ pp. 5, 15, 18, 30.

Gissing series, edited by Pierre Coustillas.⁶⁴ As Coustillas suggests, the distinguishing feature of the two stories is their ‘mock-heroic tone, reinforced in the case of ‘My First Rehearsal’ by frequent lapses into ‘sententious or sonorous’ verse.⁶⁵ Narrated in elevated language by the hero himself, Richard Morton is revealed as an incurable romantic, who thinks and speaks as did the poets of a bygone age. Long given to moon-gazing and grandiose gestures, Richard instantly interprets the ‘irresistible impulse’ that overwhelms him when a band of strolling players visit the town, as a favourable portent. Armed with traditional bundle on a stick, he sets off for London like a latter day Dick Whittington, certain he will win fame and fortune as an actor:

I doubted not I should find a host of magnanimous managers who would listen attentively to a few recitations from my favourite plays and immediately conclude an engagement with me on handsome terms.⁶⁶

‘My First Rehearsal’ is about the folly of self-aggrandisement and gullibility, its common companion. While reciting to himself the last few lines of ‘Manfred’s sublime apostrophe ... in a voice choked with feeling,’ Richard is startled out of his reverie by a soberly dressed stranger, whose extravagant praise is music to the ears of the aspiring young actor. After some discussion of his plans, during which he reveals that he is on foot out of choice, not lack of money, Richard eagerly accepts his new friend’s suggestion that he should take part in his theatrical company’s next performance of *Hamlet*, he being the manager of the troupe.

⁶⁴ *My First Rehearsal and My Clerical Rival*, acknowledgements and p. 2.

⁶⁵ p. 6.

⁶⁶ p. 13.

Having secured a hotel room for Richard close to his own, Julian Bradford takes the young aspirant through his paces, persuading him that he must dress for the part:

Now, if you have no objection, I will ask you to slip off your own clothes and don those I have brought. They are not, of course, what you will appear in, but it is my constant rule that rehearsals shall take place in some kind of stage attire. It is particularly desirable for novices, as it accustoms them to the feel of the stage dress, which I have often known to be very distracting at first.⁶⁷

In Bradford's room, Richard has barely started when the manager is called away, never to return. Divested of clothes, and, as he subsequently discovers on returning to his ransacked room, of all his precious savings, it finally dawns on the young dupe that he is the victim of an elaborate hoax.

Unusually for Gissing, 'My First Rehearsal' has no more serious consequences than a salutary lesson for the pretentious young hero. The thief gets clean away with his spoils, and everyone treats the whole episode as a joke; the landlord 'could not help laughing heartily' at Richard's preposterous appearance and plight, the police merely made notes, and the real Julian Bradford, though sympathetic, also found it impossible to 'refrain from laughing at [Richard's] adventure.'⁶⁸ In light of the young man's final words on the incident, it is doubtful that he actually learned anything from his experience: 'How I rescued myself from my miserable position it would take too long to tell; suffice it to say that the real Mr. Julian Bradford regretted that he had no opening for my genius.'⁶⁹ The grandiose notions are still there.

⁶⁷ p. 17.

⁶⁸ pp. 19, 20.

⁶⁹ p. 20.

Interestingly, the Richard Morton of 'My First Rehearsal' differs in name only by the letter 'e' from the Richard Merton of 'My Clerical Rival,' a coincidence too glaring to be accidental, suggesting that Gissing was seeking to develop the mock-heroic theme along other than quixotic lines. According to Frank O'Connor the short story often 'uses the old rhetorical device of the mock-heroic, but uses it to create a new form that is neither satiric nor heroic, but something in between ... it is the first appearance of the Little Man.'⁷⁰ This is certainly the case with Gissing's second mock-heroic tale. Unlike his near namesake, Richard Merton seems firmly rooted in the real world, having chosen to forego the pleasures of a long vacation in Normandy for a seemingly less exciting:

long-standing invitation from a good old uncle, rector of an out-of-the-way village somewhere in Hampshire, a classical scholar of the old school, who was especially desirous that [he] should read with him for a month or so preparatory to going in for Honours.⁷¹

Richard Merton's romantic leanings only come to light when he falls in love with Amy Wheatcroft. From the moment he saw her, 'all the dusty academic lore had vanished from [his] mind, to be replaced by all the half-forgotten poetry [he] had ever dreamed over,' from which he drew images of the classic heroines of yesteryear, none of whom quite equalled Amy's matchless beauty.⁷²

Unfortunately, like Harold in 'A Terrible Mistake,' Richard is inclined to jump to hasty conclusions. His uncle has a curate named Cheeseman, to whom our hero takes an instant dislike, mainly because of the cleric's close friendship with Amy and her mother. When he overhears an intimate conversation between the curate and a woman he assumes to be Amy, the distraught young man wastes no time in

⁷⁰ Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1963), p. 15.

⁷¹ *My First Rehearsal and My Clerical Rival*, p. 21.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

escaping his hitherto blissful sojourn in the country. On taking his leave however, though too ingenuous to understand its meaning, he does unknowingly get to the heart of the mystery: 'Amy blushed painfully, when I said good-bye – well she might; her mother, on the other hand, I had never seen in such high spirits, and the wreathed smiles about her rejuvenescent countenance goaded me past expression.'⁷³ Six months later he learns the embarrassing truth that Cheeseman had married Mrs Wheatcroft, not her daughter.

Like 'My First Rehearsal,' the consequences for the hero are relatively trivial – for his imperceptiveness Richard has only to endure six months of sadness before all is explained, and he wins the girl of his dreams. 'My Clerical Rival' is a homespun version of the mock-heroic, revealing Gissing's inventiveness in shedding new light on a traditional genre. The artless gallant reappears occasionally in the author's final phase of short fiction, notably in 'Comrades in Arms,' 'The Salt of the Earth,' 'The Fate of Humphrey Snell' and 'Humplebee'.

'The Lady of the Dedication' is an amusing satire on editorial practice; through Mr Swanwick, editor of the fictional *Narthex*, Gissing launches an oblique attack on the dubious ethics of the publishing world. It is Mr Swanwick's custom to return unread, the piles of unsolicited manuscripts that daily appear at his home, preferring to wait until an author has become a household name before agreeing to publish his work, still unread. This he confesses to his wife as they discuss Robert Adler's new book: 'He has just sent in a tale for the *Narthex*. A month ago I should have returned it without reading; now I shall print it without reading; that's

⁷³ p. 28.

all the difference.⁷⁴ Although written long before *New Grub Street*, 'The Lady of the Dedication' has an interesting link with the later novel; both Edwin Reardon and Robert Adler are desperate to escape the thralldom of the three-decker novel, but unlike Reardon, Adler stands firm against the publishers' demands for three volumes, believing that the future success of his single volume work would prove the strength of his argument.

Robert Alder is the fortunate counterpart of the hero of 'The Last Half-Crown'. Faced with the identical problem of having only money enough to pay his week's rent, Robert is saved from starvation by the arrival of a cheque and an invitation to dine at the Swanwicks. After learning the good news, Robert resumes writing a letter begun the previous day to his sweetheart, Ellen Lake, already known to the reader as nursemaid to the Swanwicks' children, who has astounded her employers by teaching their young son to recite a verse from the poetry of Robert Herrick. Ellen represents the ideal working girl, whose thirst for knowledge and culture is stimulated by her relationship with an educated young man, prefiguring Ida Starr in *The Unclassed*, and the tragic Thyrza Trent in *Thyrza*.

Having pondered over the dedication in the young author's book, Mrs Swanwick casually asks Ellen if her middle name begins with an E, thus solving the mystery of 'The Lady of the Dedication'. The story ends on a philosophic note, with Mrs Swanwick, somewhat put out that she had never been the subject of a dedication, wistfully remarking: 'What a pity I wasn't a work-girl! How

⁷⁴ *Essays & Fiction*, p. 229.

delightful to have worked and starved and hoped!’⁷⁵ On the other hand, in view of Gissing’s personal experience of working, starving and hoping, the inference is probably meant to be ironic.

‘The Lady of the Dedication’ reveals much of Gissing’s disenchantment with the publishing world, barely concealed beneath his light-hearted satire of the proprietor of the *Narthex*, perhaps, at a deeper level, aimed at Bentley in view of the publisher’s initial unqualified acceptance of ‘Mrs Grundy’s Enemies.’ The story’s most interesting feature however, is the clever interweaving of mystery and romance, which acts as an intriguing counter to the author’s subtle critique of literary production.

Throughout this period, Gissing’s short fiction underwent several crucial directional shifts. As the first three of the above four stories demonstrate, the phase of the eighties began innocuously enough with little stress on the law of consequences, but the situation changed abruptly with ‘The Last Half-Crown,’ after which causality became the dominant theme. Under the influence of Schopenhauer, the author’s work gradually acquired a decidedly philosophical slant, focusing more on the durability of characters who are able to accept and endure. By the end of the period however, the author had also become deeply interested in the psychological and sociological, character-shaping influences that enabled those individuals to accept and endure, and it was these latter three concepts that he carried forward to the nineties, when his worth as a short story writer was finally recognised. Thus, Gissing entered his third phase of short

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.239.

fiction armed with the necessary skills to bring him to the forefront of nineteenth-century short fiction.

CHAPTER SIX

The Place of Realism in Gissing's Short Fiction

Lilian Furst's introduction to *Realism* argues that, as an artistic movement, realism is the product and expression of the dominant mood of its time that eschews the fantasies of Romanticism in favour of the political, social, scientific and industrial advances of its day.¹ In similar vein, David Lodge suggests that a working definition of realism in literature might be:

... *the representation of experience in a manner which approximates closely to descriptions of similar experience in non-literary texts of the same culture.* Realistic fiction, being concerned with the actions of individuals in time, approximates to history [...].²

Of course, not all literary critics share this point of view. In *Concepts of Criticism* (1965) René Wellek argues that even in modern English literary criticism the use of 'realism' as a period concept is rare.³ In his opinion there was no realist movement of note in England before George Moore and George Gissing, the latter writer's realism writes Wellek, using the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, 14 as his source, having grown out of the influence of Zola.⁴ Against such an argument, Ian Watt's discussion of the realistic novel in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), posits the view that time is an essential category in defining individuality: 'the characters of a novel can only be individualised if they are set in a background of particularised time and place.'⁵ Watt's argument is reinforced by that of Wallace

¹ *Realism*, p. 1.

² David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), p. 25.

³ René Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 234.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 229, 234..

⁵ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987), p. 21.

Martin in *Recent Theories of Narrative* (1986), which states that modern critics see realism both ‘as a period concept, best exemplified in the art and literature of the nineteenth century’ and more generally, as ‘designating a true reflection of the world, regardless of when the work was created.’⁶ Martin claims that the plots and characters in realistic fiction reveal what actually took place in history. Undoubtedly the pro-particularists’ argument is sound, and certainly in the case of Gissing’s short fiction, its vivid snapshots of late Victorian working and middle class life, provide the reader with potted histories of a diverse section of the lower strata of society - the schoolteacher, the clerk, the clergyman, the pharmacist, the writer, the travelling salesman – at a specific point in time.

By the late nineteenth century a significant number of English writers held the firm conviction that literature should reject traditional forms, such as romanticism and melodrama, and deal directly with contemporary life and observed phenomenon. The Europeans, however were undeniably far more aware of the inadequacy, in terms of sincerity and plausibility, of romantic literature than their British counterparts, and as early as 1856, Edmond Duranty proclaimed in the first issue of his journal *Réalisme*:

The litterateurs and versifiers have spoiled artists and the calling of art by their insistence on upholding the noble genre, on acclaiming the noble genre, on shouting that we must poetise and idealize.⁷

Up to the 1880s English writers had made little more than a token gesture towards the new movement, focusing mainly on ‘[r]ealistic criteria such as truth of

⁶ Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 57.

⁷ Quoted in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George J. Becker (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 24.

observation and a depiction of commonplace events.’⁸ From the mid-eighties, however, there was an upsurge of interest in the more outspoken techniques of their European counterparts. As previously mentioned, the rejection of George Moore’s *A Modern Lover* by Mudie’s Circulating Library on account of its offensive content, prompted an incensed response from the author in the form of a satiric polemic entitled *Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals*. The pamphlet launched a bitter attack on the immutability of English social and literary conventions. Gissing was equally inflamed by such Draconian censorship: in his article ‘Morrison, Gissing and the Stark Reality,’ Roger Henkle points out that particularly in *The Nether World*, Gissing directly confronts ‘the insidious integration of the London poor into the social discourses of popular culture’ by resisting the ‘easy representation of slum life that facilitates such an appropriation.’⁹

In Lilian Furst’s view, the nineteenth century realists ‘placed truth-telling at the core of their beliefs,’ thereby suggesting directness, simplicity and artlessness.¹⁰ However, despite George Eliot’s and other serious writers’ earlier attempts to represent the life of the working man realistically and truthfully, it was still common practice even late in the century for the ‘cultural establishment to assume that all depiction and expression of lower-class life will be kept within the power of the middle-class to assimilate it and represent it.’¹¹ Such a practice was utterly discredited by Henry James, who, in his essay ‘The Art of Fiction,’ asserted that

⁸ Ibid., p. 229.

⁹ Roger Henkle, ‘Morrison, Gissing and the Stark Reality,’ *The Novel* (Spring, 1992), pp. 312-3

¹⁰ *Realism*, pp. 2-3.

¹¹ ‘Morrison, Gissing and the Stark Reality,’ p. 308.

‘Art is essentially selection, but it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive. For many people art means rose-coloured windows and selection means picking a bouquet for Mrs Grundy.’¹²

Guy de Maupassant, in his Preface to *Pierre et Jean* (1888), sets out the realist’s criteria: ‘By dint of seeing and meditating he has come to regard the world, facts, men, and things in a way peculiar to himself, which is the outcome of the sum total of his studious observation. ... To make the spectacle of life as moving to us as it has been to him, he must bring it before our eyes with scrupulous exactitude.’¹³ Further, Maupassant points out that contrary to yesterday’s novelist, who ‘preferred to relate the crises of life, the acute phases of the mind and heart,’ his counterpart of today:

... writes the history of the heart, the soul, and intellect in their normal condition. To achieve the effects he aims at - that is to say, the sense of simple reality, and to point the artistic lesson he endeavours to draw from it - that is to say, a revelation of what his contemporary man is before his very eyes, he must bring forward no facts that are not irrefragable and invariable.¹⁴

Similarly, in his article ‘Realism in Art’ George Lewes insists that ‘Art always aims at the representation of reality, i.e., of Truth; and no departure from truth is permissible, except such as inevitably lies in the nature of the medium itself.’¹⁵ Lewes claims that the antithesis of realism is ‘falsism’ rather than idealism, consequently he deplored the tendency among artists to represent ‘peasants with regular features and irreproachable linen’ and novelists to allow their characters to

¹² Henry James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ *Longman’s Magazine* (September, 1884), p. 515.

¹³ Guy de Maupassant, *The Works of Guy de Maupassant, Volume VIII: Pierre et Jean and Other Stories* (London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1909), p. 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Realism*, p. 34.

‘speak refined sentiments in unexceptionable English.’¹⁶ For Lewes and like-minded intellectuals, ‘truth to life’ indicated a commitment by the artist to incorporate within his vision, the essentially everyday, commonplace aspects of human existence. The truth to life portrayal must avoid the exceptional, its primary aim being to induce in the reader the desire to think, and, through the author’s subtle emphasis on significant everyday incidents, to appreciate the hidden depth of the story. In his discussion on Henry James’ views on realism in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983) Wayne Booth is fully in accord with the writer’s belief that the ‘moral sense of a work of art’ depends completely ‘on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it.’¹⁷

In an article published in November 1896 in two consecutive Saturday issues of the *Labour Leader*, Alfred R Orage, editor of the *New Age*, ranks Gissing’s contribution to the school of realism alongside such as Zola, Ibsen, Hardy and Crane.¹⁸ He argues that through the voice of Harold Biffen in *New Grub Street*, the author iterates his artistic intention to reproduce life verbatim from no other point of view than that of honest reporting. Such an enterprise, confesses Biffen, would inevitably produce a work of unutterable tedium, because ‘if it were anything but tedious, it would be untrue.’¹⁹ Biffen’s, or as Orage suggests Gissing’s, view is very much in line with that expressed by Flaubert in his correspondence with Louise Colet regarding the composition of *Madame Bovary*: ‘I am in a completely

¹⁶ Ibid., p.34.

¹⁷ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 45. Quoted from *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces of Henry James*, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: 1947), p. 45.

¹⁸ A. R. O., ‘George Gissing’ *The Labour Leader*, III, Nos. 137 & 138, 14 & 21 November 1896, pp. 392 & 400.

¹⁹ *New Grub Street*, p. 174.

different world now, that of attentive observation of the dullest details. My eyes are fixed on the spores of mildew growing on the soul.'²⁰

Undoubtedly Gissing was influenced by the European Realists, a debt he acknowledged in a letter to sister Margaret: 'the writers who help me most are the French & Russian; I have not much sympathy with English points of view.'²¹ Echoes of Maupassant and other European Realists are much in evidence in Gissing's short works. His posthumously published *The House of Cobwebs* (1906) was greeted with almost unanimous acclaim, the *Glasgow Herald's* anonymous review, which refers to the 'very rare and special excellencies' of Gissing as a storywriter, being a typical laudatory example:

The more than Maupassant-like disdain of mere plot of the conventional 'story' is here unfettered ... A terse, mature, yet exquisitely unusual style, a descriptive accuracy which might be called photographic if it could be attained by any but a very great artist, and a psychological insight which ... is so admirably apportioned as to endow every one of his personages with an absolutely self-consistent individuality – such are the distinguishing features of this, as of all the best work, of a writer who hewing at the sodden dough of London proletarian existence with the chisel of a great craftsman, raised English fiction higher into the region of pure literature than any writer since Thackeray.²²

Gissing's major concern in short story construction was the creation of fully rounded figures drawn from everyday life. First encountered in the shape of Slythorpe in 'One Farthing Damages,' by the time the author reached his third phase, three-dimensional characterisation of the commonplace individual had

²⁰ *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p. 91. Quoted from Gustave Flaubert, *Oeuvres Complètes Correspondance*, Vol II, p. 365. To Louise Colet, 8 February 1852.

²¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 3, p. 47.

²² *The Critical Heritage*, pp. 503-4.

become a defining feature of Gissing's short fiction. In a letter advising Algernon on the subject, he pointed out:

We know numbers of short stories that have good as no incident at all. This is true, but in such cases there must be one of two things: either a peculiar strangeness of situation, or an exceptional vividness in the picturing of individuals.²³

Furthermore, an earlier letter proposing certain measures intended to enliven his brother's narrative technique, outlines the very principles to which the author himself strenuously adhered:

... the secret of art in fiction is the *indirect*. Nothing must be told too plumply. Play about your facts & intersperse them with humour or satire.

Think out the *characters* till you get them very distinct. Here is a rule. Try to let no one say a word that could have been said by anyone else but themselves. That avoids triviality of talk, & keeps the character well to the front.²⁴

It is just such painstaking attention to detail that gives the impression of fidelity to life, which Ian Watt argues, stems above all from the amount of attention given in the story to 'the individualisation of its characters' and 'the detailed presentation of their environment.'²⁵ Guy de Maupassant believed, as did Gissing, that in order to 'move us, as he himself has been moved by the spectacle of life,' the novelist 'must reproduce it before our eyes in a scrupulous resemblance.'²⁶

In her critical study *The Short Story*, Valerie Shaw quotes Mario Praz' definition of 'democratic art' in the short story:

... lacking heroes and heroines, attention becomes concentrated on the details of common life ... the most ordinary things, by dint of being looked at with

²³ *The Collected Letters of George Gissing: Volume Four . 1889 – 1891*, eds. P. F. Mattheisen A. C. Young and P. Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1993), p. 58.

²⁴ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, pp. 178-9.

²⁵ *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 18.

²⁶ *Realism*, p. 46.

intensity, acquire an important significance, and intimate beauty of their own, more profound for the very reason that it is muted.²⁷

In Shaw's view the two-fold sense of seeking out and revealing the hidden beauty of obscure lives is a recurring feature of short fiction, as is the use of its brevity to intensify the reader's gaze and thus create a degree of intimacy between reader and story.²⁸ In other words, the reader embarks on a voyage of discovery with the author, a search that reveals the unique embodied within the mundane.

The need to stimulate interest in the commonplace necessarily demanded the development of new techniques that conveyed a sense of sustained quietism in the face of adversity rather than the traditional dramatic peaks and troughs of romantic fiction, and furnished ordinary events with thematic overtones, such as, in the case of Gissing, obsession, class transgression and abandonment. As Wallace Martin points out, Realism observes a 'doctrine of natural causality, as opposed to the chance, fate and providence of romantic fiction,' a principle strictly observed by Gissing in his mature short fiction.²⁹ In addition it was important that events taking place in, and at the conclusion to, a realistic story should replicate everyday life, and since much of everyday life is anticlimactic and inconclusive, it became necessary to abandon both the overtly improbable incident and the dramatic ending. In W V Harris' opinion, the best of Gissing's stories 'seem finished without being final, significant without being striking.'³⁰

²⁷ Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 60-1. Quoted from Mario Praz, *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction*, trans. Angus Davidson (Oxford: Oxford Paperback Edition, 1969), p. 375.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 133, 61.

²⁹ *Recent Theories of Narrative*, p. 60.

³⁰ Wendell V. Harris, *British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), p. 122.

Since the 1890s, a significant shift in the development of the short story has been made by a group of writers generally regarded as the new realists. New realism, argues Hèctor Agosti in 'A Defense of Realism' espouses the notion that 'artistic creation appears as judge of the interplay between the action of reality and the reaction of consciousness.'³¹ He claims:

The difference between the new realism and any other theory of art consists in the fact that it hopes to make conscious that consciousness at times unconscious with which the artist approaches objects. This, far from impelling him to an art of frozen rational projections, on the contrary hurls him into the boiling whirlpool of living ideas. Art is able to seize 'directly' in things themselves, conceptions which in the present state of society and of consciousness are apprehended apart from things, outside of them.³²

Grounded midway between the polar opposites of objectivism and subjectivism (what Agosti calls *super-subjective*), new realism sought to express reality through the artist's temperament, 'a temperament which is determined and conditioned by the conflicts of his time, modified in his innermost thoughts by his social relations, and constrained to mould his individual consciousness in conjunction with or in opposition to the prevailing order.'³³ In Agosti's view, the incessant movement between the action of things and his consciousness places the artist in a position where the merging of the objective and the subjective enables him to recreate essential reality. Gissing articulated very similar ideas in his essay 'The Place of Realism in Fiction' when referring to literature as 'all but dead material until breathed upon by "the shaping spirit of imagination," which is the soul of the individual artist.'³⁴ He was unequivocal in his belief that the novelist must work subjectively. 'The Place of Realism in Fiction' was written in 1895 at a time when

³¹ *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p. 493. Quoted from Hèctor P. Agosti, *Defensa del realismo* (Montivideo: Editorial Pueblos Unidos, 1945), pp. 9-25.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 495.

³³ p. 497.

³⁴ *Gissing on Fiction*, p. 85.

subjectivity was anathema to the general run of realists, thus distinguishing Gissing's realism, and by definition his short fiction, from that of his contemporaries by its modernity and innovativeness of style.

Gissing's major contribution to the 'new realism' was his ability to 'freeze the moment,' to place emphasis on a single moment of intense or significant experience, in other words to create an epiphany that lays bare the human psyche. In a sense this particular aspect of realism has much in common with the short fiction of James Joyce. The epiphanic moment, defined by Stephen Hero in Joyce's novel of the same name, as a 'sudden spiritual manifestation ... a memorable expression of the mind itself,' takes the form of a manifestation out of proportion to the significance of whatever produces it.³⁵ In John Bayley's view the short story affords the epiphany, or moment of time, 'complete and conscious existence.'³⁶ Interestingly, although Joyce's attitude towards Gissing's work was scornfully dismissive - 'His 'books remind me of what Effore calls *Pastefazoi*' - there are strong affinities between 'The Prize Lodger' from Gissing's *Human Odds and Ends* and 'A Painful Case' in Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914).³⁷ Like Mr Duffy, Jordan, the prize lodger, values an orderly lifestyle; both men live in lodging houses, both become attracted to women who seem to offer an escape from their lonely, humdrum existences. Duffy's epiphany occurs when he learns that his ideal has been killed in a train accident while wandering around in a drunken stupor:

³⁵ James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (London: Paladin, 1991), p. 216.

³⁶ John Bayley, *The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen* (Brighton: The Harvester Press), p. 9.

³⁷ *Critical Heritage*, p. 518. 'Pastefazoi' is a monotonous Tuscan dish of noodles and beans; *Human Odds and Ends*, pp. 133-154; James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), pp. 103-114.

Jordan's significant moment comes in the form of a sudden revelation that he has been hoist with his own petard - the wife he thought perfect was in reality a tyrant, just as he had been when seeking to reinforce his reputation as 'the prize lodger.'

Many of Gissing's stories of the nineties have as their central character a sociological misfit, whose epiphanic experience opens the floodgates to self-knowledge. 'The Foolish Virgin' is a story about an impoverished spinster, whose desperate search for a husband at any price brings her to the brink of disaster, when a timely moment of truth informs her that her survival depends on her willingness to accept menial work, rather than her ability to snare a husband.³⁸ 'Christopherson' is a tale about a bibliophile who cherishes his books at the expense of his wife's health. The threat of her imminent death reveals to Christopherson the awful truth that his excessive love of books is no more than a selfish obsession.³⁹ In 'The Fate of Humphrey Snell,' Humphrey is a free spirit who finds his vocation as a gatherer and vendor of wild herbs.⁴⁰ Eventually he falls in love and willingly sacrifices his freedom to return to the 'mind-forg'd manacles' of city life.⁴¹ Snell's significant moment occurs when, after hearing nothing from his beloved since they parted, the news of his having found a job brings an enthusiastic response by return of post. Ironically, he recognises, but chooses to ignore, the significance of the row of crosses at the foot of the letter, that a 'cross is frequently set upon a grave [...].'⁴² Numerous other stories from Gissing's third

³⁸ *A Victim of Circumstances*, pp. 187-216.

³⁹ *The House of Cobwebs*, pp. 47-67.

⁴⁰ *A Victim of Circumstances*, pp. 53-71.

⁴¹ William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 'London,' pl. 46.

⁴² *A Victim of Circumstances*, p. 71.

phase reach their climax by way of a frozen moment in time, when a character undergoes a life changing experience.

From a stylistic viewpoint, Gissing's stories differ greatly from those contained in *Dubliners*. There is an overarching unity in Joyce's work, as the author himself reveals in his letter to Constantine Curran: 'I am writing a series of epicleti – ten – for a paper. ... I shall call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city.'⁴³ *Dubliners* is not about individuals, but rather it consists of a continuous theme that encompasses the condition of the Irish nation as a whole – society stagnating in the stultifying atmosphere of a demoralised and decaying city. Gissing's stories, on the other hand, are specifically about individuals who, in their stubborn refusal to be daunted by adversity, bring a degree of vitality, as well as a moral challenge, to the prevailing social order.

One of the most notable exponents of the 'new realism of the '90s' was Arthur Morrison, whose *A Child of the Jago*, which depicted life in the East End slums as the author himself had experienced it, engendered critical outrage on its publication in 1896. Morrison's style of realism stood in stark contrast to the more sanitised versions of urban working class life portrayed in contemporary literature, which provided 'a means of appropriating the lower classes into formulas recognizable to the upper strata' by the creation of an 'individual subject that could be brought within the hegemonizing of English middle-class culture.'⁴⁴ As P J Keating points

⁴³ James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. xxxiii-iv.

⁴⁴ 'Morrison, Gissing and the Stark Reality,' p. 312.

out, through his assimilation into the popular culture, the lower class individual becomes:

... of inestimable use to a democratic society. So long as his wit, drunkenness, violence, sentimentality and love of freedom are expressed in individual terms, he is socially harmless; so long as these qualities are viewed from a distance he is even attractive and picturesque.⁴⁵

In presenting the urban poor as an essentially alienated sub-stratum of society, Morrison was accused in H D Traill's article 'The New Realism,' of fallaciously depicting deprivation and gratuitous violence in his novel of the slums, *A Child of the Jago*. The author's article 'What is a Realist?' sought to disabuse Traill and equally ill-informed critics of the notion that 'the function of the imagination is the distortion of fact,' claiming that when squalor and poverty are allowed by society to exist, it is the duty of the artist to reveal the unembellished truth.⁴⁶ In his introduction to *Working-class Short Stories of the 1890s* (1971) Keating is of the view that it was 'Arthur Morrison's interpretation in *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894) that established the predominant tone of slum fiction in the nineties.'⁴⁷ While acknowledging the poverty and deprivation of the East End, Morrison recognised 'its most characteristic quality as being oppressive, all-pervading monotony.'⁴⁸

As Clare Hanson points out in *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1890 – 1980*, Morrison 'used factual, non-emotional language in order to throw into relief the misery and pain he depicted.'⁴⁹ She also maintains that the move to bring the

⁴⁵ P.J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 221.

⁴⁶ Arthur Morrison, 'What is a Realist,' *The New Review*, Vol. XVI, No. 94 (March, 1897), p. 327.

⁴⁷ P. J. Keating, *Working Class Short Stories of the 1890s* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. xiii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980*, p. 18.

'freshness of colloquial speech' into the short story was a further innovative development of the "'new realists" of the 1890s.'⁵⁰ The vernacular reveals something of 'the social status and personal characteristics' of a speaker and is essentially 'unpoetic'.⁵¹ Although Gissing tended not to focus specifically on misery and squalor in his later short fiction, it is evident from many of his stories, such as 'Mutimer's Choice,' 'Phoebe,' 'Letty Coe,' 'The Day of Silence' and 'Fleet-footed Hester,' that he held an equally strong belief that the use of accurate colloquial dialogue gave increased authenticity to working class narratives. Hester's language in 'Fleet-footed Hester' is precisely that of 'a noble savage,' her speech is the speech of Hackney, and a 'fit expression of an elementary, not a degraded mind.'⁵² Ironically, critics frequently dismissed such strict adherence to the vernacular as ungrammatical. On the occasion of a review in the *National Observer* of Elsa d'Esterre-Keeling's *Appassionata: A Musician's Story* (1893), the critic's careless misreading of the text prompted a bitter response from Gissing in the novelist's defence:

... surely it is obvious that the dialogue of a novel should imitate as closely as possible the speech of life ... Reviewers frequently quote from an author's dialogue to support a charge of weakness in grammar. Worse than that, the novelist is often represented as holding an opinion which he has simply attributed to his characters. There *are* people who read, or glance over, notices of novels, and in these cases are misled by a carelessness which has all the effect of deliberate misrepresentation. The author of *Appassionata*, for instance, had taken pains with her work; as a result, her reviewer informs the public that she does not know the difference between 'as' and 'like.'⁵³

Not only is Gissing attacking critics' inability to appreciate colloquial language as a defining characteristic of the lower classes, but he is also touching on an issue that

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ J. P. Stern, *On Realism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 10.

⁵² *A Victim of Circumstances*, p. 292.

⁵³ *Gissing on Fiction*, p. 75; *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 176.

continued to irk him throughout his literary career; that of reviewers' and readers' inability to distinguish between the voices of the characters and that of the author. In his discussion in *Mimesis* of the works of Flaubert, Erich Auerbach refers to the author's realism as impartial, impersonal and objective, consequently when his characters express themselves they reveal no trace of their creator. Flaubert worked, writes Auerbach, in the conviction that every event, if expressed purely and simply, 'interprets itself and the persons in it far better and more completely than any opinion or judgment appended to it could do.'⁵⁴ As seen from his response to Algernon's misreading of *The Unclassed*, these were clearly the principles Gissing sought to embody in his art:

You evidently take Waymark's declⁿ of faith as my own. Now this is by no means the case. Waymark is a *study of character*, & he alone is responsible for his sentiments. ... If my own ideas are to be found anywhere, it is in the practical course of events in the story; my characters must speak as they would actually, & I cannot be responsible for what they say.⁵⁵

There were those however, who could appreciate the important difference between omnipresence and authorial distance. Frederic Harrison for instance, though he found much of *The Unclassed* unpalatable, nevertheless assured the author that he made 'the clearest distinction between the Unclassed & George Gissing.'⁵⁶

From the mid-nineties Gissing narrowed his scope in the field of short fiction, concentrating almost exclusively on the shabby genteel, a vast alienated class of society that had hitherto eluded literary attention. In his article 'Not Enough

⁵⁴ *Realism*, p. 81. Quoted from 'In the Hotel de la Mole' in *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 400-34. .

⁵⁵ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 228.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

Money,' which referred to Gissing as 'the best novelist we have produced,' George Orwell designated the author:

... the chronicler of poverty, not working class poverty ... but the cruel, grinding, 'respectable' poverty of underfed clerks, downtrodden governesses and bankrupt tradesmen.⁵⁷

This narrowing of focus entailed a shift of emphasis from tragedy to pathos, for instance from the horrific experiences of Bertha and Harold in 'The Quarry on the Heath' to the moral courage displayed by Mr Tymperley in 'A Poor Gentleman.'⁵⁸

Once a gentleman of substance, Mr Tymperley has been brought to financial ruin as a result of improvident speculation in a friend's dubious business dealings. Although now living at the edge of poverty, he has never lost hope of a return to his former life, consequently he has stubbornly clung on to his evening suit, his last vestige of respectability. After a chance meeting with his former colleague's widow, Tymperley is invited to dinner, which he feels able to accept in the knowledge that his evening attire ensures social acceptance. Pride forces him to lie to his hostess, maintaining that he has chosen to live in a run-down neighbourhood in order to devote himself to social work. On receiving a cheque to be distributed among the poor, Tymperley is sorely tempted to keep it for himself, and on impulse buys a pair of new boots, which he subsequently discovers pinch and creak. After a night of self-recrimination, the poor man, having handed the cheque to a clergyman, writes to the donor, confessing that he was living in poverty out of necessity not choice, and that his desire for material comfort had almost added a criminal act to his catalogue of woes. The pinching and creaking boots are a

⁵⁷ George Orwell, 'Not Enough Money: A Sketch of George Gissing,' *The Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. V, No. 3 (July, 1969), p. 2.

⁵⁸ *The House of Cobwebs*, pp. 106-123.

symbol of Tymperley's struggle to retain his moral integrity in the face of adversity. In *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* Gissing expresses very strong views about the debilitating effect of poverty:

What kindly joys have I lost, those simple forms of happiness to which every heart has claim, because of poverty! Meetings with those I loved made impossible year after year; sadness, misunderstanding, nay, cruel alienation, arising from inability to do things I wished, and which I might have done had a little money helped me; endless instances of homely pleasure and contentment curtailed or forbidden by narrow means.⁵⁹

As Orwell points out in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937):

In the kind of shabby-genteel family that I am talking about there is far more *consciousness* of poverty than in any working-class family above the level of the dole. ... Practically the whole family income goes on keeping up appearances. It is obvious that people of this kind are in an anomalous position, and one might be tempted to write them off as mere exceptions and therefore unimportant. Actually, however, they are or were fairly numerous. Most clergymen and schoolmasters, ... a sprinkling of soldiers and sailors and a fair number of professional men and artists fall into this category.⁶⁰

Such were the characters that informed Gissing's short fiction some forty years earlier.

Simultaneously, as he excluded extremes from his narratives, Gissing necessarily excluded them from character, paring his figures down until they were outwardly indistinguishable from the ordinary man in the street, but whose uniqueness lay in an inner core of resistance to an indifferent world, a capacity to withstand 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.'⁶¹ The ability of an individual to recognise his own weaknesses, and accept his alienation from the external world, frees him from the desire for self-assertion and rebellion. Georg Lukács maintains

⁵⁹ *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, p. 15.

⁶⁰ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), pp. 115-6.

⁶¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1986), p. 278, ln. 58.

that resignation is an integral part of bourgeois literature of the nineteenth century.⁶² The short story of the eighties and nineties created a special niche for itself by becoming the vehicle for discontinuity and alienation, where the individual is portrayed in isolation, 'detached from the great social and historical continuum.'⁶³ At their most characteristic, Gissing's later short stories reveal an intense awareness of human isolation, of alienated individuals who have learned to 'make peace with what they daily have to bear.'⁶⁴ *Human Odds and Ends*, the author's first collection of stories and sketches, examines the lives of those who exist at the edge of society, individuals whose centrality to that society has hitherto been neither acknowledged nor understood. The powerful sub-text of 'An Inspiration,' a story from the collection, stresses the need for social responsibility towards the hapless by demonstrating how a morally upright individual is able to revitalise the life of one less fortunate than himself.⁶⁵ On a whim, Harvey Munden invites a poor, demoralised salesman to dine with him. As a result of this act of kindness, the salesman regains a sense of self-worth, which gives him the courage to confront and outmanoeuvre the unscrupulous brother-in-law of the woman he loves.

Harvey Munden appears in two other Gissing stories; as a minor character in 'A Capitalist,' he merely acts as an intermediary between the alienated protagonist and the narrator and, as in 'An Inspiration,' as a *raisonneur* in 'A Lodger in Maze Pond,' each story revealing a psychological shortcoming in the major character's

⁶² *Realism*, p. 102.

⁶³ *British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 109.

⁶⁴ *The Realistic Imagination*, p. 160.

⁶⁵ *Human Odds and Ends*, pp. 56-73.

nature.⁶⁶ The two latter tales focus on Munden's efforts to subvert the consequences of human fallibility: in 'A Lodger in Maze Pond' he tries unsuccessfully to dissuade his friend from repeating a mindless folly; conversely, in 'An Inspiration,' his timely intervention brings out an unsuspected spark of rebellion in his demoralised guest. Munden is the Good Samaritan in a largely indifferent world. 'Lodger' and 'Inspiration' highlight the plight of the alienated individual, and the fact that mankind rarely perceives the sociological problems at the root of that plight.

In his discussion of the theme of revolt versus resignation in 'Gissing as a Romantic Realist,' Coustillas claims that at heart Gissing was a Romantic, pointing out that the dichotomy of revolt versus resignation which often informs his work has romantic overtones:

The revolt is usually born of poverty and suffering in the working-class novels, which have affinities with Dickens's and Dostoevsky's as Gissing implicitly admitted in his critical study of Dickens, but the romanticism of his social rebels usually finds an outlet in behaviour which is less grotesque than that of his predecessors'; humorous eccentricity was not consonant with his temper, human or artistic. With his characters, revolt, and if it assumes a social dimension, violence is usually absent from it; revolt only seeks to come through in nonconformity of social behaviour.⁶⁷

As previously noted, in his essay 'The Place of Realism in Fiction' Gissing argues that '[t]he novelist works, and must work subjectively. ... all is but dead material until breathed upon by the 'shaping spirit of imagination' ... Realism... signifies nothing more than an artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life.'⁶⁸

Coustillas sees this as realism grafted on to romanticism, as Gissing's personal

⁶⁶ *The House of Cobwebs*, pp. 28-46; 241-264.

⁶⁷ Pierre Coustillas, 'Gissing as a Romantic Realist,' *The Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. XVII, No. 1 (January, 1981), p. 19.

⁶⁸ *Gissing on Fiction*, p. 85.

view of realism, out of which emerged the unique, harmonious combination of the two opposing forms typical of his short fiction in the mid-nineties.

In *Short Stories and Short Fiction 1880 – 1980*, Clare Hanson argues that from the 1880s it is possible to distinguish two separate strands of development in the short story, the chief distinction being that on the one hand the major emphasis is on plot, on the other plot is subordinate to psychology and mood. In her view the plotless story is the more closely related to realism, ‘but it is usually a realism which is subjectively conceived.’⁶⁹ As Hanson points out, a distinctive feature of the ‘plotless’ story, particularly associated with writers of *The Yellow Book*, an *avant-garde* periodical launched in 1894, is the psychological sketch.⁷⁰ A ‘sensation in its day,’ the *Yellow Book* published some of the best short fiction of the nineties, containing within its covers stories by Henry James, H G Wells, Kenneth Grahame, and of course, George Gissing, whose ‘A Foolish Virgin’ was published in January 1896.⁷¹ The psychological sketch tends to deal with ‘an apparently trivial incident that has significance for what it reveals of a character’s inner mood or state of mind.’⁷² Much of Gissing’s mature fiction delves into the consciousness of alienated, disillusioned figures; ‘A Victim of Circumstances’ for example, explores the minds of both Hilda and Horace Castledine, the former a gifted artist whose talents are sacrificed to her husband’s ego and pride.⁷³ By entering into the consciousnesses of both husband and wife, the reader is able to

⁶⁹ *Short Stories and Short Fictions*, p. 7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.14-5.

⁷¹ Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966), pp. 265-6.

⁷² *Short Stories and Short Fictions*, p. 15.

⁷³ *A Victim of Circumstances*, pp. 3-36.

understand the plight of Hilda as a frustrated woman artist, and the patriarchal mindset of Horace.

Focusing on the Russian realists, Andrew Wachtel's 'Psychology and society' argues that nineteenth century Eastern European novelists differed from their Western counterparts in that they were largely concerned with individual psychology because it provided a window into social psychology, whereas English and Continental realists, such as George Eliot, Hardy and Flaubert, tended to be more interested in portraying individuals as individuals.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the psychological problems addressed appear to be very similar to those articulated by the Eastern Europeans, namely doubt, pride, spite, envy, and these mental conditions are very much the province of Gissing's second and third phases of short fiction, 'The Last Half-Crown,' 'A Poor Gentleman,' 'The Tout of Yarmouth Bridge' and 'Their Pretty Way,' being but a few examples.

When the subject is of a more psychological nature, the author excises his own personality and allows the characters to express their inner feelings indirectly. There was a growing tendency among realists, particularly Gissing, to view the process of thinking as more important than the unfolding of dramatic physical events, in that it provided the opportunity to replace overt action with the activity of the mind. In his critical study of the author, Swinnerton maintains:

Even in *The House of Cobwebs*, we become aware that Gissing had his own conception of the short story. Most of the stories in the collection are little narratives ... They are in short, undramatic. ... When we find the incidents in Gissing's short stories humdrum, or mild, we recognise that we had expected to

⁷⁴ *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, eds. Malcolm V. Jones & Robin Feuer Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 130.

be stirred in some way, or to be given some precisely poignant moment, whether of suspense or sympathy. The lack of this emotional heightening in the whole of Gissing's work is notable; in his short stories it becomes, according to the dramatic test, a positive defect.⁷⁵

Undeniably, Gissing's stories are undramatic, that is what he intended them to be. Swinnerton is wrong however, in claiming that they lack emotional heightening; almost every story in *The House of Cobwebs*, the collection on which the critic bases his case, concerns a character who experiences what can be likened to an instant feeling of strong emotion, a significant moment of intense awareness totally unlike anything previously known, such an experience being expressly designed to elicit the sympathy or otherwise of the assiduous reader.

In *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977), David Lodge's chapter on 'Two Kinds of Modern Fiction' argues that in view of its experimental nature, modernist fiction is not concerned exclusively with consciousness, but does at times explore the subconscious and unconscious workings of the mind.⁷⁶ On such occasions, in order to make room for introspection, external 'objective' events are necessarily diminished in scope and scale. In line with modernist fiction, which Lodge points out has no real beginning since it thrusts the reader into a 'flowing stream of experience' and an indeterminate ending, many of Gissing's short stories follow a similar pattern of construction.⁷⁷ 'Comrades in Arms,' 'The Salt of the Earth,' 'The Poet's Portmanteau,' 'A Drug in the Market,' 'Spellbound,' 'The Foolish Virgin,' 'The Prize Lodger' and many others, all begin in the midst of a personal crisis and proceed towards an ambiguous ending. In *Concepts of Criticism*, René

⁷⁵ *George Gissing: A Critical Study*, p. 129.

⁷⁶ *The Modes of Modern Writing*, p. 45.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-6.

Wellek discusses the conclusion reached by Richard Brinkmann in *Wirklichkeit und Illusion*, that 'Realism ... is found ultimately in the stream of consciousness technique'.⁷⁸ This notion, writes Wellek, quoting from Tübingen, that "the subjective experience ... is the only objective experience" identifies impressionism, the exact notation of mental states of mind, with realism and proclaims it the only true realism.⁷⁹ In this respect Gissing's work appears to have been a significant building block in the development of psychological realism.

Contiguous with the plotless story is the inconclusive ending. George Levine argues that the refusal of satisfaction to the reader is in effect a refusal of plot, a refusal to permit the conventions of romanticism to distort the conventions of realism. Furthermore, Levine points out that ironically 'the refusal of satisfaction is a way of sustaining both desire and narrative because it keeps the quest alive and denies any ending'.⁸⁰ 'The Sins of the Fathers,' the first of many of Gissing's stories in which psychological insight is the key to unravelling the complexities of unfulfilled desire, reveals the author's fascination with the destructive power of desire when it flouts rigid social codes.

Gissing's mature stories frequently feature a character whose persona constitutes a blend of the psychological, environmental and sociological influences that together determine that character's behaviour. Thus, by revealing the fears and fantasies that are rooted within the human psyche, Gissing allows a degree of

⁷⁸ *Concepts of Criticism*, p. 237.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁸⁰ *The Realistic Imagination*, p. 139.

sympathy even to the seemingly most self-indulgent and undeserving of his protagonists, the artist in 'A Victim of Circumstances' being a case in point. Equally, the sub-text of 'The Tout of Yarmouth Bridge' suggests that the fact that Serena was abandoned and forced to live on her wits from the age of nine, provides a measure of justification for her becoming an artful procurer of lodgers for her aunt's dingy boarding house, and ultimately the revengeful betrayer of her aunt's trust.⁸¹ Conversely in 'The Peace Bringer,' the implication is that it is the influence of privileged environmental and sociological forces that have moulded Jaffrey into the man he has latterly become.⁸² Jaffrey has throughout his life enjoyed a comfortable, self-indulgent lifestyle, but since contracting a chronic illness, he has fallen into a state of inertia and total disenchantment both with his wife and his life. As he lies dying, Jaffrey cruelly arranges for a former lover to visit him almost daily, ostensibly to play soothing music. Out of pity his wife accepts her husband's disloyalty without recrimination. It is only when his paramour reveals that she visits him only for the money he provides, and then deserts him as he nears his end, that he realises the pain he has caused his wife and at what cost his selfishness has been gratified. Approaching death opens Jaffrey's mind to the realisation that desire had been futile; the secret of true peace and happiness lay in reality and the here and now.

In her essay 'Time and the Short Story,' Jean Pickering points out that the short story 'tends to deal with the unchanging elements of character and emphasises the

⁸¹ *Human Odds and Ends*, pp. 210-217.

⁸² *Stories & Sketches*, pp. 225-241.

stability of the essential self.’⁸³ Many of the protagonists in Gissing’s psychological studies have one distinctive characteristic in common, that of single-mindedness, each following an unchanging pattern of existence. A typical feature of the short story is that it focuses on ‘people whose identity is determined by their circumstances,’ which again suited Gissing’s short story technique.⁸⁴ According to Coustillas, ‘Gissing found keen intellectual satisfaction ... in collecting evidence that man is a prisoner of his own condition ... that an individual’s character never changes [...].’⁸⁵

To summarise, the place of realism in Gissing’s short fiction is firmly grounded in his rejection of society’s demand for an idealised representation of the under classes and his use of colloquial language to give fidelity to the lives of the poor. Furthermore, his three-dimensional characterisations, which unveil the pathos of the sociological misfits, are designed to reveal the psychological, environmental and sociological influences that determine human character. In addition, his stories are generally plotless, and the events in and endings to the tales are in the main anticlimactic and inconclusive, as Harris puts it, ‘finished without being final, significant without being striking.’ Even more significantly, Gissing was a pioneer of the notion of expressing reality through the artist’s temperament, by inscribing his material with ‘the shaping spirit of imagination.’⁸⁶ In line with Clare Hanson’s view that the plotless story is often subjectively conceived, and what Hèctor Agosti

⁸³ *Re-reading the Short Story*, ed. Clare Hanson (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989), p. 48.

⁸⁴ Frank O’Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (London: Mcmillan & Co. Ltd., 1963), p. 126.

⁸⁵ ‘Gissing as a Romantic Realist,’ pp. 24-5.

⁸⁶ *George Gissing on Fiction*, p. 85.

terms the 'super-subjective,' Gissing's realism is rooted midway between objectivism and subjectivism. More importantly, however, the author made a major contribution to the 'new realism' of the 1890's through his emphasis on the epiphany, the single moment of intense awareness.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Right Place at the Right Time

In the preface to his collection of short stories, *The Country of the Blind* (1911), H G Wells claims that ‘in British literary history the 1890s was *the* era of excellent short-story writing and experimenting with forms.’¹ Wells and Gissing became friends after meeting at the Omar Khayyám Club in November 1896, and despite the fact that Wells’ account of their relationship in *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934) is less than generous, it is likely that he ranked Gissing among those writers whom he considered to be the major innovators of the time.

By the mid 1890s Gissing’s short fiction had distinctive qualities that placed him in the vanguard of leading short fiction writers of the day. Essentially plotless, his stories were rooted in reality, dealing not with the extraordinary, but rather with the underlying extraordinariness of the ordinary, very much on the lines of Clare Hanson’s definition of plotlessness in *Short Stories and Short Fiction, 1880-1980* (1985):

... plotless fiction is concerned with the realm of human probabilities. It does not deal with the avowedly strange or marvellous, but tends to reveal that quality of the marvellous which is hidden within the mundane, obscured by habit or by dullness of perception.²

¹ *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 135: *British Short Fiction Writers 1880-1903: The Realist Tradition*, ed. W. B. Thesing (Detroit: Gale Research, 1994), p. 67. Quotation from the preface of H. G. Wells’ *The Country of the Blind* (London: Nelson, 1911).

² Clare Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1985), pp. 5-6.

Professor Hanson continues: ‘... in many plotless fictions a moment of heightened awareness acts as a focus, a structural equivalent for conventional resolution of plot’ – a kind of epiphany - and this is precisely the technique the author used to counter the inconclusiveness of his endings.³ Instead of using a conventional method of completion, Gissing would often place the climax in the body of the text. For instance, in ‘The Schoolmaster’s Vision,’ Mr Donne’s brutal and humbling awakening from his hitherto cynical view of life forces him to re-evaluate his role as mentor to the boys in his school. However, although the revelation acts as a catalyst in releasing an unsuspected vein of compassion in the schoolmaster’s nature towards a desolate pupil, its main function is to reveal the salutary effect the moment of self-knowledge has on Donne, when he becomes aware that his failure in life has been self-inflicted.

Although considered by his colleagues and pupils alike as an exemplary headmaster, teaching has long ceased to satisfy the needs of Mr Donne, and increasingly his thoughts hinge on resentment at the opportunities that had eluded him. A widower of some six years, Donne had loved his wife and were it possible, would have gladly continued his marital state, yet there were times when he thought that ‘it might be that Providence ... had designedly released him from an unsuitable bond.’⁴ In affairs of the home Mrs Donne had been an admirable wife, but in truth the headmaster often harboured fanciful thoughts of a more stimulating relationship. Little wonder then that Donne is bowled over by the arrival, on a

³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴ George Gissing, *A Victim of Circumstances*, p. 130.

bicycle, of a pupil's mother 'dressed ... in an unfamiliar costume, with curiously short skirts' and finds himself 'regarding the lady's skirts and her wonderful feet with indecorous fixity [...].'⁵ However, despite his obvious fascination, he is unable to suppress a feeling of Puritanical disapproval of the young mother who flaunted herself so boldly. After her departure, Donne is tortured by conflicting emotions of repugnance and desire, culminating in a frantic bid for freedom from the 'passionless, arid' existence he endured at 'the hated school.'⁶ In a state of mental anguish the headmaster wanders aimlessly around the countryside until sunset, when hunger drives him to a nearby inn. On impulse he decides to stay the night, during the course of which he is tormented by a series of surreal dreams involving the object of his desire. Seeming terrifyingly real, Donne's dreams bring no solace to his tortured soul; rather they assail his senses with nightmarish images of ridicule and failure. Finally there comes a dream quite different from the others in that it assumes a semblance of reality; in the dream Donne's traditional 'man of the world' talk that he always gives to school-leavers is on this occasion subverted by a violent invective on the evils of marriage:

And now there is one point on which I feel obliged to touch, delicate though it may be. ... My dear boy, let me beg of you, for your own sake, *not* to marry. Believe me, marriage is the curse of life. I mean it! Look at me, a horrible example. ... Besides – you are sure to marry the wrong woman. Imagine what it means, when you are irrevocably bound, to meet your ideal in the other sex! That meeting always comes much later in life, and the bitterness of it! Of all my advice to you this is the most precious, because it comes from my own miserable experience.⁷

Instantly, Donne regrets his impetuous words, knowing that the deep resentment he feels against his wife is a pathetic attempt to cover up his own failure to engage

⁵ Ibid., p.132.

⁶ p. 136.

⁷ pp. 135, 140.

with life. The headmaster's earlier dreams reveal that his infatuation for Mrs Argent is merely a projection of the prophecy he warns the school-leaver to ignore at his peril. At last disabused of his fantasy, the headmaster returns to his school and to relative normality. Subsequently, on learning that Mrs Argent is to be married, Donne is untroubled by his former passion, rather his sympathy for the woman's deeply scarred son releases that core of compassion that had for so long been suppressed. Acknowledging that such misery 'never did anything but grievous harm to body and soul,' the reformed headmaster extends the hand of friendship to the suffering boy: 'Come as to a friend, my dear boy, and I will do my utmost to help you in trouble such as this, or any other.'⁸ Externally Donne's conduct reveals no perceptible change, but his final counsel to the outgoing head boy is unmistakeably influenced by his terrifying dream: 'Whatever the path in which Providence directs you, cultivate a reasonable contentment. There is a spirit abroad – a spirit of restlessness, of revolt. Be not misled by it.'⁹

As George Levine puts it in *The Realistic Imagination* (1981): 'The protagonists must make peace with what they daily have to bear.'¹⁰ There is a measure of sympathy for Dunne's realisation that his dreams have always exceeded his capacity to fulfil them, typical of Gissing's impartial attitude toward many of his disaffected characters. In his entry regarding the author's contribution to the realist tradition in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography 135: British Short-Fiction Writers 1880-1914* (1994), D E Hall, editor of the Gissing section, asserts:

⁸ p. 143.

⁹ p. 144.

¹⁰ George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 160.

His mature character studies, devoid of most sentimentality and melodrama, reveal the environmental and psychological bases for human perception and behaviour. He exposes the fears and fantasies that account for human foibles, thus retaining, even in his most scathing pieces, a measure of implicit sympathy for his characters.¹¹

A revealing passage in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, provides an interesting insight into the author's empathy with the disillusioned misfit:

I have always regarded as a fact of infinite pathos the ability men have to subdue themselves to the conditions of life. Contentment so often means resignation, abandonment of the hope seen to be forbidden.¹²

This was the conclusion Gissing reached near the end of his life; in the mid-nineties his short stories insisted on resilience rather than resignation.

A singular aspect of Gissing's third phase of short fiction was his ability to tease out the psychological and sociological influences moulding his characters' behaviour. Already implicit in 'The Last Half-Crown,' where Harold Sansom's mental trauma occurs as a direct consequence of his irreconcilable sense of failure, this facility achieved its greatest impact during the eighties in 'Phoebe'. Ultimately these psychological vignettes emerged as a *tour de force* in the author's later short works, revealing his intuitive insight into the multi-faceted psyches of characters such as Castledine in 'A Victim of Circumstances,' whose capacity for self-deceit and self-aggrandisement allows him to masquerade as the creator of his wife's paintings. In Castledine's mind the masquerade has become reality, so after Hilda's death, and with it his livelihood and reputation, he simply perpetuates the myth by blaming her and their children for his failure to sustain his success. Even subtler is the author's portrayal of Hilda Castledine as the unfortunate victim of her

¹¹ *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 135, p. 130.

¹² *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, p. 171.

husband's ego. Once her husband had allowed the art dealer to believe that the watercolours were his work, it was Hilda who actually suggested that these should merely carry the signature 'H. Castledine,' thus blurring the distinction between Hilda and Horace, but, as a consequence of her husband's deceit and her fear of its discovery '[h]er faith in him had suffered a blow from which it would not recover.'¹³ Therefore, when the decision was made to move to an urban area, where there would be no temptation to scour the byways for artistic inspiration, Hilda resolved with sadness to give up painting. From that time on she gave the impression of having regained her former gentle and supportive nature, successfully hiding from all around her, her intense feelings of loss:

No one divined what lay beneath her tender smile, with its touch of sadness – least of all Horace himself. No one knew of the long sleepless nights when she wept silently over a glorious hope that had come only to vanish. She had her moments of rebellion, but subdued herself by remembering that her own weakness was to blame for these sorrows. An artist no longer, however her artistic soul might revolt, the duties of wife and mother must suffice for all her energies, and supply all her happiness.¹⁴

Hilda is the real victim of the story, and Gissing instinctively stresses the mental suffering she experiences because of her initial complicity in Horace's deceit, and the intense frustration she feels at the unjust end to her artistic ambitions. In his article 'Gissing as a Romantic Realist,' Pierre Coustillas points out that 'in his depiction of wronged characters,' Gissing:

... readily entered into the psychology of those whom native weakness and social pressures have brought to offend the moral law, or of those who suffer in mental solitude, the victims of injustice, of egoism ...¹⁵

¹³ *A Victim of Circumstances*, p. 26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-2.

¹⁵ 'Gissing as a Romantic Realist,' p. 19.

Gissing's last phase of short fiction began with disappointment. Despite Bentley's acceptance of 'Phoebe' and 'Letty Coe,' by the end of 1884 Gissing had wearied of producing short stories, only to have them rejected. It was not until 1891 that he again tried his hand at the genre. Although 'Letty Coe,' had been accepted and paid for in December 1884, publication was delayed until October 1891, and it seems likely that this small success encouraged him to try once again to break into the short fiction market. 'A Victim of Circumstances' was completed in November 1891 and sent to *Blackwood's Magazine*.¹⁶ That the editor's positive response gave a much needed boost to Gissing's confidence is clearly visible in his letter to Ellen shortly after the story's acceptance: 'It is considered a difficult thing to get admission into *Blackwood*.'¹⁷ However, 'A Victim of Circumstances' remained unpublished until January 1893, when it was finally printed as a consequence of the author's letter to the editor requesting payment or return of the manuscript:

I am sorry to be obliged to trouble you with reference to my story "A Victim of Circumstances." Twelve months ago, on writing to make inquiry, I was informed that you had put the story aside for use in the Magazine. This news was gratifying to me, & from month to month I have hoped that the proofs would arrive. Unfortunately I cannot let the date of publication remain indefinite. – I wonder whether it would be possible for you to pay for the story before it appears. If not, & if there seems to be no likelihood of speedy publication, I fear I have no choice but to request you to return me the MS. Most assuredly I do not wish to withdraw it from your hands, but literature is unhappily a trade ...¹⁸

'A Victim of Circumstances' proved to be the turning point, and from that time on Gissing's short fiction production, totalling in excess of eighty stories, was virtually

¹⁶ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 4, p.339.

¹⁷ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

continuous until his death in 1903, reaching a peak in 1895 and gradually tailing off thereafter.

In April 1893, Clement Shorter, editor of *The Illustrated London News*, *The English Illustrated Magazine* and *The Sketch*, asked Gissing for a short story of low life, the outcome of which was 'Lou and Liz,' published in the August issue of the *English Illustrated Magazine*.¹⁹ However, in the belief that the going rate for short pieces was four guineas a thousand words, the author quickly became dissatisfied with the figure he was getting from Shorter, complaining bitterly to his recently acquired friend, Clara Collet: 'Clement Shorter writes to me asking for *three* more stories, to be used in the "English Illustrated," offering 12 guas. each for "all-world serial use." Now this is sharp practice, I fear. ... I must stand firm against Clement.'²⁰ After a somewhat acrimonious letter to the editor, a meeting was arranged at which Shorter offered to waive the American rights but stood firm on the rate, so, despite his resolve, Gissing continued to supply stories at twelve guineas each.²¹ A diary entry recording the meeting notes:

Thinking I had anything but pleased Shorter, I was astonished to receive by last post a note from him, which must have been written immediately after my departure. He will be "exceedingly glad" to have 6 stories from me for the *Eng. Illustrated*, at 12 guineas each, I to keep the American rights. ... I replied saying I would do the stories, and that he should have all the serial rights, as I can't sell the American myself.²²

¹⁹ pp. 105, 106, ns. 4 & 5.

²⁰ Clara Collet became one of Gissing's most loyal friends. He first heard of her through sister Ellen, who had read a report in *Queen* magazine of her lecture on her brother's novels. Miss Collet herself contacted the author in May 1893, and after exchanging a few letters, they finally met at her home in July, subsequently becoming close confidantes throughout the remainder of Gissing's life. See *Collected Letters* Vol. 5, pp. 117-8, n. 1 and p. 141.

²¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol., 5, pp. 143 and 146, n. 3.

²² *Diary*, p. 323.

At the same time however, in order to maximise his exposure to the short fiction market, the author contacted William Morris Colles, inviting him to act as his literary agent.²³ Initially, Gissing provided Colles with five stories, all of which the agent successfully placed with leading magazines.²⁴ As seen from his letter to Algernon in October 1884, the arrangement proved highly successful: ‘Shorter wants more stories from me, & Colles also. The latter, to acknowledge a short thing I have just sent him, writes: “This is just what I want. Please let me have as much more of this kind of stuff as you can.”’²⁵ Nevertheless, despite the growing interest in his short work, Gissing remained firmly committed to his principal literary goal to be recognised as a serious novelist:

I cannot and will not be reckoned among the petty scribblers of the day ... I want money & all it will bring very badly, but I want a respectable position in literature yet more. When I write, I think of my *best* readers, not of the mob. The demand for my books is steadily increasing, & will do. ... Two things I aim at in my work: the love of everything that is beautiful, & the contempt of vulgar conventionality.²⁶

In October 1895, Colles informed Gissing that Jerome K Jerome, editor of *To-Day* and *The Idler*, wanted some stories featuring ‘London types’.²⁷ Anxious to preserve his reputation as a serious writer, Gissing was reluctant to become associated with an editor who catered for the lower end of the literary market, confessing to Clara Collet that he felt it was ‘something of a degradation to be in

²³ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 145.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146, n. 2 - ‘The Day of Silence,’ ‘A Capitalist’ and ‘A Lodger in Maze Pond’ appeared in the *National Review* in December 1893, April 1894 and February 1895 respectively; ‘Under an Umbrella’ was published in *To-Day* on 6 January 1894; and ‘His Brother’s Keeper’ in *Chapman’s Magazine of Fiction* in June 1895.

²⁵ p. 242.

²⁶ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 3, pp. 134-5.

²⁷ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 154, n. 1.

any way associated with him' having hitherto 'avoided to the utmost all grossly popular papers & magazines [...].'²⁸ In the event, he delayed his decision, pleading pressure of work.²⁹ After so many early disappointments, it must have given Gissing enormous satisfaction to be sought after by leading magazine editors of the day, and to be in a position to turn down offers that he considered would compromise his rigorous literary standards.

Increased confidence in his ability to create saleable short stories prompted Gissing to suggest to Colles that he should write a series of tales concerned with the lives of people in lodgings, possibly entitled 'At a Week's Notice,' an idea that had first occurred to him in 1891 when he was enduring an exceptionally painful and disruptive period of lodging house occupation: '... there has come across me, out of these miseries, an idea for a vol. of short stories, to illustrate the wretchedness of life in lodgings [...].'³⁰ Colles sold the idea to Jerome, and a series of six sketches, ultimately entitled 'Nobodies at Home' appeared in *To-Day* magazine from 4 May to 8 June 1895.³¹ Having overcome his initial disquiet about writing for 'grossly popular papers and magazines,' Gissing submitted two sample sketches to Jerome, together with a covering letter, which vaguely suggests that the author's unique style of realistic representation may well have developed out of this early, reluctant collaboration: 'Herewith I send you two sketches, in which I

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

²⁹ *Diary*, p. 319.

³⁰ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p.266; *Diary*, pp. 253-4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 266, n. 1. The series comprised 'The Friend in Need,' 'A Drug in the Market,' 'Of Good Address,' 'By the Kerb,' 'Humble Felicity' and 'A Man of Leisure'.

have aimed, as you suggested, at depicting very commonplace people in such a manner as to present *their own view* of themselves & of the world.’³²

With the exception of ‘By The Kerb,’ the sketches form part of a collection, prefaced by Alfred Gissing, entitled *George Gissing: Stories and Sketches* (1938). Whatever the reasoning behind its omission from the collection, ‘By The Kerb’ is worth mentioning if only as an interesting counterpart to ‘The Justice and the Vagabond,’ a story from the author’s later ‘Great Men in Little Worlds’ series published in the *English Illustrated Magazine*. The description of the street hawker in ‘By The Kerb’ is in sharp contrast to that of the vagrant in the later story. The ‘half-starved ... raggedly clad’ hawker, whose pasty skin is ‘marked with pustules,’ compares ill with the vagabond’s ‘clear brown skin’ and ‘strong upright figure.’³³ Upbringing and environment clearly contribute to this glaring contrast: the early death of his parents and three of his four siblings indicates an impoverished and unwholesome life, therefore it is unsurprising that the frail, nameless protagonist lacks the will to engage in the struggle for survival. In his youth he had capitalised on his delicate beauty and become adept in the art of sponging on vulnerable women, but his beauty is long gone and with it his gullible admirers. Conversely, the vagabond has the advantage of a good education, a healthy constitution and a sense of self-worth that safeguards him from ever being reduced to sycophancy.

³² p. 280.

³³ George Gissing, ‘By the Kerb,’ *To-Day*, Vol. VII, No. 81 (25 May 1895), p. 65; *Human Odds and Ends*, p. 23.

Goodeve's first appearance in 'The Justice and the Vagabond' occurs in the magistrate's court where he is charged with assault. As the accused faces the bench, Justice Rutland notes that the prisoner 'looked superior to his position,' possessing 'a bright intelligent eye, and a strong upright figure.'³⁴ It is difficult to imagine a description further removed from the 'half-starved' wretch of 'By The Kerb,' yet both men have known hardship and poverty, both began adult life in menial jobs. Education is the key – Goodeve had attended a reputable boarding school and though, like the street hawker, he is a homeless vagrant, his education has prepared him to make the best of hard times, and instilled in him the sense of moral duty that impelled him to repay acts of charity in kind. The beggar on the other hand sees no shame in being a parasite, and only feebly attempts to fend for himself after his benefactors have deserted him. While Goodeve's spectacular adventures are the envy of his prosperous, highly respected old school chum, the descent of the nameless one into sloth and penury is the bane of his two remaining friends. At the end of 'The Justice and the Vagabond,' Goodeve is about to embark on yet another voyage of discovery, 'By The Kerb' ends as it begins, with the beggar listlessly plying his tawdry wares.

The second point of interest in 'By The Kerb' is that it provides yet another example of Gissing's proclivity for recycling ideas. The story begins and ends with the phrase 'Collar studs, three a penny. Collar studs, a penny for three,' indicating that the pauper is fundamentally incapable of adjusting to change, and recalling the author's earlier 'Phoebe' and the subtle way in which he uses the words 'Poor

³⁴ *Human Odds and Ends*, pp. 22-3.

Phoebe' to begin and end the story, in order to draw the reader's attention to the wretched girl's inherent inability to adapt to new conditions.

After publication of *In the Year of Jubilee* in December 1894, Gissing produced no other major work until *The Whirlpool* in spring 1897. During this time however, despite being overwhelmed by demands for short fiction, he did take advantage of the current vogue for one-volume novels by producing in rapid succession, *Eve's Ransom*, *Sleeping Fires* (1895) and *The Paying Guest* (1896). Having been commissioned by Shorter at their meeting in December 1893, *Eve's Ransom* was serialised in the *Illustrated London News* from 5 January 1895 onwards.³⁵ In the meantime, Colles was pressing the author to let Methuen publish the novel after serialisation; Gissing however was adamant: 'Lawrence & Bullen are anxious to have "Eve's Ransom," and it would be too bad to go elsewhere with it after their standing by me through the evil days.'³⁶ Gissing felt a strong sense of moral indebtedness to his publishers in consequence of their faith in his artistic ability during his years of struggle. Between 1892 and 1897 Lawrence and Bullen published all of the author's major novels, as well as *Eve's Ransom* and *Human Odds and Ends*, his first collection of short stories.³⁷ At the end of 1899 Lawrence and Bullen ceased trading, although for some years Arthur Bullen continued publishing on his own, reissuing in 1901, seven of the firm's eight Gissing titles.³⁸

³⁵ *Collected Letters* Vol. 5, p. 290, n. 3.

³⁶ p. 284.

³⁷ Works published by Lawrence and Bullen: *Denzil Quarrier*, *The Odd Women*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *Eve's Ransom*, *The Whirlpool* and *Human Odds and Ends*.

³⁸ *Collected Letters*, Vol 7, p. 411. With the exception of *Denzil Quarrier*, Bullen reissued under his own name all the titles previously published by Lawrence & Bullen, as well as *The Unclassed* and *The Emancipated*.

As a result of his desire to fulfil his obligation to Lawrence and Bullen, Gissing committed an unwitting breach of literary etiquette in allowing *Eve's Ransom* to be published immediately after its serialisation. At all times anxious to observe ethical principles, the incident caused the author, in equal measure, acute embarrassment and intense irritation, clearly apparent in his grudgingly apologetic letter to Shorter:

Nothing could have surprised me more than this strongly worded attack upon what seemed to me – and I am sure to my publishers – a perfectly innocent proceeding. It has never occurred to me for a moment that in issuing “Eve’s Ransom” as a volume immediately upon its conclusion as a serial we were doing anything that infringed your rights, or that fell short of courtesies due to you.

My eyes have been opened to yet one more of the harassing points that have to be kept in view by one who writes for periodicals. Meaning perfectly well, I find myself held guilty of gross duplicity.³⁹

A somewhat triumphal entry in his diary brings the matter, from the author’s point of view, to a satisfactory conclusion: ‘Find apologetic letter from Shorter, ending with request for new stories. Evidently I hit the right tone to deal with him.’⁴⁰

However, despite his unfortunate experience with *Eve's Ransom*, Gissing was keen, though rarely successful, to pursue the possibility of serialising his novels.

Demos had appeared in the *Manchester Weekly Times* from July 1889 to February 1890, but he was less successful in 1898 with ‘The Town Traveller,’ which he wrote ‘expressly for serial use.’⁴¹ In fact, his agent’s failure to dispose of the serial rights compelled the author to write apologetically to Bullen:

I so much regretted your not feeling well that evening when I dined with you – both on your own account & because I had hoped to have a little serious talk. I wanted to tell you that Colles, after vainly trying to serialize a short novel of mine (a farce) had disposed of it to Methuens – getting, at my request, the last penny they would offer. Now, this is what I never wished to do, in dealing with

³⁹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, pp. 315-6.

⁴⁰ *Diary*, p. 370.

⁴¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 7, p. 49.

L. & B.; it goes, as you know, against the grain with me. But the fact is that I am in a serious position. My expenses are far heavier than they used to be, & I *must* make money – a difficult thing for an unpopular author.⁴²

Subsequently, *By the Ionian Sea* and 'An Author at Grass' were both serialised in the *Fortnightly Review*, the former in May 1900 and thereafter from July to October of the same year, the latter appearing in four seasonal parts from Spring 1902 to Winter 1903, and *Will Warburton* (1905) appeared in both *The New Age* and *The Yorkshire Weekly Post* in the early part of its year of publication.⁴³

In spite of having produced no major work, 1895 was undoubtedly Gissing's most successful year both financially, having amassed £436 in the bank, and in terms of productivity; after successfully completing the 'Nobodies at Home' series, he was commissioned by Shorter to write twenty short pieces for *The Sketch*, and six stories for *The English Illustrated Magazine*.⁴⁴ 'Human Odds and Ends' appeared in *The Sketch* from October 1895 to March 1896; *The English Illustrated Magazine* series, 'Great Men in Little Worlds,' was published monthly from May to September 1896.⁴⁵ Having completed the series of six stories, Gissing was persuaded by Shorter to write a further three, which together with the last of the six tales, were ultimately published out of series.⁴⁶ In addition to these commitments, the author produced numerous individual stories, which Colles distributed piecemeal among other leading magazines.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 101-2.

⁴³ Details of serialisations contained in *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature 4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1535-52; Pierre Coustillas, 'Gissing in the Yorkshire Weekly Post,' *The Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. XII, No. 1 (January, 1976), pp. 21-24.

⁴⁴ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 342.

⁴⁵ 'George Gissing's Short Stories: A Bibliography', pp. 68-70.

⁴⁶ *The Collected Letters of George Gissing: Volume Six. 1895-1897*, eds. P. F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young and P. Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995), p. 43, n. 1.

Unfortunately, Gissing's relationship with Colles was often fraught with difficulty. In January 1895, some three months prior to their disagreement over the publication of *Eve's Ransom*, Gissing had informed his agent that Smith, Elder had asked him to contribute to a proposed series of ten novels; since he already had a book in mind, he wished to know whether Colles would rather it go to Methuen or Smith, Elder.⁴⁷ As a result of Colles misconstruing the import of the letter, Gissing followed up with an emphatic refusal ever again to do regular business with his former publishers:

The only reason why I laid such stress on the offer from Smith, Elder was that I thought they might perhaps seem to you preferable, from the business point of view, to a newer firm. Of *going back* to S & E., there is no question; I should merely sell a volume to them for a special cheap series. I should never dream of letting them become, again, my regular publishers.⁴⁸

Smith, Elder had dealt very shabbily with Gissing throughout the publication of five of his books, paying a paltry £100 and £150 respectively for the copyright of *Demos* and *The Nether World*, both of which sold 8,750 copies.⁴⁹ Consequently, Gissing harboured a bitter grudge against the company long after the relationship ended, thus when George Smith died in 1901, he noted in his *Commonplace Book*: 'One of the worst illustrations of public snobbery I have known is the outbreak of laudation on the death of George Smith, the publisher. He is spoken of as the glory of the Victorian age, the noblest, most generous of men ... In the *Athenaeum* last week, old Furnivall has a letter in which he tells one or 2 truths about Smith ... but I have seen no such truths anywhere else.'⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 284.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 285-6.

⁴⁹ Pierre Coustillas, 'Aspects of the Late Victorian Publishing Scene: George Gissing and his Publishers,' *Journal of the Eighteen-Nineties Society*, Vol. 23 (1996), p.7.

⁵⁰ *Commonplace Book*, p. 68.

A further mix-up occurred between the author and his agent in December of the same year over two short stories, which Colles claimed had been sent in duplicate.⁵¹ Gissing strongly refuted this, listing the only three stories, in addition to the 'Nobodies' series, that he had produced for Colles during the year, these being 'Their Pretty Way,' 'A Despot on Tour' and one other, whose title the author could not recall, but which Pierre Coustillas has subsequently discovered was 'A Freak of Nature.'⁵² Interestingly, the first and last of these tales have a curious history.

Assuming it to be an unpublished story, 'Their Pretty Way' was printed from manuscript in Coustillas' *George Gissing: Essays & Fiction* in 1970. However, the story had actually appeared in *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* on 15 September 1894, entitled 'Their Pretty Ways,' the change clearly having been made on the typescript at proof stage. With the publication in 1993 of *The Day of Silence and Other Stories*, where the story was printed from the newspaper, there came to light a number of minor differences between the two versions.⁵³ The manuscript is currently held at the Lilly Library, Indiana University.⁵⁴

Apart from the difference in title, the majority of alterations occur in punctuation, or a change of tense, one exception being the substitution in the story

⁵¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 6, p. 67. The stories in question were 'Humble Felicity' and 'A Man of Leisure,' both of which appeared in *To-Day* magazine as part of the 'Nobodies at Home' series.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 67 and n. 3.

⁵³ p. 67, n. 1.

⁵⁴ George Gissing, *The Day of Silence and Other Stories*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (London: J. M. Dent, 1993), p. xxii.

published in *The Day of Silence* of the word 'dissensions' for 'discussions'.⁵⁵ There are however several changes in the body of the text that indicate refinement at proof stage. In the manuscript of 'Their Pretty Way' Joseph Rush is referred to as Jo, while throughout the published version he is called Joe, while 'home,' 'within,' 'But tonight' and 'oughtn't to,' become 'house,' 'in,' 'But this time,' and 'ought not to' in 'Their Pretty Ways'.⁵⁶ Although these changes are in no sense radical, it is interesting to note how meticulously Gissing approached his proofreading.

A yet more bizarre fate befell 'A Freak of Nature.' Commissioned by Alfred Harmsworth, proprietor of the proposed *London Magazine*, Gissing submitted his story to Colles prior to the magazine becoming operational. In April 1895 the author received a cheque for fifteen pounds direct from the would-be publishers, which led him to complain to the editor about the proprietor's objection to dealing with agents. Apart from a letter to Colles in September, enquiring whether the magazine was yet in existence, Gissing made no further reference to the matter. In the event, the periodical, retitled *Harmsworth's Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, did not appear until July 1898; in February 1899, a bowdlerised version of 'A Freak of Nature' was published in the magazine entitled 'Mr. Brogden, City Clerk'.⁵⁷ As a result of research carried out by Pamela White in preparation for the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* (1982), it became apparent that the two stories were

⁵⁵ The phrase 'Neither spoke of their wives' discussions' appears on p. 259 of *Essays & Fiction*. This is changed to 'Neither spoke of their wives' dissensions' on p. 54 of *The Day of Silence*.

⁵⁶ Page references in *Essays & Fiction* are p. 256, lines. 3 & 33, p. 259, lines. 15 & 23; in *The Day of Silence* p. 51, line. 2, p. 52, line. 3, p. 54, lines. 23 & 31.

⁵⁷ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 306, n. 2.

one and the same. The University of Kansas, present owners of the manuscript of 'A Freak of Nature,' gave permission for Coustillas to reproduce it in *George Gissing: A Freak of Nature or Mr Brogden, City Clerk* (1990), the introduction to which contains full details of this intriguing tale of editorial vandalism.⁵⁸

Although Gissing had become very skilful at short story composition, there being generally no more than two days between thought and execution, writing for magazines at his present prolific rate was extremely time-consuming. Moreover, as he confessed to Bertz, he was becoming increasingly anxious about when he would find the time to get to work on a serious novel.

The editors are really worrying me with demands for sketches and short stories, and as I work very slowly ... I am in constant fear of not being able to meet my engagements. ... Thus it is that I see no chance of getting to work on a long book, though I much wish to do it.⁵⁹

Besides the three additional stories he had agreed to produce for Shorter, Gissing finally succumbed to pressure from the editor of *The Yellow Book* to write a story for his *avant-garde* publication. On completion of these commitments, he determined to refuse all such work for 'at least six months,' when he would 'sit down once more to a wholesome book.'⁶⁰

In the event, Gissing was unable to carry out his resolve just then, because his wife was expecting their second child in the coming January, which of course involved not only additional expense, but also inevitable disruption to the author's

⁵⁸ *George Gissing: A Freak of Nature or Mr Brogden, City Clerk*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Edinburgh: The Tragara Press, 1990), pp. 5-18.

⁵⁹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 351.

⁶⁰ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 6, p. 43.

routine; consequently he continued to write short stories. Nonetheless, he did extensively revise *The Unclassed* for Lawrence and Bullen.⁶¹ The revised edition was published in November 1895. In February 1896, the author purchased a copy of *Isabel Clarendon* with revision in mind, again for Lawrence and Bullen, but abandoned the idea after re-reading first the chapter, on the grounds that the novel was ‘hopelessly commonplace.’⁶²

In April 1896, Gissing was at last able to spend some time in Wales researching his proposed new novel, which, according to his cheerful letter to Clara Collet, was steadily taking shape by early May:

... it is wonderful how I have been recovering my self-respect. This steady work, morning & evening – not hurried money-earning toil, but work of my best, deliberate, with full strain of the willing mind. ... Once again, I have the joy of moulding phrases which cast & turn themselves in my head till the form satisfies me, & of exhibiting character in growth, building up men & women.⁶³

Lawrence and Bullen published *The Whirlpool* in April 1897. Also in 1897, Lawrence and Bullen offered to publish a collection of the series of stories that had appeared in *The Sketch*. In July, Bullen advised Gissing that since he believed that all the sketches of ‘Human Odds and Ends’ would ‘make excellent reading,’ he intended reserving some of them for a second series to be issued in the spring.⁶⁴ *Human Odds and Ends* was published in November 1897, but the proposed second series did not materialise.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 30.

⁶² pp. 96, 97.

⁶³ p. 129.

⁶⁴ pp. 317-8

⁶⁵ pp. xi and p. 318, n.2.

Increasingly disenchanted with the way Colles was handling his affairs, Gissing began seriously to consider changing his agent. As noted in his diary, the opportunity presented itself quite by chance on his return from holiday in August 1897: 'At Waterloo I met Pinker, the literary agent, and had a talk with him on the journey to Epsom. Wrote this same evening, asking him if he would try to sell the American rights of 'Human Odds and Ends.'⁶⁶ However, it was not until November 1898 that the two men reached a business agreement, Pinker having written in the meantime offering his services as an agent.⁶⁷ During a visit to Dorking on November 27, Pinker agreed to find a publisher for Gissing's new novel, 'The Crown of Life,' and sundry short stories. Pinker's first success, 'A Poor Gentleman,' appeared in the *Pall Mall Magazine*, in October 1899, followed the same month by *The Crown of Life*, published by Methuen.

In February 1897, little more than a year after the birth of Alfred, Gissing left the family home and moved to lodgings in Budleigh Salterton, where he set about re-reading the works of Dickens in preparation for a critical study of the author's work commissioned by Blackie & Son, and, over a period of five weeks, completed his latest novel, 'The Town Traveller.'⁶⁸ In September, after a final attempt at reconciliation with his wife, the author left England for Siena, where he stayed until the completion of his book on Dickens. Once free of his literary commitment, Gissing set out on a journey of discovery through Southern Italy, the

⁶⁶ *Diary*, p. 443.

⁶⁷ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 7, p. 232.

⁶⁸ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 6, p. 249; Pierre Coustillas, *Gissing's Writings on Dickens* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1969), p. 2.

details of which were meticulously recorded in his diary and letters, and later reconstructed into his stirringly evocative *By the Ionian Sea*.

Whether or not it was Gissing's intention from the outset to turn his Italian journey into a travel book, it was certain that he did not see himself as a mere tourist, but rather as an historian retracing the glories of the past: 'Every man has his intellectual desire, mine is to escape life as I know it and dream myself into that old world which was the imaginative delight of my boyhood.'⁶⁹ In his critical study of the author, Frank Swinnerton claims that 'Italy was far more to Gissing than to any casual wayfarer; every step was made upon "haunted, holy ground," full of memory and interest.'⁷⁰ In Swinnerton's view, *Dickens*, *By the Ionian Sea* and the author's historical novel *Veranilda* 'represent Gissing's most expert work ... In these books ... he writes with the purpose of increasing our knowledge of the things he loves.'⁷¹ In *By the Ionian Sea* the author reveals his genius for creating a fascinating blend of ancient and modern, where the 'juxtaposition of pathetic modern squalor and vanished ancient greatness expresses itself in elegiac lyricism ... interspersed with rueful comedy.'⁷² For instance, in his determination not to see the urban squalor during the journey from Naples to Paola, Gissing's fixes his gaze firmly on Mount Vesuvius:

... trying not to see that cluster of factory chimneys which rolled black fumes above the many-coloured houses. They reminded [him] of the same abomination on a shore more sacred; from the harbour of Piræus one looks to Athens through trails of coal-smoke. By contrast pleasant enough, Vesuvius to-

⁶⁹ *By the Ionian Sea*, pp. 4-5.

⁷⁰ *George Gissing: A Critical Study*, p. 162.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁷² Robert L. Selig, *George Gissing* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), p. 109.

day sent forth vapours of a delicate rose-tint, floating far and breaking seaward into soft fleeces of cirrus.⁷³

However, as a result of the numerous misfortunes and discomforts he suffered during the course of his travels, including a near-death experience in Cotrone, Gissing never quite came to terms with modern Calabria, and his last wish as the book closes is that he might ‘wander endlessly amid the silence of the ancient world, to-day and all its sounds forgotten.’⁷⁴ First appearing as a serial in the *Fortnightly Review* in May 1900 and thereafter from July to October of the same year, *By the Ionian Sea* was published in book form by Chapman and Hall in June 1901. There have been many reprints since that time, with a new critical, illustrated edition due for publication in 2003. Scribner’s brought out the first American edition in 1905, followed by six reprints from 1917 to 1966.

By the Ionian Sea was generously acclaimed by many critics as an academic *tour de force*, in particular an unsigned review in *Literature* implies that in addition to his achievements as a novelist and critic, it would not be fanciful to suggest that Gissing had an equal claim to distinction as a classical scholar. Equally laudatory, *The Guardian*’s anonymous reviewer proclaimed the book possessed of the ‘finest poetic feeling, the truest sympathy, and the clearest analysis’ ever to have been combined by the scholarly Gissing with the description of travel.⁷⁵

Gissing is highly regarded in present day Calabria, many articles having been written about him and his eventful journey. In October 1998 the local authorities

⁷³ *By the Ionian Sea*, pp. 5-6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁷⁵ *The Critical Heritage*, pp. 386, 389.

of Catanzaro announced their intention of celebrating the author's visit to the region with the unveiling of a commemorative plaque, to take place at an international symposium on 23 October 1999. An interesting feature of the plaque is that Gissing shares the honour with Coriolano Paparazzo, Ennio Flaiano and Federico Fellini. Paparazzo was the proprietor of the hotel at which the author stayed in Catanzaro.⁷⁶ Looking for a striking name for the intrusive press photographer in 'La dolce vita,' film director Fellini and his scriptwriter Flaiano came across the name 'Paparazzo' in *By the Ionian Sea* and thus 'paparazzi' came into common use as a pejorative term for the gutter press.⁷⁷

Between 1897 and 1903, in addition to his work on Dickens, the travel narrative and *The Private Papers*, Gissing produced *The Town Traveller*, *The Crown of Life* and *Our Friend the Charlatan*. It is not surprising therefore that after 1896 the author's short fiction output fell sharply, averaging rather less than three stories per year. However, by this time the author had acquired a wealth of experience in the art of literary composition, which he put to good use in his short story writing. As initially his stories had provided material for his novels, his novels now served a similar purpose in his short fiction, particularly in terms of antithetical characterisation. For instance, Miss Hurst in 'An Old Maid's Triumph' makes a determined effort to provide for her old age, whereas Virginia and Alice Madden in *The Odd Women* lack the moral fibre necessary to engage in the struggle for existence. Again, in 'Miss Rodney's Leisure,' Miss Rodney's blanket strategy for

⁷⁶ P. Coustillas, D. Grylls & B. Postmus, 'Gissing in Catanzaro: A Commemoration,' *The Gissing Journal*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1 (January, 2000), pp. 11-12.

⁷⁷ F. Badolato & P. Coustillas, 'Gissing and the Paparazzi,' *The Gissing Journal*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 4 (October, 1997), pp. 29-31.

educating the unenlightened differs greatly from the rigidly selective system adopted by Rhoda Nunn, the novel's heroine. Similar recycling occurs in terms of location; in *A Life's Morning* Gissing uses the quarry from 'The Quarry on the Heath' as the site of Mr Hood's suicide, while in 'Lou and Liz' the Bank Holiday fair is reminiscent of Bob and Pennyloaf Hewitt's wedding excursion to the Crystal Palace. Many similar links occur throughout Gissing's third phase of short fiction, as do connections with personal experience, such as that revealed in a letter to Clara Collet. Informing her of his plans regarding Edith, and the serious illness that forces his removal to South Devon, Gissing makes a curious confession:

There is no one to blame but myself, in the last resort. I, of course, am to blame for taking that poor girl out of her natural sphere; whence all her trouble and mine. It was grossly selfish; it was utterly unintelligent behaviour; it showed the unteachable man. (Do you remember my story "A Lodger in Maze Pond"? There is my own silly self.)⁷⁸

In line with its overall format, chapter nine of this study will contain analyses of stories written during each year of the final phase of Gissing's short fiction up to 1900, though not necessarily published the same year. In addition, there will be an evaluation of tales from the three series commissioned during this period.

⁷⁸ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 6, pp. 237-8.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Gissing on Dickens

Although Colles was being overtaken by Pinker as Gissing's principal literary agent, he nonetheless handled practically the whole of the author's work on Charles Dickens, which as it turned out, proved to be one of the most important diversifications of the author's literary career. At the time though, as Coustillas points out, not everyone saw Gissing as an appropriate critic of the great novelist; in fact when it was rumoured that he was writing a book on Dickens the news was received with a certain degree of scepticism.¹ In his 'Literary Letter' in the *Illustrated London News*, Shorter, the author's most enthusiastic publisher of his short fiction, suggested that it was 'a curious irony to have given Mr. Gissing the task of appreciating Dickens. The one makes poverty so much more depressing than it really is, the other so much more joyous than it is.'²

The commission to write a critical appraisal of Dickens' works came from John Holland Rose, a former pupil at Owens College, two years Gissing's senior. In 1896 Rose was appointed editor of Blackie & Son's proposed Victorian Era Series, which it was planned would deal with influential movements of the nineteenth century and prominent literary figures.³ Rose's proposal was received by Gissing on 27 December 1896 and immediately accepted, but it was the autumn of 1897 before the author settled down to work on the volume, having in

¹ *Gissing's Writings on Dickens*, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1 and p. 14, n.1.

³ p. 1.

the meantime begun and completed *The Town Traveller* (1898). Because his domestic situation had become intolerable Gissing decided to write the book in Sienna, prior to setting off on a long anticipated journey through Calabria. Since it had been decided that the author should retain the copyright, Colles was asked to pursue the possibility of an American edition, ultimately brought out by Dodd, Mead & Company.⁴ *Charles Dickens, a Critical Study* was published simultaneously in England and America in 1898.

Despite the doubts regarding Gissing's analytical prowess, *A Critical Study* was highly acclaimed both in England and across the Atlantic. William Archer, distinguished dramatic critic, lavished generous praise on Gissing's ability to grapple with the complexities of an artist such as Dickens 'without falling into excess, whether of praise or blame,' acknowledging that:

Mr Gissing avoids both dangers, and without swerving from his allegiance to an artistic ideal more serious and strenuous than Dickens ever conceived, shows that the keenest sense of a great man's limitations is not inconsistent with the most ardent appreciation of his unique and beneficent genius.⁵

Archer strikes right at the heart of the matter in pointing out the ingenuity of the author's equitable approach to Dickens' novels. As far back as 1890, when Gissing wrote to Ellen in an attempt to assuage her antipathy towards *The Emancipated*, he stated categorically his ambivalent attitude towards human nature:

In very deed, there is a satiric vein in "The Emancipated" which, to those conservatives who understand it, will make the book rather acceptable than otherwise. (This you evidently missed.) It comes of the fact that I am able to look at both sides, & to laugh at the weaknesses of both.⁶

⁴ p. 3 and p. 14, n.3.

⁵ *The Critical Heritage*, pp. 320-1.

⁶ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 4, p. 209.

This unique characteristic was present in all the author's fiction, and is recognised as the most distinguishing feature of his work on Dickens. He felt that the novelist's faults, for example in *Hard Times*, should to some degree 'be attributed to Dickens's lack of acquaintance with various kinds of literature, with various modes of thought. ... the manner of its presentment betrays an extraordinary *naïveté*, plainly due to untrained intellect, a mind insufficiently stored.'⁷ Although throughout *A Critical Study* Gissing is unsparing in his criticism of the novelist's glaring weaknesses, he always concedes that these should be viewed in light of the novelist's educational disadvantages and mid-Victorian social mores, as well as stressing the humanity of the man whose empathy with his readers led him to rely too heavily on melodrama and coincidence, devices which were anathema to late nineteenth century realists.

Twentieth-century critics have become more aware than Gissing's contemporaries, who tended to compare Dickens with late-Victorian novelists, that it was impossible to make an impartial judgment of Dickens' work without viewing it in the context of its period, for instance Jacob Korg claims that the 'most striking contribution to Dickens criticism Gissing made was that of putting the novelist and his work into their appropriate sociological setting.'⁸ Similarly, John Goode argues that for Gissing 'Dickens's greatness is located in his age, representative of it, and because of that, a permanent register of its strengths and limitations,' and that it is this sense of historical distance that accounts for the fact

⁷ George Gissing, *Charles Dickens : A Critical Study* (London : 1898; The Gresham Publishing Company, 1903), p. 22.

⁸ *George Gissing: A Critical Biography*, p. 215.

that throughout his work on Dickens 'he insists on the need in the reader for a sense of relativity.'⁹

Because of his insistence on maintaining that sense of relativity, Gissing found himself at variance with critics who condemned the novelist's deference to Mrs Grundy, arguing that sympathy with his readers was to Dickens the very breath of life, therefore he 'could never have regarded it as within a story-teller's scope to attempt the conversion of his readers to a new view of literary morals.'¹⁰ For almost every lapse into implausibility, Gissing provides a counter argument in mediation, focusing mainly on the novelist's inimitable characterisations, such as that of Mr Micawber in *David Copperfield*, that transcend all attempts at censure. For example, in Gissing's opinion 'a novel more shapeless, a story less coherent than *Martin Chuzzlewit*, will not easily be found in any literature,' but nonetheless he ranks that novel's Mrs Gamp on a par with Shakespeare's Falstaff: 'Where else since Shakespeare shall we find such force in the humorous presentment of gross humanity?'¹¹

Interestingly, a recent visit to the Lilly Library, Indiana University has brought to light a hitherto unpublished document containing notes pertaining to the Martin Chuzzlewit section of *A Critical Study* and brief reference to Christmas tales, 'The Holly Tree' and 'Somebody's Luggage.'¹² A full transcript of these notes provides a valuable insight into Gissing's analytical skill in selecting the most pertinent aspects of Dickens' unique style:

⁹ *Ideology and Fiction*, p. 21.

¹⁰ *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, p. 75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 204.

¹² George Gissing, 'Notes on Dickens, GISSING MSS, Box No. 1, The Lilly Library, Indiana University.

Todger's p. 81-3. Good prose. No rhythm, no sentiment. Vivid without laboured detail.

Superfl. & feeble Chap. 1.

Dinner at Ant. Chuzz's. p. 115.¹³ *Draws attention to the similarities between Pecksniff and Jonas Chuzzlewit* (my italics).

Kingsgate St., p. 195. The goldfinch. 196.¹⁴ *Gissing points to the pathos elicited by the plight of the poor caged birds, unheeded in an indifferent world.* (my italics).

Burial of old Chuzz. pp. 203-5¹⁵. *An outwardly solemn occasion, but only the faithful Chuffey is a genuine mourner* (my italics).

Pecksniff girls good.

Mawkish talk of old Martin; exagg. talk of Tigg; perfect rightness of Gamp & Bailey.

Grotesque figure in few words. Tamaroo, p. 319¹⁶; Nadgett, p. 281.¹⁷

¹³ Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (London: The Alexandra Publishing Co., 1901), p. 115. "'I shall drink," said Anthony, "to Pecksniff. Your father, my dears. A clever man, Pecksniff. A wary man! A hypocrite, though, eh? A hypocrite, girls, eh? Ha, ha, ha! Well, so he is. Now, among friends, he is. I don't think the worse of him for that, unless it is that he overdoes it. You may overdo anything, my darlings. You may overdo even hypocrisy. Ask Jonas!'"

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 196. '... in every pane of glass there was at least one tiny bird in a tiny bird-cage, twittering and hopping his little ballet of despair, and knocking his head against the roof: while one unhappy goldfinch who lived outside a red villa with his name on the door, drew the water for his own drinking and mutely appealed to some good man to drop a farthing's worth of poison in it.'

¹⁵ p. 204. 'So through the narrow streets and winding city ways, went Anthony Chuzzlewit's funeral: Mr. Jonas glancing stealthily out of the coach-window now and then, to observe its effect upon the crowd; Mr. Mould as he walked along, listening with sober pride to the exclamations of the bystanders; the doctor whispering his story to Mr. Pecksniff, without appearing to come any nearer the end of it; and poor old Chuffey sobbing unregarded in a corner.'

¹⁶ p. 319. 'This ancient female had been engaged, in fulfilment of a vow, registered by Mrs. Todgers, that no more boys should darken the commercial doors; and she was chiefly remarkable for a total absence of all comprehension upon every subject whatever. She was a perfect Tomb for messages and small parcels; and when despatched to the Post-office with letters, had been frequently seen endeavouring to insinuate them into casual chinks in private doors, under the delusion that any door with a hole in it would answer the purpose. She was a very little old woman, and always wore a very coarse apron with a bib before and a loop behind, together with bandages on her wrists, which appeared to be afflicted with an everlasting sprain. She was on all occasions chary of opening the street-door, and ardent to shut it again; and she waited at table in a bonnet.'

¹⁷ p. 281. 'It was no virtue or merit in Nadgett that he transacted all his Anglo-Bengalee business secretly and in the closest confidence; for he was born to be a secret. He was a short, dried-up, withered, old man, who seemed to have secreted his very blood; for nobody would give him credit for the possession of six ounces of it in his whole body. How he lived was a secret; where he lived was a secret; and even what he was, was a secret. In his musty old pocket-book he carried contradictory cards, in some of which he called himself a coal-merchant, in others a wine-merchant, in others a commission-agent, in others a collector, in others an accountant: as if he really didn't know the secret himself.'

Ruth at butcher's p. 375.¹⁸ Essence of homeliness.

Jonas's room, p. 448¹⁹. *Gissing stresses the room's possible use as an escape route* (my italics).

Chap. 49 – Gamp & Prig. One of Dickens's great things.

No half measures in retribution. Pecksniff felled to the ground, & before women.²⁰ He & Cherry come to beggary.²¹

Morality very simple. A scoundrel is a scoundrel.

The finale – all grouped in stage fashion about old Chuzzlewit, Mrs Gamp, Poll & Bailey. Entering without any probability or explanation.

Never again will any man write so rosily.

Indication of a bye-gone-day. "He dismounted from the rumble." "Luggage in the 'boot.'"

Does not hate his scoundrel, only hatred shown in satire of upper classes.

Vivid only in eccentrics, & in its [illegible word] descripts. Jonas a mere surly ruffian. Pinch a mere walking virtue. Ruth a merry doll. Young Martin a walking gentleman; also Westlock.

Pinch imbecile in his inability to see thro' Pecksniff.

Everybody to be made happy. Even the Eden neighbours turn up, just at right moment – by the Monument. In later books he was not capable of this frank concession.

The chapter on Davis in the Holly-Tree.²²

¹⁸ p. 375. 'Well! She washed up the breakfast cups, chatting away the whole time, and telling Tom all sorts of anecdotes about the brass-and-copper founder; put everything in its place; made the room as neat as herself ... She had no sooner done this, than she was off again; and there she stood once more, as brisk and busy as a bee, tying that compact little chin of hers into an equally compact little bonnet: intent upon bustling out to the butcher's, without a minute's loss of time [...].'

¹⁹ p. 448. 'The room in which [Jonas] had shut himself up, was on the ground floor, at the back of the house. It was lighted by a dirty skylight, and had a door in the wall, opening into a narrow covered passage or blind-alley, very little frequented after five or six o'clock in the evening, and not in much use as a thoroughfare at any hour. But it had an outlet in a neighbouring street.'

²⁰ p. 501. '[Pecksniff] advanced with outstretched arms to take the old man's hand. But he had not seen how the hand clasped and clutched the stick within its grasp. As he came smiling on, and got within his reach, old Martin, with his burning indignation crowded into one vehement burst, and flashing out of every line and wrinkle in his face, rose up, and struck him down upon the ground.'

²¹ p. 522. '.... a drunken, squalid, begging-letter-writing man, called Pecksniff [...].'

²² George Gissing (1857-1903): *An Exhibition of Books, Manuscripts and Letters from the Pforzheimer Collection in the Lilly Library* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University, 1994), Item 39, p. 24, notes that 'The Holly Tree' is a Christmas tale.

D's best children. (Brats).

Christopher the Waiter in Somebody's Luggage. Admirable review of his career. Humour & sympathy.²³

His appreciation of the French.

Mrs Liniper, a parallel to Mrs Gamp. Goodness showing thro' squalor of circumstance.

Insisting on the fact that there is *good* in all people, to be recognized only if they get to know each other.

Mrs L. spoilt of course by the conventionality of story, but otherwise one of D's pleasantest bits.

Mrs L, Doctor Marigold, & the rest, all their kind *sublimated*. Touches of exquisite reality, but entire reality is not arrived at.

Doctor M's wife & child, pp. 250-1, one of the few times in which he is told unpleasant truth.

P. 252. Instance of immorality in speech.

True pathos. Doctor M joking to the crowd whilst child dies.

D. always on side of goodness, simplicity, sweetness.

The note of sincere Christianity.

Great sympathy with childhood, especially in poor and hard circumstances. Little maids of all work.

Mrs Gamp. How strange, when one thinks of it, the art which makes an entertaining picture of a thing actually loathsome and what earthly right has this to be called a picture of life?

His plan in the Preface agst. charge of exaggeration. – true that we don't see peculiarities until attention drawn, but D. makes the peculiarity the whole man.

The business of life is ignored. Grotesque connection of Martin with architecture. His – "Grammar School." – so David Copperfield's lit. work (Dora holding pens)! Bank [?], says [unreadable name] would have stopped story.

Transcript: Courtesy, The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

²³ *Pforzheimer Collection*, p. 24. Item 39 notes that 'Somebody's Luggage' is a Christmas tale.

Although the above notes represent only a fragment of Gissing's research on his subject, they are nevertheless sufficient to reveal an intuitive and intellectual insight into the world of Dickens.

Throughout the study Gissing levels his most severe criticism at Dickens' persistent inability to create credible women, citing a long list of failures such as the waxworks figures in *Bleak House* of Lady Deadlock and her maid Hortense, the ludicrous ghostly presence of Miss Havesham in *Great Expectations* and the exaggerated theatricality of Rose Dartle in *David Copperfield*. For all that Gissing is unequivocal in his praise of those of the novelist's female figures whom he feels are masterpieces of characterisation, Sarah Gamp being a case in point:

... to my imagination the thick-tongued, leering, yet half-genial woman walks as palpably in Kingsgate Street as yon mountain of a man in East Cheap ... the same perfect method of idealism is put to use in converting to a source of pleasure things that in life repel or nauseate.²⁴

Gissing points out that despite the preponderance of idealised tragic figures and domestic paragons in his work, Dickens was more than adept at depicting many of his women 'in his liveliest spirit of satire,' arguing that the novelist's countless pictures of more or less detestable women 'must be held among his finest work' since 'this portraiture alone would establish his claim to greatness.'²⁵ For the creation of Mrs Gargery of *Great Expectations*, the author saves his highest accolade. In his view the blacksmith's wife 'is a shrew of the most highly developed order ... without any assignable cause, she is invariably acid, and ready at a moment's notice to break into fury of abuse.'²⁶ Because her continuous scolding makes wretched the lives of her husband and brother, Dickens devises

²⁴ *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, pp. 204-5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

²⁶ p. 167.

the most effective plan short of murder, for silencing the termagant forever – ‘[a] felling and stunning and all but killing blow, followed by paralysis and slow death,’ which Gissing sees as a ‘sharp remedy, but no whit sharper than the evil it cures.’²⁷

Although tinged with sadness owing to Gissing’s deep sense of regret that Dickens probably hastened his own death as a result of his becoming in his latter years a public entertainer, the last chapter of *A Critical Study* begins with a touching eulogy of the great novelist:

It is a privilege of a great writer to put into his work the finest qualities of his heart and brain, to make permanent the best part of himself, and through that to influence the world. In speaking of Dickens’s triumphs as an author, I have felt that the most fervent praise could not err by excess; every time I open his books, as the years go on, it is with ever more of wonder, delight, admiration, and love.²⁸

Three years after the publication of *A Critical Study*, the Gresham Publishing Company, a subsidiary of Blackie and Son, proposed reprinting the book as the introductory volume to an Imperial Edition of Dickens’ works. Blackie negotiated terms with Gissing for the copyright, and the first Imperial Dickens appeared in 1902 and was reprinted eight times. Although by this time Gissing had revised his text, reprints without corrections were published in Blackie’s 1903 Victorian Era Series and their Casket Library Edition in 1926, followed by two further impressions in 1928 and 1929. In America, Dodd, Mead and Co., in addition to their first publication in 1898, produced three further editions in 1904, 1912 and 1924, and the Kennikat Press reissued the book in 1966.²⁹ Since then, three more

²⁷ p. 169.

²⁸ p. 275.

²⁹ *Gissing's Writings on Dickens*, p. 9.

American editions have been published. In his introduction to *The Immortal Dickens* (1925), B W Matz prophesied that Gissing would be best known to future generations by his *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* and *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, and of the two he felt that the latter would be most in demand, since it was 'the first book of its kind worthy of its subject to be published, and has never been superseded.'³⁰

Shortly after the publication of *A Critical Study*, Gissing received a request from Methuen to write prefaces to their proposed Rochester edition of Dickens' novels. Through Colles it was agreed that Gissing would be paid ten guineas for each piece, payable on publication.³¹ Between August 1898 and February 1900 the author completed introductions to eleven Dickens novels, these being *David Copperfield*, *Dombey and Son*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Bleak House*, *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Barnaby Rudge*, *Sketches by Boz* and the *Christmas Books*.³² In June 1901, after being informed by Methuen that his preface to the *Christmas Books* was intended for publication in Blackie's 'Little Library' Edition, Gissing wrote to the Author's Syndicate enquiring whether his agreement with Methuen allowed any use other than for the Rochester Edition.³³ Having confirmed that Gissing was within his rights to object to Methuen's proposal, G Herbert Thring, of the Society of Authors, and Colles, took the matter up with the publishers on the author's behalf. The dispute was settled to Gissing's satisfaction by the end of October.³⁴ However, there still remained the question of payment for the as yet unpublished prefaces, which

³⁰ George Gissing, *The Immortal Dickens* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1925), p. vii.

³¹ Gissing's *Writings on Dickens*, p. 6.

³² p. 6.

³³ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 8, pp. 191-2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

Colles was under the impression totalled six. In a letter acknowledging final settlement of Methuen's account, Gissing confirmed that he had written only eleven introductions, suggesting that the agent was probably counting 'Master Humphrey's Clock' as the twelfth, whereas it had in fact been dealt with in a few lines in the preface to *The Old Curiosity Shop*.³⁵

Unfortunately, Methuen abandoned the Rochester edition after only six titles had been published, and the remaining prefaces languished in Methuen's files until 1920 when they attracted the attention of Temple Scott and B W Matz. At the time only three introductions in addition to the six already published were recovered, those to *David Copperfield* and the *Christmas Stories* having apparently disappeared.³⁶ Gissing's nine introductions and his essay 'Dickens in Memory' were published as *Critical Studies of the Works of Charles Dickens* by Greenberg of New York in 1924, followed in 1925 by an English edition published by Cecil Palmer entitled *The Immortal Dickens*.³⁷

'Dickens in Memory,' first published in the Dickens issue of *Literature* in December 1901, acts by way of a prefatory chapter to the volume, recalling Gissing's first awareness of the novelist through reading *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and his wanderings around Dickens' London haunts on his arrival in the city in October 1877. The author recalls how Forster's *Life of Dickens* stimulated him when he became tired and discouraged with his own work. Reading of the

³⁵ pp. 272-3.

³⁶ The three unpublished introductions comprised *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Sketches by Boz* and *Dombey and Son*.

³⁷ *The Immortal Dickens*, p. 7.

writer's work pattern was what stirred him 'not to imitate Dickens as a novelist, but to follow afar off his example as a worker.'³⁸

In his preface to *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Gissing reiterates the criticism he levelled at the novel in *A Critical Study*, namely that on account of its being written piecemeal at monthly intervals 'no great work of fiction is so ill put together,' nevertheless he argues that but for this imperfection 'the book would perhaps rank as his finest.'³⁹ Though he acknowledges the fact that the book's essential moral purpose was 'to show how selfishness propagates itself,' Gissing points to the curious paradox that the really vivid characters are neither the paragons nor the outright villains, but rather the minor figures; Mrs Gamp, Sweedlepipe, Mrs Todgers and the Pecksniff girls are the ones who truly capture the reader's imagination, because Dickens is 'never so successful as with the amusingly base [...].'⁴⁰ Gissing claims that the secret is in the language, which is representative of mid-century lower London; each character is 'at once individual and a type' revealing 'the multitude behind them, the obscure swarming of a vast city.'⁴¹ In the author's view the dialogue in *Chuzzlewit* is Dickens at his best, even 'his Americans express themselves with a racy vigour which has a great air of verisimilitude.'⁴²

In Chapter X, the preface to *Bleak House*, Gissing offers a sharp rebuttal to a suggestion he had heard that in the changed character of Dickens' later works, where 'plot' becomes paramount, the influence of Wilkie Collins is clearly

³⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁹ p. 113.

⁴⁰ p. 122.

⁴¹ p. 121.

⁴² p. 133.

discernible, pointing out that by 1851, when *Bleak House* appeared, Collins had published only his atypical *Antonina*. In the author's view, 'if influence there were of one novelist upon the other, *Bleak House* had its part in the shaping of Collins's successful work.'⁴³

Relating to Gissing's insistence on maintaining historical relativity when appraising Dickens' work, Goode refers to the author's preface to *Pickwick Papers*, from which he quotes: 'Thus came into existence an English classic – a book representative of its age, exhibiting the life and the ideals of an important class of English folk, on the threshold of the Victorian era.'⁴⁴ Goode argues that in claiming that the classic status of a book should be measured by its representativeness of a particular age and group reveals Gissing's freedom from modern criticism's tendency to discount literature that has not been established as a canon. The collection of introductions represents a valuable companion to *A Critical Study*, concentrating as they do on individual novels rather than on specific phases of Dickens' work.

In recent years it has emerged that F G Kitton, the annotator of the Rochester Edition, retained the proof copy of the preface to *David Copperfield* when publication was cancelled, and this was among the papers purchased by the Dickens Fellowship on Kitton's death in 1904.⁴⁵ In 1980, the proof copy of the introduction was chanced upon by Richard Dunn among a collection of Kitton's papers at Dickens House, and published in the Spring 1981 issue of the

⁴³ p. 122.

⁴⁴ *Ideology and Fiction*, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Richard J. Dunn, 'Gissing's Introduction to the Rochester *David Copperfield*,' *The Dickensian*, Vol. 77, part 1, No. 393 (Spring 1981), p. 3.

Dickensian.⁴⁶ In his introduction to *Copperfield*, Gissing is unusually severe about Dickens' inability to create true to life situations, noting 'with what violence to all probability Dickens works out the melodrama of Steerforth's fate and little Emily's recovery. Things happen as on the transpontine stage; not the least as in the life we know.'⁴⁷ Gissing was aware that neither the novelist nor his public saw anything wrong in this, pointing out in the novelist's defence that only during the last twenty-five years, with the benefit of foreign influence, had English writers adopted a realistic approach to their fiction.

Although regretful that Dickens failed to present life with complete artistic integrity, Gissing acknowledges that the presentation of unembellished pictures of life was anathema to a novelist like Dickens, who went out of his way to keep faith with his readers. In fact the author's severest criticism is levelled at the circulating libraries and their hypocritical subscribers, whose rigid strictures forbade the slightest deviation from the conventional moral code. However, despite the many justifications Gissing finds for the lack of verisimilitude in *David Copperfield*, he is unable to overlook the novelist's inability to give a semblance of reality to the latter part of the novel. Although expressing a strong conviction that the earlier part is 'unsurpassed in literature for its charm and vitality,' the author asserts that in comparison with the hero of Thackeray's *Pendennis*, David's portrayal fails totally in its attempt to depict him as an imaginative artist:

... perhaps the childhood of a born novelist has never been so suggestively described; but from the day when he leaves school, 'well educated, well dressed, and with plenty of money' in his pocket, David ceases to interest us as

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁷ p. 5.

an illustration of the artistic character. We no more credit him with the ability to produce works of fiction than we believe that he sat at his desk writing whilst Dora 'held the pens' – about as wild an impossibility as can be discovered in the whole range of imaginative writing. Copperfield will bear not a moment's comparison with Arthur Pendennis, who suggests, very well indeed, a sort of literary man easily discovered.⁴⁸

As an acknowledged authority on the novelist, Kitton was appointed general editor and annotator of a de luxe Autograph Edition of Dickens' works to be published in America by George Sproul. In view of their amicable collaboration on the Rochester Edition, Kitton invited Gissing to write a new introduction to *David Copperfield*. The novel was published in three volumes in 1903, but as a result of the publisher's impending bankruptcy few of the three hundred sets were sold. Owing to its obvious scarcity, the introduction only became generally available to the public in 1997.⁴⁹

In his introduction to the Autograph Edition, Gissing again refers to the unevenness of *Copperfield*. He sees it as a book of two halves, with the early chapters, which tenderly depict the squalid, miserable life of the young David much as Dickens himself experienced it, lapsing into a distinct separation between writer and character in the latter part of the novel. In Gissing's view, David hints 'at the life and personality of Dickens as a man and author, but only in the remotest way.'⁵⁰ Conscious of the criticism that followed Dickens' fall in popularity after his death, Gissing argues in the novelist's defence that while it is impossible to believe in Steerforth's rascality, or the old boatman's wanderings about Europe in search of his niece, it should be remembered that Dickens was

⁴⁸ p. 6.

⁴⁹ Pierre Coutillas, 'Gissing's Introduction to the Autograph Edition of "David Copperfield,"' *The Gissing Journal*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1 (January, 1997), p. 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

noted for actually believing in his creations: 'He distressed himself all but to illness over his heroine of "The Old Curiosity Shop."'”⁵¹ Gissing maintains that the thought of the artist creates its own world, which in Dickens' case meant that he did not always see in the light of reality those figures that he strove to make real to his readers. Furthermore, the author points out that however insubstantial the character, the background is invariably totally convincing, consequently the implausibility of a character or incident becomes insignificant in the light of a masterly narrative.

Just prior to the publication of the Autograph Edition's introduction to *David Copperfield* in *The Gissing Journal*, Pierre Coustillas' article 'Gissing's Two Introductions to David Copperfield: Veracity in the *Bildungsroman*' appeared in *David Copperfield: Charles Dickens* (1996), a collection of essays on the novel. The essay sets out to shed light on the validity of Jerome Buckley's claim in *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974) that *David Copperfield* led mid-Victorian achievements in this field. It is Coustillas' view that, as creator of *Workers in the Dawn*, which itself fully qualifies as a *Bildungsroman*, and, as noted from his 'Extracts from my Reading,' an avid reader of Goethe's *Willhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Gissing was the most appropriate critic to evaluate the extent of Dickens' contribution to the genre.⁵² Aware that *Copperfield* had begun its existence as an autobiographic account of Dickens' own life, the author recalls, in his introduction to the Autograph Edition, Goethe's ability to make poetry out of an intolerable misfortune, and so rid

⁵¹ p. 18.

⁵² Pierre Coustillas, 'Gissing's Two Introductions to *David Copperfield*: Veracity in the *Bildungsroman*' in *David Copperfield: Charles Dickens*, ed., Jean-Pierre Naugrette (Paris: Ellipses, 1996), pp. 12-13.

himself of the burden. 'Even thus,' claimed Gissing, 'did it come to pass with Dickens.'⁵³ But Dickens was a romantic idealist; *Copperfield* ends with only the villains getting their comeuppance, while the feckless but genial Mr Micawber finds a fortune in Australia. In Coustillas' view, based on his reading of the introduction to the Autograph Edition, such a subjective approach could not be 'unreservedly associated with the novel of formation or initiation. If the latter genre is to offer a recognizable picture of life ... it must circumscribe its inspiration to plausible experience' as for instance in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*.⁵⁴ In order for *David Copperfield* to claim affinity with the *Bildungsroman* its current definition would need to be revised.

As Coustillas points out in his essay, Gissing praised the book's narrative in so far as his critical judgment allowed, in particular its pathos, humour and irony.⁵⁵ According to the author the novel's lack of deliberate satire was principally due to the fact that its interest was more firmly grounded in simple humanity, thus:

Evil in character is exhibited, indeed, but the dark colours are softened by an ever-present humorous intention. Nowhere is Dickens happier in the use of his peculiar irony; a mental quality which enables him to represent the tyrant, the sneak, the snob, as objects of merry mockery rather than of detestation, and which regards human weaknesses, even the exasperating and the harmful, with a greatly forbearing smile.⁵⁶

Coustillas argues that rather than judging Dickens by his own fictional standards, which rejected the optimism of mid-Victorian Romantics in favour of the more realistic human experience of unfulfilled expectations, Gissing assesses *Copperfield* in terms of the trials and tribulations of an innocent young man's journey through life towards a state of selfhood. As a consequence of the author's

⁵³ 'Gissing's Introduction to the Autograph Edition of "David Copperfield,"' p. 11.

⁵⁴ 'Gissing's Two Introductions to *David Copperfield*,' p.20.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁶ 'Gissing's Introduction to the Rochester *David Copperfield*,' p.4.

abiding interest in the teachings of Schopenhauer, he could readily accept Dickens' depiction of selfhood as a state of being only to be achieved 'through growth ... through a process of psychological and moral maturation.'⁵⁷ Therefore, though *Copperfield* would not meet the modern literary definition of *Bildungsroman*, it does loosely conform to Gissing's notion of an individual's psychological and moral progress towards selfhood. Coustillas' concluding view of the two introductions is that:

Gissing accepts Dickens' idiosyncratic vision, censuring only those lapses into melodrama and psychological impossibilities of which contemporary readers were particularly tolerant, because they were inextricably meshed with a heavily didactic moralism which has come to be viewed as a major characteristic of the age.⁵⁸

After the publication of *A Critical Study*, Gissing was generally acknowledged as an authority on Dickens, as a consequence of which he was approached by a number of editors to write sundry articles on the great novelist. At the end of 1900 the Northern Newspaper Syndicate commissioned a piece on Dickens' Homes and Haunts. The task was accomplished over three days, but publication was delayed until August 1902, when it appeared in *The Nottinghamshire Guardian*.⁵⁹ The article was reprinted, along with essays by other writers, in *The Homes and Haunts of Famous Authors*, published by Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., Ltd., in 1906. As is evident from a letter to Algernon, during his early years in London Gissing was wont to wander the city streets seeking to rekindle images of the literary past:

When I am out on a bleak wintry night I can always find one pleasure at least in the situation, & that is in the images from various novelists & poets which

⁵⁷ 'Gissing's Two Introductions to *David Copperfield*,' p. 15.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁹ *Gissing's Writings on Dickens*, p. 9.

surrounding sights & sounds recall. ... the pages of Dickens are innumerable which a wretched night in London summons to the thoughts.⁶⁰

It is unsurprising therefore that Gissing was happy to undertake a task so dear to his heart.

After brief reference to Portsea, Dickens' birthplace, and his unhappy spell in lodgings at Lant Street during his father's imprisonment at Marshalsea, Gissing offers an interesting explanation as to why Dickens suffered more than an ordinary boy would have done in being forced to work in the blacking factory at Hungerford Stairs:

It was not the mere hardship of daily toil at so early an age which told upon him; nor yet was it merely the sense of being defrauded of education, by which he felt himself well able to profit. Dickens had a keen sense of social distinctions, quite unaffected by the radicalism of his intellect. Once escaped from bondage, he did his best for many a year, to conceal from all his acquaintances all he had gone through in childhood. He felt it as a loss of caste. Happily, the artist was quite free from this besetting weakness of the man. In his books, no trace of bitterness disturbs the delightful humour and pathos with which he recounts, in the guise of fiction, his most painful memories.⁶¹

Although Gissing was not himself exposed to anything like the hardship suffered by Dickens, the death of his father had a profound effect on the young boy's future by precipitating him into an elite education system in which he was able to excel academically without having the financial backing normally associated therewith. Thus, he was acutely aware in later life that his position within the class system was ambiguous: 'he had the education and the intellectual pretensions of the comfortable bourgeois and the income (never very much) of an ordinary worker.'⁶² While Gissing was able to express admiration for Dickens'

⁶⁰ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 86.

⁶¹ *Homes and Haunts of Famous Authors* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., Ltd., 1906), p. 112.

⁶² *Gissing: A Life in Books*, p. 12.

ability to excise all trace of bitterness from his writings, he utterly failed to practise what he preached:

Gissing was *not* born into the lower classes ... but rather into that twilight zone between 'middle' and 'working' – a guarantee in itself that one's life will be devoted at least in part to sorting the problem out. It is in this way that the 'exile' motif, the man 'exiled' from his natural or appropriate social class, came into Gissing's life at an early age.⁶³

Gissing's sense of alienation dogged him throughout his life, evidence for which is paramount in such novels as *Isabel Clarendon*, *Thyrza* and *Born in Exile*. His letter to Eduard Bertz, dated 23 to 26 February 1890, speaks volumes:

The other morning the ship's parson happened to have a talk with me, & he evidently observed my name written on a book I was reading. The next morning he approached me with a grin & began: "I hear you are a celebrated author." He explained that someone in the first class had heard him mention my name & at once recognized it.

This has a symbolical significance. It is my fate in life to be known by the first-class people & to associate with the second class – or even the third & fourth. It will always be so.⁶⁴

Gissing's article next touches on Dickens' role as clerk to an attorney at Gray's Inn, an occupation which afforded him extraordinary insight into the intricacies of the law, and which he used to such striking effect in *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*. The author then moves on to the reading room of the British Museum, a much frequented haunt of Dickens. However, though 'dear to the memory of almost all our men of letters, from Charles Lamb onwards,' the reading room holds no such romantic notions for Gissing, representing rather a sweat shop controlling the weary, work-worn lives of many of the characters in his *New Grub Street*.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

⁶⁴ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 4, p. 196.

Soon after his marriage Dickens moved out of Chambers to Doughty Street and thence to a house in Devonshire Terrace, from where he wrote most of his novels. From 1851 to 1860 the author lived at Tavistock House, where he completed *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Thereafter Dickens lived at Gadshill, and spent his final decade improving and extending the property, his last improvement being the addition of a conservatory which, Gissing was led to believe, gave the author 'more pleasure than anything else he had contrived. It was finished at the beginning of June 1870; and only a week after, the master of the house lay dead.'⁶⁵

Contrary to Gissing's previous practice concerning work on Dickens, he commissioned James Pinker to negotiate terms with the editor of *Literature* for the author's personal view of the novelist for the periodical's Dickens issue of December 1901.⁶⁶ The essay, entitled 'Dickens in Memory,' was reprinted as the first chapter of the dual publications *Critical Studies of the Work of Charles Dickens* and *The Immortal Dickens*. In addition Gissing returned briefly to the field of journalism, when approached by the editor of *The Times* to review Swinburne's article on Dickens and Kitton's *Life of Dickens*. The articles were published in the *Literary Supplement* on 25 July and 15 August 1902 respectively.⁶⁷

Gissing's last major contribution to Dickens' criticism was written at the behest of Chapman and Hall. Initially it was suggested that the author should write a new *Life of Dickens* based on Forster's biography, but because he was

⁶⁵ *Homes and Haunts of Famous Authors*, p. 120.

⁶⁶ *Gissing's Writings on Dickens*, p. 9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

living in France by this time, which meant he would incur considerable difficulty in obtaining research material, he successfully negotiated a compromise with the publishers to write an abridged version of Forster's *Life of Dickens*, which was published in October 1902 as *The Life of Dickens. Forster and Gissing*.⁶⁸ Never wholly comfortable about truncating the acclaimed work, Gissing confessed to Bertz:

To tell you the truth, I felt a good deal of hesitation about cutting down such a biography as Forster's; it savours of philistinism. But people do not read the book nowadays, calling it too long. And, if I had not undertaken the task, someone else might have done it far less reverently.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ pp. 10-11.

⁶⁹ p. 11; *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Volume Nine : 1902 – 1903, eds., P. F. Mattheisen, A. C. Young and P. Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1997), p. 15.

CHAPTER NINE

A Victim of Circumstances

Gissing's timely third attempt to break into the field of short fiction coincided with a massive increase in the number of periodicals available to the reading public, the consequence of which was an unprecedented demand for short stories. In *The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre* (1986), Harold Orel suggests that the reason for this upsurge of interest in short fiction in the late nineteenth century was threefold: the broadening of the educational base as a result of the Education Act, 1870, which made school attendance compulsory; the mechanisation of printing; and the development of mass-circulation periodicals specialising in fiction.¹ As in 1877 when, since no periodical had survived the combined effects of the Chicago fire of 1871 and the 1873 depression, Gissing looked to the city's newspapers to provide an outlet for his talent, he now seized the opportunity presented by the influx of cheap periodicals targeted at the lower-middle and working classes.² The writer's first offering, 'A Victim of Circumstances,' was readily accepted by *Blackwood's Magazine* in November 1891, but as previously noted, publication was withheld until January 1893. Gissing's involvement with the short fiction market began in earnest, when, on 30 March 1893, he noted in his diary: 'Letter from Editor of *Illustrated English Magazine* asking for a short story "like the Bank Holiday scene in 'Nether

¹ Harold Orel, *The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 184.

² *Lost Stories from America*, p. 5.

World”’. Replied that I would write something.’³ After a shaky start, quickly abandoned, ‘Lou and Liz’ was completed in two days, and was published in *The English Illustrated Magazine* in August 1893.⁴ In accordance with the editor’s suggestion, the story contained a riotous bank holiday scene not dissimilar to that at the Crystal Palace in *The Nether World*.

Thereafter, demand for the author’s short stories grew steadily year on year to a point where it began to severely limit the time available for his larger fiction. Consequently, there developed a serious conflict between Gissing’s desire for critical recognition as a novelist and the need to write moneymaking fiction in order to support his family, thus rendering him a victim of his own success. Signs of this looming dilemma occurred almost immediately, when, in addition to ‘Lou and Liz’ the author produced eight further stories between July and September 1893, while trying at the same time to work on his latest novel, ‘Miss Lord of Camberwell.’⁵ A frustrated diary entry dated 3 October 1893 speaks volumes: ‘In evening began – for the how-manyeth time? – “Miss Lord of Camberwell”, and wrote 2pp.’⁶

Of the nine stories written between April and September 1893, ‘A Lodger in Maze Pond’ is one of the most interesting because of the ambiguity surrounding the sincerity of Gissing’s claim that Shergold is ‘my own silly self.’⁷ Harvey Munden, the *raisonneur* of the tale, adopts the role of mentor to the distressed

³ *Diary*, p. 300.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 301-2.

⁵ ‘Fleet-footed Hester’, ‘His Brother’s Keeper’, ‘A Capitalist’, ‘A Lodger in Maze Pond’, ‘The Day of Silence’, ‘Our Mr Jupp’, ‘Under an Umbrella’ and ‘The Muse of the Halls.’

⁶ *Diary*, p. 317.

⁷ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 6, p. 238.

protagonist, in some measure echoing the relationship between Gissing and Morley Roberts. Roberts had done his utmost to persuade his friend to end his affair with Nell Harrison, and later to leave her when the marriage became intolerable, and in *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* Roberts observes that Gissing himself predicted the disastrous outcome of his second marriage in *New Grub Street*, which was published barely two months after his marriage to Edith Underwood.⁸ Unlike Reardon, however, who, in *New Grub Street*, ruefully suggests that instead of marrying into his own class, he should 'have looked about for some simple, kind-hearted work-girl,' Shergold is from the outset drawn to women of lower rank. 'A Lodger in Maze Pond,' focuses on both Shergold's 'incessant hunger for a woman's sympathy and affection' which places him 'at the mercy of the silliest, vulgarest creature' and his inability to relate to women of his own class:

I stand in awe of refined women. I am their equal I know; I can talk with them; their society is an exquisite delight to me; - but when it comes to thinking of intimacy with one of them—! ... Perhaps I have come to regard myself as doomed to life on a lower level. I find it an impossible thing to imagine myself offering marriage – making love – to a girl such as those I meet in the big houses.⁹

On hearing of the imminent death of Shergold's uncle and benefactor, Munden calls to congratulate his friend on his forthcoming inheritance. Aware of the young man's ruinous marriage to a shop girl, Munden is slightly troubled by the familiarity with which the landlady's daughter discusses his friend. His concern turns to alarm when, on his second visit, the girl informs him that Shergold is to marry her. When the young man admits that out of a misguided sense of responsibility towards the girl he has foolishly misled, he has offered marriage,

⁸ *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, pp. 27, 43 and 181-2.

⁹ *New Grub Street*, p. 404; *The House of Cobwebs*, p. 260.

Munden takes control of the situation by persuading Shergold to accompany him to Europe. Two weeks later however, the threat of legal action and public humiliation, combined with an already tortured conscience, sends Shergold scurrying back to England. Shortly afterwards Munden receives a letter telling of his friend's imminent marriage and proposed world voyage; a few months later he hears the sad news of the young man's squalid, unheroic death.

Despite Gissing's admission that Shergold is 'my own silly self,' the similarities between the author and the anti-hero of 'A Lodger in Maze Pond' are largely superficial. Certainly, like Shergold, Gissing was of high intellect and enjoyed the company of refined women, Mrs Gaussen, Mrs Harrison and Clara Collet being three that spring immediately to mind, and, again like Shergold, he endured two unhappy marriages to women of low rank, but in terms of moral strength the writer and the fictional character were dramatically different. In contrast to the author's uncompromising attitude towards culture and life, Shergold, though finely wrought, is but a man of straw, lacking the firm resolve of Gissing, and thus destined to be a hapless victim:

It was not cheerful, the life-story of Henry Shergold. At two-and-twenty he found himself launched upon the world, with a university education incomplete and about forty pounds in his pocket. ... A year later there came one fateful day when he announced ... that he was going to be married.¹⁰

His bride-to-be was 'a tall, pale, unhealthy girl of eighteen,' who served in a tobacconist's shop.¹¹ As predicted, the marriage was a disaster, driving Shergold to attempted suicide and temporary separation from his wife. The couple's reunion, based on Mrs Shergold's belief that her husband would inherit his uncle's

¹⁰ *The House of Cobwebs*, p.248.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 248.

fortune, results in the withdrawal of his benefactor's financial support and his subsequent abandonment of a law degree. After seven years of misery his wife dies in a sordid accident. Free, and again heir apparent, Shergold becomes a medical student and, due to his intriguing history, the darling of female society. Yet, with all going so well for him he is unable to resist the temptation to toy with the servant girl's affections, or the pangs of conscience that force him to honour his proposal. In this respect Shergold has much in common with the protagonists of 'The Fate of Humphrey Snell' and 'The Salt of the Earth,' both of whom know that they are being shamefully manipulated, yet both accept their role as pawns in a cynical game.

Interestingly, Robert Selig's recent article on 'A Lodger' also questions some critics' ready acceptance of its autobiographical content.¹² In his view the story reveals more about Gissing's creativity than biographical detail:

... any particular approach that fits Gissing's fiction into his life like a hand within a glove under estimates the breadth of his imaginative capacity.¹³

'The Day of Silence' is one of the finest tales from the first year of Gissing's short story renaissance. Though undeniably bleak, 'The Day of Silence' is not without humour, tenderness and irony, while its compassionate conclusion is a masterstroke that goes far in tempering the grim reality of an appalling family tragedy. The Burdens are a working class couple with one much-loved son. Although poor, the family enjoy a loving relationship, and it is a matter of regret to both parents that they have little time to spare for their son. The weather had

¹² Robert Selig, 'The Biographical-Critical Circle: "A Lodger in Maze Pond,"' *The Gissing Journal*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1 (January, 2002), pp. 25-30.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

been perfect for a week, so, as a special Saturday treat, Solomon decides to take Billy rowing on the river, his friend 'Four-half' Pollock to provide the boat. Pollock had earned the name 'Four-half' as a result of his drinking habits, and sure enough a large jar of ale accompanied him on the boat. A highly amusing drinking session ensues: unused to strong drink Billy soon 'began to show the effect of it' and 'lay back in the stern, laughing to himself' and staring fixedly at the sky.¹⁴

As the afternoon grew warmer, the men decided to swim. Solomon went first, leaving 'Four-half' to look after the boy. Drowsy from the drink and the sun, Pollock recklessly persuades Billy to slip into the water while holding on to his hands. All was well until Solomon spotted his son; in the scramble to get the boy back on board, Pollock tumbled into the water and in panic overturned the boat:

Billy was being wafted down the river. Once or twice his little head appeared above the water, and his arms were flung up. The desperate father came onwards, but slowly ... from the drowning child there came no sound.

An alarm was given.

Too late, save for the rescue of Jem Pollock. Burden ... was not far from the place where his child had gone down for the last time; with ordinary command of his strength and skill he might have easily kept afloat until help neared him; but he sank. Only his lifeless body was recovered.

And Billy – poor little chap – disappeared altogether.¹⁵

Throughout these harrowing passages one can only think of the sorrow awaiting the mother on her return from a gruelling day's work. But Gissing is merciful; having already planted the idea that she is desperately ill, the author allows her to die peacefully in a churchyard, her slight uneasiness over Pollock's insobriety

¹⁴ *The Day of Silence*, p. 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.23.

lulled by the knowledge that Solomon would ensure that no harm came to their beloved son. When Pollock calls at the Burden house to tell of the tragedy, there is no one there to receive the dreadful news: 'In the little home there was silence.'¹⁶

'The Day of Silence' is one of Gissing's most poignant stories, full of sunlight and roisterous humour, yet the day is too joyful, pregnant throughout with impending disaster. Nevertheless, the tone is uplifting, focusing on a family whose happiness endures despite their grinding poverty, effectively countering the notion in many of the author's stories, that impoverishment breeds conflict and resentment. Further, in line with the overall style, the irony is tender and merciful, allowing the mother to die thinking of her son 'enjoying himself up the river.'¹⁷

'The Muse of the Halls,' written in response to Shorter's request for a Christmas story for his *English Illustrated Magazine* and surprisingly, bearing in mind its topicality, the only story of the above mentioned nine not to be reprinted in subsequent collections; an unaccountable omission, not least because, at a deeper level, the tale is a light-hearted satire on Gissing's own battle with high and low culture. Denis Bryant, the hero of the story, is a composer dedicated to producing serious music, yet his work does not sell. Against his better judgment he is persuaded to adapt an aria from his abandoned opera into a popular song, and to his chagrin the piece becomes a huge success:

Now that the temptation to follow up his success proved irresistible, he was mortified by discovering with what facility he could turn out the kind of article demanded by musical commerce ... Denis spent many an hour of gloomy self-

¹⁶ p. 24.

¹⁷ p. 24.

contempt. He felt that it was all over for him as a serious composer; he would be tinkled into notoriety, perhaps into fortune. Well, the fortune he could do with.¹⁸

Throughout his career Gissing waged a constant battle between his desire to produce only worthy literature and his gift for story telling, which provided a better income, because, like Denis, 'the fortune he could do with.' In addition the story articulates the frustrations experienced by the author in his dealings with Shorter through Bryant's reaction to the publishers' agent's offer of 'a five-pound note for the copyright.' Unlike Gissing, who allowed Shorter to acquire outright ownership of his stories, Bryant had no intention of conceding his rights: 'Bright and Airlie would publish ... Denis Bryant ... would retain the copyright.'¹⁹

Returning to his theme in *New Grub Street*, which seeks to expose the commercialisation of literature, in 'The Muse of the Halls' Gissing addresses the issue from the point of view of Hilda Paget, who, like the novel's anti-hero Jasper Milvain, adopts the attitude that culture impedes the march of progress, and believes that since art has become the province of the multitude, it is in her interests to exploit the market: 'Everybody, in every kind of art, is beginning to play to the gallery. We have to be democratic, or starve.'²⁰ Another interesting feature of 'The Muse of the Halls', is that it generated an idea that became a dominant theme in Gissing's later novel, *The Whirlpool*. In the wake of her father's financial collapse and suicide, Alma Frothingham determines to become a professional violinist, but 'Alma had no profound love of the art,' rather she was beguiled by dreams of public adulation; for her:

¹⁸ George Gissing, 'The Muse of the Halls,' *The English Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. II, Xmas 1893), pp. 318-9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

²⁰ p. 314.

music was not an end in itself. ... So much had she pretended and posed, so much had she struggled with mere manual difficulties, so much lofty cant and sounding hollowness had she talked, that the name of her art was grown a weariness, a disgust.²¹

From the outset Alma's reckless pursuit of fame exposes her to situations beyond her control and ultimately leads to her death from an overdose of laudanum.

Because Hilda Paget's attitude towards life is of a more practical nature, she is in no danger of losing her grip on reality. Her benchmark for success is financially rather than celebrity based, so, in response to public demand, she wholeheartedly embraces popular culture. Nevertheless, when her disapproving fiancé proves to be more successful than herself in the field of low art, she somewhat triumphantly accepts his insistence that she quit the music hall:

Send me a written confession that *you were wrong when you said I was a failure*, and it shall be as you please.²²

'The Muse of the Halls' is a typical example of Gissing's recycling technique, borrowing and lending in order to present an alternative point of view. For instance, while *New Grub Street* is principally concerned with the trials and tribulations of writers who lack the capacity to adapt to the modern literary world, 'The Muse of the Halls' focuses on the hero's ability to compromise. Initially, Denis Bryant is as reactionary as is Edwin Reardon in the novel, but consequent upon his commercial success he rapidly becomes a Jasper Milvain. Similarly, when the theme of 'The Muse of the Halls' is recycled in *The Whirlpool*, Gissing addresses the issue from the point of view of egoism rather than pragmatism.

²¹ George Gissing, *The Whirlpool* (1897; Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1977), pp. 245-6.

²² 'The Muse of the Halls,' p. 322.

As already noted, Gissing had become aware that Shorter was underpaying him for his work, so when a further three stories were requested he wrote to the editor on the issue of payment, indicating that he should receive twelve guineas for publication of a story '*alone*;' for 'all world serial rights' the figure should be 'half as much again.'²³ In December, having received no reply to his letter, Gissing confronted the editor in person, and surprisingly, in view of their somewhat brusque discussion, was asked to undertake a serial for the *Illustrated London News*, and, later that day, received a request for six more stories at twelve guineas each for the British rights alone. In the meantime, irritated by Shorter's initial silence on the matter, the author decided to contact literary agent William Morris Colles of the Authors' Syndicate, through whose services he hoped to discover his 'price in the market.'²⁴ Heartened by Colles' assurance that his work should fetch three guineas per thousand words, Gissing left five stories for the agent's attention.²⁵

In October Gissing recommenced work on 'Miss Lord of Camberwell,' but his plans were again frustrated by a request from Shorter to write six short stories for his *English Illustrated Magazine*, which were completed by December 1893.²⁶ From New Year's Day he worked exclusively on 'Miss Lord' until 13 April 1894, when he noted in his diary '*finished my interminable novel*,' published later that year as *In the Year of Jubilee*.²⁷

²³ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 143.

²⁴ *Diary*, p. 316.

²⁵ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 146. The stories comprised 'The Day of Silence,' 'A Capitalist,' 'A Lodger in Maze Pond,' 'Under an Umbrella' and 'His Brother's Keeper'.

²⁶ 'The Poet's Portmanteau,' 'The Pessimist of Plato Road,' 'A Midsummer Madness,' 'The Honeymoon,' 'Comrades in Arms' and 'In Honour Bound' were published in *The English Illustrated Magazine* between June 1894 and April 1895.

²⁷ *Diary*, p. 335.

‘A Midsummer Madness,’ was Gissing’s second Christmas story for Shorter, and like ‘The Muse of the Halls,’ it too has not been reprinted, its preoccupation with drunkenness perhaps considered too vulgar for inclusion in one of the subsequent collections. Although ten years had passed since the publication of ‘Phoebe,’ from which every reference to drink had been excised, insobriety was still, to some editors, a taboo subject. In fact ‘Simple Simon’ was similarly bowdlerised when it appeared as ‘Vegetarianism v. Love. The Story of Simple Simon’ in *The Harmsworth Magazine* in December 1900, even though, as ‘Simple Simon,’ it had appeared unexpurgated in *The Idler* in 1896. Clearly Shorter was as untroubled as Gissing by the story’s questionable morality, whereas the compilers of the collections assuredly were. Neither ‘Simple Simon,’ nor ‘A Freak of Nature,’ a third example of editorial intervention, have been included in subsequent collections, and ‘Phoebe’ had to wait until 1938 before again appearing in print, the offensive passages still expunged.²⁸

‘A Midsummer Madness’ is a cautionary tale about a group of people who allow an evening’s entertainment to get out of hand. Unable to sleep as a result of a rowdy party taking place in the flat below, the narrator tries to escape the din by retreating to the roof of the building. Being fairly well acquainted with his usually peaceful neighbours, he is mystified by their disorderly behaviour. Scarcely has his annoyance begun to abate when he is joined on the roof by the noisy revellers, and the mystery is quickly solved – Mr Hague, the tenant of the flat, is away on business, and in his absence Lotty Hague and her party have picked up a motley crew of ne’er-do-wells on their way back from the theatre. Among the group is

²⁸ ‘Phoebe’ is the opening story in *George Gissing: Stories & Sketches*, published by Michael Joseph Ltd in 1938.

Mrs Hague's sister, who seems strangely withdrawn from the rest of the party, though, like them, she has had far too much to drink. Suddenly there is a commotion, and Lotty Hague leaps on to the parapet, the far side of which is a sheer drop. As the woman turns towards the void, the narrator is horrified when, as he attempts to avert certain disaster, Lotty's sister Gertie, catches his arm. Gertie's fiancé eventually saves Lotty, and in so doing prompts a violent outburst from the sister:

Indescribable the scene that followed. Mrs. Hague was in violent hysterics, shrieking I know not what frenzied words. Her sister, scarcely less clamorous, strove to tear her out of Billing's arms; on both him and her she dealt vigorous blows.²⁹

In view of the sisters' extraordinary behaviour, the narrator senses that there is more to the present situation than a drunken orgy.

When, after having rid themselves of the hangers-on, the group are safely back in Lotty's flat, Gertie continues to hurl abuse at her fiancé and distressed sister:

Tom, you're a villain! You're a black-hearted villain! It's been going on all night. I saw it from the first. Leave her alone! Stand away! – Oh, she's a beast, a beast, a beast – I'll let her husband know. I'll write to him this very moment.³⁰

While Billings sets out to find a doctor, Gertie begins to write her vengeful letter. Leaving Lotty pleading with her sister, the narrator wanders into the dining room, 'where the table, with its decanters and empty bottles, showed how a simple supper had ended in noise, and melodramatic discord.'³¹ On Billings' return, the narrator takes him to his flat, where the unfortunate man explains that his relationship with Gertie was one of entanglement rather than love, and that he had

²⁹ George Gissing, 'A Midsummer Madness,' *The English Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. XII (December, 1894), p. 58.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³¹ p. 60

allowed it to continue out of fear of a legal action for breach of promise. Now, he was determined that the engagement should end.

When, a day or two later, the narrator next meets Lotty, he is troubled to find that her behaviour is still unstable. She tells him that she has several times been up to the roof with suicide in mind. It seems that Gertie has not yet written her malevolent letter, but if Lotty makes any attempt to see her husband she is intent upon carrying out her threat. Suddenly the woman asks "Do you think ... that Mr. Billings will marry Gertie - now?" In the question, the narrator detects a certain sense of regret: 'I could not be mistaken. A pang of some kind went through her.'³² Mrs. Hague had clearly not been an innocent victim of the recent debacle; rather it had been a case of 'when the cat's away, the mice will play.' Nevertheless, she is finally persuaded that instead of awaiting her husband's return, she should go to him immediately and tell her side of the story. It is some two years before the narrator learns that his advice had been successful and is gratified to be told 'I owe you so many, many thanks -'³³

'A Midsummer Madness' is interesting in that, despite the fact that Lotty's plight is treated sympathetically, Gissing does not shy away from the possibility that she was to some degree at fault by provoking her sister's jealousy, and it also leaves the reader with a sense that the heroine does not emerge unscathed from the experience; her searching question suggests that her interest in Billings was not entirely platonic.

³² p. 62.

³³ p. 63.

Gissing used a similar beginning for the later 'At Nightfall,' yet another story overlooked in subsequent collections. The piece opens to the contrasting silence of a sickroom and the strains of a singing voice and accompanying piano; a muted echo of the earlier piece, where the narrator's bedroom is flooded with the sound of raucous music. As in 'A Midsummer Madness,' a man's personal space is invaded by music coming from the flat below, but here the inference is not that of selfish disregard of the feelings of others, but rather an insistence that life goes on. Interestingly, this notion is immediately turned on its head as, after learning of the death of a noted adulterer, the dying man relates to his nurse the tale of his unrequited love for the man's wronged wife, who had in the past refused to sacrifice her moral beliefs for transitory happiness. Although, as he lies close to death, he is comforted by the knowledge that he had not forced her to live against her conscience, for him life has not gone on; he has been locked in a past of bitterness and regret:

The very last time I saw her I railed and raged at her like a madman. I called her a hypocrite ... I talked like a ruffian – mad as I was with need of her. I felt as men must feel when they have killed women they loved – just like that, a hypocrite! And she the noblest, frankest face I ever looked on. ... It seemed such accursed folly. A woman, still young and childless, her husband living with someone else, and me with money enough, with pluck enough for anything!³⁴

Colles sold 'At Nightfall' to the American *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* for the princely sum of sixty-five dollars but despite the agent's assurances to the contrary, it failed to attract the English market.³⁵

Of the six stories written for Shorter in December 1893, 'The Pessimist of Plato Road' ranks highly as a swingeing satire on hypocrisy. Philip Dolamore, a

³⁴ George Gissing, 'At Nightfall,' *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, LXV (May 1900), p. 799.

³⁵ *Diary*, p. 514.

self-styled student of philosophy, resides in the imposingly named Plato Road, a fitting place for a young man of culture to indulge his passion for ‘books – not novels [...]’.³⁶ His landlady, suspicious at first of her eccentric lodger’s intentions towards her daughters, gradually overcomes her distrust to the extent that she accepts him as a prospective son-in-law. Evelyn’s attraction to Philip is based solely on his intellectual superiority, a fact which he repeatedly stresses through quotations from the poets and references to philosophical works: “‘Schoppenhaw’ is a German philosopher ... I read him in an English translation, but only because the original is too expensive.”³⁷ However, as the narrator reveals, the young pretender has only a smattering of poetry, and knows no foreign language; in fact, in view of his mangled pronunciation, his knowledge of the spoken word leaves much to be desired. Gissing uses this technique of garbled foreign pronunciation to undermine the pompous hypocrite. In ‘One Farthing Damages,’ for instance, Slythorpe refers to his ruthless scheme to force Mary Hope into marriage as a ‘*roose d’amour*,’ while in *In the Year of Jubilee*, Samuel Barmby’s comment ‘Carlyle and Gurty! Yes, Carlyle and Gurty; those two authors are an education in themselves,’ exposes the young man’s total lack of said education.³⁸

As a devotee of Schopenhauerean philosophy, Dolamore, of course, purports to embrace the pessimistic creed, the meaning of which he is delighted to explain to Evelyn: ‘A pessimist is one who sees through all the illusions of life. Pessimism teaches one to renounce the desire of life.’³⁹ Although Evelyn expresses a genuine interest in the pessimistic doctrine, it has no tangible effect on her life

³⁶ *A Victim of Circumstances*, p. 168.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

³⁸ *Lost Stories from America*, p. 159; *In the Year of Jubilee*, p. 58.

³⁹ *A Victim of Circumstances*, p. 171.

until Mrs Byles insists that until Dolamore marries her daughter, he must leave the house. Thus ensues a chain of events from which Evelyn barely escapes with her life, and Dolamore is exposed as a cowardly fraud. In a bid for notoriety, Dolamore compiles a letter to the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, informing him that he intends to commit suicide: 'As a student of philosophy, I claim the right to put an end to my life.'⁴⁰ On reading the letter, Evelyn insists on joining her lover in a suicide pact. Keeping faith with her commitment, the girl takes the fatal dose, only to discover that through Dolamore's ineptitude, instead of death she merely experiences the discomfort of a violent emetic. Meantime, unable finally to emulate the Schopenhauerean ideal, the would-be philosopher disappears into hiding, from which he emerges a chastened man.

For all he knew, Evelyn Byles was dead; and he could not easily forget that the prolongation of his own days in this miserable world was due merely to a craven disloyalty at the moment when he went to post his letter to *The Daily Telegraph*.⁴¹

The reason why Gissing allowed Dolamore to escape the consequences of his cowardice, is possibly related an extract from his *American Notebook*: 'Consistency in a bad or foolish course is *not* meritorious. I had rather a man who preaches an absurd doctrine and violates it in practice, than one who is consistent in following such a course.'⁴² Some ten years prior to writing 'The Pessimist of Plato Road,' the author's 'The Hope of Pessimism' was a gross violation of his commitment to the Positivist movement.

The theme of the pretentious upstart whose delusions of grandeur inevitably end in crushing defeat, recurs many times in Gissing's stories, for instance 'Our

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 180.

⁴¹ p. 183.

⁴² *American Notebook*, p. 21.

Mr Jupp,' 'The Foolish Virgin,' 'The Firebrand,' 'The Hapless Boaster,' 'The Scrupulous Father' and 'A Daughter of the Lodge.' Most notably, the psychological implications of this common phenomenon are explored in depth in *Born in Exile* and *Our Friend the Charlatan* (1901).

After completing *In the Year of Jubilee*, Gissing was busy until mid 1894 writing *Eve's Ransom*, the novella that he had promised to Shorter for serialisation in the *Illustrated London News*. However, by September he was again producing short stories, seven of which were completed in a month.⁴³ By this time the author's short fiction had acquired a quality of style and tone that indicates a significant refinement of the author's technical skill. In each story, the brevity and economy of the pared-down narrative traces only the pertinent impressions of an unobtrusive observer. As Emanuela Ettorre suggests in her article "'The Salt of the Earth' and the Ethics of Self-Denial," the form of the short story allowed a writer to break free from conventional narrative schemes,' thus enabling Gissing, while still tied to the traditional three-volume novel, to experiment in the field of short fiction by adopting new techniques, such as 'a shorter narrative and a richly suggestive and allusive style.'⁴⁴

'The Salt of the Earth' demonstrates Gissing's increased confidence in his ability to produce attention-holding realistic fiction. The story is about a lonely man, whose many acquaintances represent a poor substitute for friendship. Thomas Bird is an anonymous figure, 'there was nothing to distinguish him from

⁴³ 'Simple Simon,' 'Their Pretty Ways,' 'The Tyrant's Apology,' 'The Fate of Humphrey Snell,' 'The Salt of the Earth' and 'An Inspiration.' 'A Merry Wooing' was completed but not published.

⁴⁴ Emanuela Ettorre, "'The Salt of the Earth' and the Ethics of Self-Denial,' *The Gissing Journal*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3 (July, 1995), p.22.

hundreds of rather shabby clerks,' but for many his very existence is essential to their well-being.⁴⁵ In a sense, Bird is a philanthropist, whose money seems to burn a hole in his pocket until it reaches the eager hands of those who would take it from him, but for all that he is an unsung, and for the most part an unwilling, hero. Despite this failing, Bird is an optimist, and as usual on his monthly payday his thoughts turn to how he might spend his hard-earned money. On this particular evening he is undecided as to whether to buy a hat or a new pair of boots, both of which are in need of replacement:

Living economically as he did, it should have been a simple matter to resolve the doubt by purchasing both articles. But, for one reason or another, Thomas seldom had a surplus over the expenses of his lodgings; in practice he found it very difficult to save a sovereign for other needs.⁴⁶

Bird's problem is that he cannot refuse a friend in need. His first encounter on the homeward journey is with Mr Warbeck, who shamefacedly asks for a further loan to add to his soaring total: 'I'm completely ashamed of myself. Entirely temporary ... A cheque on Wednesday at latest.'⁴⁷ Walking on, feeling somewhat crestfallen at the thought of Mr Warbeck's obvious financial difficulties, Bird next meets Mrs Pritchard, 'a gadabout infected with philanthropy,' who begs a donation for a charitable cause.⁴⁸ Another florin disappears, and then, when he reaches his lodgings, he contributes a shilling to his landlady's son for doing well at his work. Once again his purchasing power has dwindled to nothing.

That Bird's generosity goes unappreciated is clearly demonstrated through his relationship with the Warbecks. After parting with the last of his spare money, the young man sets out in response to a request from Mrs Warbeck to call on her that

⁴⁵ *The House of Cobwebs*, p. 266.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁴⁷ p. 268.

⁴⁸ p. 269.

evening, more than a little disturbed as to the significance of the summons. In a voice that suggests he is regarded as a trusted friend, she informs her visitor that as her daughter is to marry a well-to-do businessman, for the girl's sake it would be preferable if he no longer came to the house. Although devastated by the news – Bird had long been in love with Alma – he is relieved that his fears that the meeting concerned Warbeck's debt were unfounded. Thus ended Bird's friendship with the family; clearly, as he concludes from Warbeck's open manner at a later encounter, the relationship had been too insignificant to merit discussion between husband and wife, paradoxically though, Bird 'found comfort in the assurance that Mrs. Warbeck had kept *her* secret as the borrower kept *his*.'⁴⁹

The tragedy for Bird is that his generosity is never reciprocated. From his position as a perpetual outsider, he recognises his weakness, yet sees it as a mixed blessing; it made him feel 'better at heart,' but nevertheless he 'blamed himself ... knowing not that such as he are the salt of the earth.'⁵⁰ Gissing speaks of the joys of giving in *Henry Ryecroft*:

It is a pleasant thing enough to be able to spend a little money without fear when the desire for some indulgence is strong upon one; but how much pleasanter the ability to give money away! Greatly as I relish the comforts of my wonderful new life, no joy it has brought me equals that of coming in aid to another's necessity.⁵¹

At the end of 1894, Gissing received a letter from Jerome K Jerome, editor of *To-Day*, asking for a portrait for inclusion in the magazine's review of *In the Year of Jubilee*.⁵² At a meeting the following day, Jerome requested a series of

⁴⁹ p. 276.

⁵⁰ p. 277.

⁵¹ *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, p. 230.

⁵² *Diary*, p. 356.

sketches about commonplace London types. Gissing quickly got to work on 'The Friend in Need' and 'A Drug in the Market,' both of which were forwarded to the editor for approval, but his output was then interrupted by a more pressing demand from Fisher Unwin, to produce a one-volume novel for their Autonym series.⁵³ The remaining four sketches were completed by the end of March, to be published as 'Nobodies at Home' during May and June 1895.⁵⁴

The sketches are short, each not more than one thousand words, and intended to depict 'very commonplace people in such a manner as to present *their own view* of themselves & of the world.'⁵⁵ The most thought provoking of the series is undoubtedly 'A Drug in the Market,' which begins with the story's protagonist experiencing, as he reads his newspaper, a curious sense of solace in the phrase 'no man is indispensable,' since it reinforces his own view of himself as 'the least regarded of mortals.'⁵⁶ Although a man of substance, Mr Potter has no self-esteem; he considers himself of no account either to his employers or his wife and family, and as such a mere 'drug in the market.' However, being viewed as a calculating machine by his employers and treated as a beast of burden by his wife, has gradually turned Potter's customary resignation into mounting resolve: 'If his wife died, why, then he would at once emerge from insignificance, and enter upon a life of comparative dignity.'⁵⁷ Because, both at work and at home, his existence is one of drudgery and discontent, Potter is given to bouts of fantasy over how this might come about. The menacing tenor of his thoughts is almost tangible:

⁵³ George Gissing, *Sleeping Fires* (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1895; Hassocks: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1974).

⁵⁴ 'Of Good Address,' 'By the Kerb,' 'Humble Felicity' and 'A Man of Leisure.'

⁵⁵ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 280.

⁵⁶ *Stories & Sketches*, p. 255.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

Suppose her annual bronchitis were to carry her off this coming winter? It was possible, and every possibility of his narrow life had a thousand times revolved before him. This one, resisted yet recurrent, threatened to become his nightly familiar.⁵⁸

And it will happen, by fair means or foul, because as the old dictum has it, 'no man is indispensable.'⁵⁹ In Potter, Gissing pinpoints the psychological ramifications attributable to the persistent undermining of human dignity.

The demand for Gissing's short fiction increased considerably after Walter Besant's article appeared in the January 1895 issue of *The Author*:

In an advertisement of a new periodical, *The Minster*, one observes with some surprise the name of Mr. George Gissing as the contributor of a story. With surprise, not because he ought not to be there, but because this powerful writer has never before, so far as I know, appeared in a serial. I hear now of other magazines which have at last found him out. I have never been able to understand the comparative silence with which the very fine work of this writer has been received.⁶⁰

A few days afterwards, *The Literary World* referred to the article as having started a Gissing 'boom,' and the author was himself moved to thank Besant for having done him 'so important a service.'⁶¹

Evidently this generous endorsement from so respected an author did not go unnoticed, for in June 1895, at a Whitsuntide party held in Aldeburgh, the home of his friend Edward Clodd, Gissing was commissioned by Shorter to write six stories for *The English Illustrated Magazine* and twenty pieces, similar to

⁵⁸ p. 258.

⁵⁹ p. 255.

⁶⁰ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 283, n. 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 283, n. 2; p. 285.

‘Nobodies at Home,’ for *The Sketch*.⁶² Like the Jerome series, each sketch was to be limited to one thousand words, and given a similarly nondescript title.

By June 1895 Gissing was feeling the strain of his many commitments, plainly visible in his letter to Mrs Henry Hick, which contains a daunting list of work pending:

Let me put before you an appalling list of things that have to be done.

- 1) Serial story (only begun) of about 80,000 words.
- 2) Short novel for Cassells, to be sent in by the end of October. Neither begun nor thought of.
- 3) Six short stories for the *English Illustrated* – neither begun nor thought of.
- 4) Twenty papers for the *Sketch* of 1,000 words each. Dimly foreseen.⁶³

Cassells’ short novel, *The Paying Guest*, was in fact written between 27 June and 16 July, an astonishing feat in view of the author’s heavy workload, exacerbated even more by Shorter’s request on 17 October for a further three stories to add to the original six.⁶⁴

Having decided to call his stories for the *English Illustrated Magazine* ‘Great Men in Little Worlds,’ Gissing completed ‘Our Learned Fellow-townsmen,’ the first of the series, only days after his return from Aldeburgh, the remainder being written between mid-June and mid-December 1895. Although initially Shorter requested a series of six tales, only five appeared under the ‘Great Men’ title, published monthly from May to September 1896. The sixth story, ‘The Light on

⁶² ‘The Medicine Man,’ ‘Raw Material,’ ‘Two Collectors,’ ‘An Old Maid’s Triumph,’ ‘The Invincible Curate,’ ‘The Tout of Yarmouth Bridge,’ ‘A Well-Meaning Man,’ ‘A Son of Sixpence,’ ‘A Profitable Weakness,’ ‘The Beggar’s Nurse,’ ‘Transplanted,’ ‘A Parent’s Feelings,’ ‘Lord Dunfield,’ ‘The Little Woman from Lancashire,’ ‘In No-Man’s Land,’ ‘At High Pressure,’ ‘A Conversion,’ ‘A Free Woman,’ ‘A Son of the Soil’ and ‘Out of Fashion’ appeared in *The Sketch* from 9 October 1895 to 18 March 1896; ‘Our Learned Fellow-Townsmen,’ ‘The Justice and the Vagabond,’ ‘The Firebrand,’ ‘The Prize Lodger’ and ‘The Schoolmaster’s Vision’ were published monthly in *The English Illustrated Magazine* between May and September 1896.

⁶³ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, p. 342.

⁶⁴ *Diary*, pp. 378-80; 391.

the Tower' was featured in the January 1897 issue of the magazine as an individual item.

'The Justice and the Vagabond,' previously discussed in juxtaposition with 'By the Kerb,' is primarily a poignant account of unfulfilled dreams, centring on the notion of 'time's wingèd chariot hurrying near'.⁶⁵ The first line of the story registers a warning note that Mr Rutland, a prosperous magistrate and pillar of the community, is not in the best of health. Furthermore, he is troubled by a particularly persistent bout of melancholia, a recurrent form of depression 'which had weighed upon him for many years.'⁶⁶ Despite outward appearances, Rutland is an unhappy man, having felt bound throughout his adult life by the dictates of convention at the expense of personal desire.

On arrival at the magistrate's court, Rutland's attention is drawn towards the man in the dock, whom he dimly recognises from his distant past. It transpires that the two men had been inseparable school friends who had lost contact in the intervening years through dint of circumstance. While for Rutland 'the path of life' had lain 'smooth and pleasant before him,' for Goodeve life had been less predictable but rather more eventful: 'at sixteen he went to sea, and from that day ... had been a cheery vagabond on the face of the earth.'⁶⁷ Paradoxically, of the two men it is Rutland who feels the more deprived; despite his wealth and position he envies the freedom of the vagabond's way of life:

⁶⁵ *Andrew Marvell: The Complete Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (London: Penguin Classics, 1985). Quoted from 'To His Coy Mistress,' p. 51, ln. 22.

⁶⁶ *Human Odds and Ends*, p. 20.

⁶⁷ p. 24.

Back at the magistrate's home, the two men talk over old times and Goodeve's subsequent adventures at sea, laying bare a secret passion for travel that had tormented Rutland since his schooldays:

Ah, you have lived! ... It is you who have been the rich man; I, a miserable pauper! ... You have conquered the world, whilst I have been crouched in my petty corner, playing at life. ... Good God! It maddens me to look back on these thirty years, and contrast my vegetable existence with such a life as yours.⁶⁸

Recognising this plaintive outburst as a cry for help, Goodeve agrees to his friend's impulsive plan that they take an extended trip to South America. Having given the adventurer responsibility for making the necessary arrangements, Rutland sets about putting his affairs in order, a task that occupies the whole of the night and by morning leaves him exhausted. After Goodeve's departure the next day, he potters around the house in feverish anticipation of the coming voyage, but by evening he is feeling decidedly unwell. That night Mr Rutland dies. The story ends in a double irony – the vagabond waits in vain for his friend, finally concluding that at the last moment his friend's courage had failed him; death snuffs out forever the justice's latent spirit of adventure. Throughout his life Rutland had travelled far in his imagination, but public and family responsibilities had prevented his dreams from ever becoming a reality. When he finally did decide to 'seize the day' it was too late. As Gissing wrote to H G Wells: 'In "Justice & Vagabond" you will notice that the man's death is prepared for in the first sentence: the thing is a bit of irony – things postponed till too late – energy at the useless moment.'⁶⁹

⁶⁸ p. 30.

⁶⁹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 7, p. 116.

Despite the fact that the series 'Great Men in Little Worlds' was completed before 'Human Odds and Ends,' the twenty stories commissioned for the *Sketch*, the latter series was the first to be published, appearing weekly between 9 October 1895 and 18 March 1896. All twenty sketches were included in Lawrence and Bullen's collection similarly entitled *Human Odds and Ends*, published in 1897.

'Raw Material,' number two of the *Sketch* series, is a paradoxical tale about a girl who turns the tables on the accepted master/servant relationship. Gissing suffered greatly in consequence of his wife's intolerable behaviour towards their domestic help, to the extent that his work was often interrupted for days while he searched for a replacement for the latest tearful reject. Although the servant of this story is perfectly capable of holding her own in a test of wills, possibly sympathy for the normally defenceless underdog inspired this amusing tale of irrepressible self-confidence.

At her interview Minnie assures Mrs Pool that she is an experienced servant who has been unfortunate in her choice of past employer, consequently she has no references to confirm her claim that she was a lady's maid on very high wages. After the humiliation and unkindness suffered at her last employment, all she wants now is a 'real 'ome' where she would 'work her fingers to the bone for a kind, considerate mistress.'⁷⁰ Newly wed Mrs Pool is inexperienced when it comes to the selection of suitable domestic help, and indeed, having had to dispense with the services of two slovenly servants within the first few months of marriage has done little to increase her discriminatory powers. It is therefore

⁷⁰ *Human Odds and Ends*, p. 184.

relatively easy for Minnie to persuade her prospective mistress that she is just the person to put Mrs Pool's domestic life in order. Although Gissing insists at the end of the story that Minnie emerges butterfly-like from a pupal state, from the outset it is obvious that the raw material of the title more accurately describes the gullible young wife. Within a very few days the position of the two women in the household is virtually reversed, Minnie lazes about all day and stays out late at night, while Mrs Pool finds herself constantly clearing up after the girl's feeble attempts at work. Eventually matters are brought to a head when Minnie returns very late from an evening out somewhat the worse for drink, and even then she very nearly persuades her naïve mistress to give her a second chance. But for the timely intervention of Mr Pool, Minnie would no doubt have had her way. Some six months later Minnie is discovered plying a trade more fitting to her manipulative skills; she had become, as Gissing puts it, 'no longer raw material, but a finished article of commerce.'⁷¹

'A Profitable Weakness,' published midway through the series, treats of the enormous advantages to be gained through the possession of a congenial nature. The narrator of the story, while acknowledging that '[m]en in general owe sustenance to the meaner of their faculties' recalls a singular instance where a man 'found his profit in the cultivation of a mere amiable weakness, without fatigue, and without sense of degradation.'⁷² Unsurprisingly, in view of his distaste for controversy, indolence forms an integral part of Lambert Wellaway's personality. Consequently, on losing his job, the young man feels 'nothing but relief.'⁷³ Having returned to his family home in the country, Wellaway's days pass in

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 190.

⁷² p. 231.

⁷³ p. 232.

blissful idleness until he comes across a stranger painting by a stream. In his usual affable manner, Wellaway praises the man's work, and is astonished at the gratitude his flattery provokes. Introducing himself as Mr Paddy, the stranger cordially invites our hero to run a critical eye over some of his watercolours. Although close examination reveals these to be of little merit, the young man finds it against his nature to destroy his new friend's artistic illusions; instead he heaps lavish praise on the work, which has the pleasing result of an invitation to spend a few days at the artist's small estate in Gloucestershire. The visit lasts for nine years, throughout which time the only service required of Mr Paddy's guest is that of unreserved flattery.

This tale of mutual dependency reveals a distinct shift towards a less cynical view of humanity. Unlike previous stories, which focus mainly on disillusionment and failure, the benign tone of 'A Profitable Weakness' demonstrates how a few white lies can be mutually beneficial without loss of integrity on either side. Secretly, Mr Paddy is fully aware that as an artist he is regarded by his peers as 'a bore of the first magnitude,' consequently their praise has 'little savour for him,' yet '[s]uch a man as Wellaway, educated, well-bred, who could practise adulation without a trace of vulgar obsequiousness, appealed to his very heart.'⁷⁴ And as for Wellaway, he 'never found the position burdensome owing to those happy characteristics of his, the inability to tell a disagreeable truth, and the pleasure he took in pleasing.'⁷⁵ In the ninth year of their relationship Mr Paddy dies, leaving his friend a generous legacy, attributable solely to the cultivation of an 'amiable weakness'.

⁷⁴ p. 236.

⁷⁵ p. 236.

‘Out of Fashion,’ the last story of the series, is an uplifting story of how a man regains his social status and sense of self-worth through the love and understanding of a loyal helpmate. Mr Claxton’s mortification at losing his high-ranking job in the city is nothing to the distress he feels at the thought of breaking the news to his wife. In the event, Mary’s response is sanguine: “Oh, I thought from your face, it was something dreadful!”⁷⁶ Undaunted, Mary adapts happily to her new life in the north of England, and gradually, with his wife’s cheerful encouragement and support, Claxton reaches the point where he can again regard himself as successful businessman. Then disaster strikes for a second time, and Mary, now the mother of three children, once again faces an uncertain future:

... in a strange place, and in poorer circumstances than she had ever known. ... The help of one servant – often enough hindrance rather than help – was all she could now afford.⁷⁷

Because she now had her children to consider, Mary worked harder than she had ever done at ‘shedding the light of home.’⁷⁸ That accomplished, she knew that her next priority lay in restoring her husband’s sense of self-worth:

... evening was sacred. Mary knew that man cannot live by bread alone; not hers to brutalise the bread-winner by denying him his hour of mental rest. She could not play to him – there was no piano; but sometimes she sang’.⁷⁹

A fourth child is born to live only momentarily, leaving its mother near death herself. Eventually, the bad times pass, and, with the love and support of his dutiful wife, Claxton’s fortunes begin to recover, and ‘as the years went by, things needful came to him in larger measure.’⁸⁰ But he had learned his lesson and never again would he put his family’s livelihood in jeopardy. Bearing in mind Mary’s

⁷⁶ p. 304.

⁷⁷ p. 306.

⁷⁸ p. 307.

⁷⁹ p. 306.

⁸⁰ p. 307.

ability to reconcile herself to adverse conditions and Claxton's ultimate acceptance of a relatively modest lifestyle, there is an unmistakable anti-materialistic message resonating throughout the story.

'Out of Fashion' is a fitting conclusion to the series, the last paragraph seeming to encapsulate what the author meant by the term 'human odds and ends':

She sits there, with thin face, with silent-smiling lips, type of a vanishing virtue. Wife, housewife, mother – shaken by the harsh years, but strong and peaceful in her perfect womanhood. An old-fashioned figure, out of harmony with the day that rules, and to our so modern eyes, perhaps the oddest of the whole series of human odds and ends.⁸¹

There is a tender passage in *Henry Ryecroft* that tells of the aging writer's changed attitude towards the heart and the mind, which in a sense is all about gentle souls like Mary Claxton:

Foolishly arrogant as I was, I used to judge the worth of a person by his intellectual power and attainment. I could see no good where there was no logic, no charm where there was no learning. Now I think that one has to distinguish between two forms of intelligence, that of the brain, and that of the heart, and I have come to regard the second as by far the more important. ... assuredly the best people I have known were saved from folly not by the intellect but by the heart.⁸²

In a letter to H G Wells thanking him for his comments on two short stories, Gissing wrote:

As for "Out of Fashion," why, you & I differ to a certain extent on the one great subject. Of course I have bungled what I meant; but the sentiment is ingrained in me, & will outstand every assault of humour.⁸³

Although he never reverted to the sentimental idealism of the women portrayed in his early artists' stories, Gissing still liked to incorporate into his texts the odd

⁸¹ p. 308.

⁸² *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, p. 48.

⁸³ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 7, p. 116; p. 117, n.2, suggests that the 'one great subject' is the 'woman question.'

paragon of womanly virtue. Mrs Orgreave is wholly responsible for rescuing Shacklewell from a life of vagrancy in 'The Elixir,' while Mrs Morton stands in sharp contrast to the many disaffected women who adorn the pages of *The Whirlpool*.

In December 1895, Gissing finally resolved to concentrate his mind on a serious novel:

... I have put an end to all short-story writing for the present. It is now two years since I had a novel ready for publication, & if I do not put aside everything else I fear no new book will ever be done. Seeing that my books yield very little, & journalistic work a fair sum, it is doubtful whether I ought to refuse invitations to write; but there seems to be a fear that my reputation will suffer if I don't presently turn out something solid. So I am taking the serious step of living on capital for a year or so.⁸⁴

Although work commenced immediately on the new novel, the birth of Alfred the following January and Edith's failure to cope with the ensuing domestic upheaval had a detrimental effect on the author's literary output. In the event *The Whirlpool* was not completed until 18 December 1897. Therefore, despite his firm resolve, financial pressure dictated that Gissing should continue to produce short fiction, albeit at a much reduced rate – in 1896 only five stories were written.⁸⁵

Of the five tales, in view of its unusual theme of gender reversal, 'Joseph' is the most deserving of critical attention. The story focuses on the stratagem of a male domestic servant who sets out to outwit his tyrannical mistress. In addition the tale has an interesting history in that, after its initial publication in *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* in May 1896, it remained buried in the newspaper's archives

⁸⁴ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 6, p. 74.

⁸⁵ The five stories written in 1896 comprise 'Joseph,' 'Spellbound,' 'One Way of Happiness,' 'The Hapless Boaster' and 'A Yorkshire Lass.'

for nearly a century as a result of Gissing's agent becoming confused about the number of stories he had undertaken to sell on his client's behalf. It would appear that Colles had been approached in the autumn of 1895 by Thomas Catling, the editor of *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* for a series of stories by various authors. Seemingly he became convinced that he had asked for and received a contribution from Gissing. Having explained to his agent that he knew nothing about a series for Catling, the author reluctantly agreed to produce a story within three months.⁸⁶ In his diary he notes:

In evening got fiercely to work, and wrote 2000 word story for Colles – promised long ago, name “Joseph”. Miserable trash, but had to be done.⁸⁷

According to his letter to Colles, Gissing sent the manuscript of ‘Joseph’ to his agent on 9 March 1896.⁸⁸ Unfortunately the manuscript has not survived, but a revised typescript of the story is understood to be the property of a private collector.⁸⁹

‘Joseph’ centres on one of Gissing's favourite themes about lower-middle class women, whose lack of breeding renders them incapable of maintaining domestic harmony. Perpetually dissatisfied with her lot, Mrs Waterbury despises her husband's genial nature and lack of business acumen, and delights in waging ceaseless war against her unfortunate domestic servants. After six years of suffering this endless conflict, Mr Waterbury is nearing the end of his tether. In desperation, as the latest victim flees from his wife's wrath, Waterbury nervously

⁸⁶ Pierre Coustillas, “‘Joseph’: A Forgotten Gissing Story of the Mid-Nineties,” *The Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1 (January, 1988), p.2.

⁸⁷ *Diary*, p. 405.

⁸⁸ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 6, p. 109.

⁸⁹ “‘Joseph’: A Forgotten Story of the Mid-Nineties,” p. 3.

suggests: ‘Why not get a man – a lad – to do the housework?’⁹⁰ Surprisingly, Mrs Waterbury agrees to the proposal, and out of two hopefuls Joseph, a young man of ‘upright carriage, a soft, discreet step, a fair complexion, and a most ingenuous smile,’ is offered the post.⁹¹ Never before has the household known such peace and tranquillity.

In keeping with her materialistic nature, Mrs Waterbury is an opportunist. Her niece, Caroline, is shortly to inherit a small fortune, so in order not to allow this anticipated windfall to slip through her fingers, she does her utmost to persuade the girl to live with her and her husband, part of her ploy being to extol the virtues of her newly acquired domestic treasure. This turns out to be Mrs Waterbury’s undoing. Curiosity over this paragon leads Caroline to call at the house when her aunt is out. The couple meet, fall in love and make their escape, leaving Mrs Waterbury to mourn the loss of both her potential benefactor and her faithful servant. Once again chaos reigns in the Waterbury household. At the news of the couple’s marriage, all the distraught woman can utter is “‘Oh, you little idiot!’”⁹² As things turned out, who can say whether the reproach is levelled at her niece or herself?

Having spent from September 1897 to April 1898 in Italy, partly for the purpose of writing his first book on Dickens, and partly to satisfy a long held desire to travel through Calabria, it was Spring 1898 before Gissing again turned

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹¹ p. 9.

⁹² p. 14.

his attention to short fiction, when he produced a further six stories.⁹³ By this time however, finding a suitable subject seems to have proved more taxing than in the early nineties. In June 1896 he had agreed to write a six thousand-word piece for *Cosmopolis* for a fee of twenty pounds. Instead of the usual couple of days, 'A Yorkshire Lass' took eight days to write, the author having made four abortive attempts before achieving completion:

Wed. June 3. ... evening thought over story for *Cosmopolis*.

Thursd. June 4. ... Wrote 1½p. of short story, but it wont do; have a better idea to go at to-morrow.

Frid. June 5. ... Worked hard all morning, but after it all again found the thing futile. In evening began a third attempt, "Twin Souls", and wrote 1p. This, I think, will do.

Sat. June 6. ... Did 3pp. This story, after all, won't do for *Cosmopolis*, but I shall finish it, and lay it aside for future use.

Mond. June 8. Began "A Yorkshire Lass", and did nearly 3pp.

Wed. June 10. Wrote 1p. and finished my short story.⁹⁴

'A Yorkshire Lass' was published in August 1896, and privately reprinted in America in 1928.

In January 1898, Gissing received a letter from the editor of *Cosmopolis* requesting a further story for his periodical, which he wrote whilst still in Italy. Again he found the work taxing:

Tuesd. March 1. Got to work, at last, upon my *Cosmopolis* story – "The Last Illusion" – and wrote 1¼p.

Wed. March 2. Destroyed my writing of yesterday, and did 3pp. of another story, "Mrs Gray's Illusion".

⁹³ The six stories written in 1898 comprise 'The Ring Finger,' 'The Peace Bringer,' 'A Freak of Nature,' 'The Elixir,' 'Fate and the Apothecary' and 'At Nightfall.'

⁹⁴ *Diary*, p.412.

Mond. March 14. Began a new story for *Cosmopolis*, and worked all morning. Not quite 1p.

Wed. March 23. Did ½p. and finished my story.⁹⁵

‘The Ring Finger’ is a tragi-comic story of unrequited love, located in the romantic city of Rome. Interestingly, Gissing draws upon the theme of misconception, a familiar motif from his early short fiction.

After living for many years in Australia, James Kerin, accompanied by his niece who had recently joined him there, is returning to his Northern Irish homeland, having taken the opportunity to do a little touring along the way. They have recently arrived in Rome and made the acquaintance of Mr Wrighton, a college lecturer. Wrighton is in a state of high expectation, awaiting a response from England to a daring proposal he had made six weeks earlier. Both he and Miss Kerin, whose uncle has fallen victim to influenza, are at a loose end, so what more natural than that they should explore the city together. In the afternoon they visited the Forum, but while to Wrighton ‘it meant nothing more than a way of spending the afternoon,’ to Miss Kerin it clearly meant much more: ‘Her spirit was perturbed; her life had entered upon a new experience. Was this, then, what people meant by “falling in love?”’⁹⁶

Having mentioned her intention of visiting the Coliseum the next day, she is delighted when, as she is about to leave the hotel, Wrighton asks if he might accompany her. As they wander through the Coliseum, Miss Kerin suddenly touches the floor with her left hand, so suddenly that her companion is unable to

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp.484, 485,486, 487.

⁹⁶ *Stories & Sketches*, pp. 202, 203-4.

avoid treading on her fingers. After explaining that she had bent down to pick up a gold coin, Wrighton insists on examining the girl's bruised hand, seeming to pay special attention to the third finger of her left hand. As a gesture of reparation for his brutal act, the young man offers to accompany his new friend to the Villa Medici the following day. Little did he realise what this casual invitation meant to the girl:

... it would have dismayed him, indeed, to be told that she passed many hours of the night in thinking of *him*, in nursing tender gratitude for his kindness of look and voice, in trying to assure herself that his peculiarities of manner had a certain significance. If, if in very truth, they bore that interpretation, how good was destiny!⁹⁷

In the event, the proposed visit is postponed, but meanwhile Wrighton receives the long awaited response to his letter. Several days later, in the gardens of the Villa Medici, the young man is about to reveal the contents of the letter to Miss Kerin when he is disturbed by the look in her eyes: '[t]heir expression was so strange, so startled ... that he, for the first time, asked himself whether he had behaved with prudence.'⁹⁸ Uneasily, he explains that he is to be married, at which news the girl produces the gold coin from her purse, asking that he put it towards the cost of an engagement ring. So ends the tale of two lonely people who became temporarily disorientated by the glory of Rome: 'he had fancied foolishly about Miss Kerin,' she felt that of the chance acquaintances she had made over the year, 'only one would she remember.'⁹⁹ 'The Ring Finger' is a sad little tale about wishful thinking.

In addition to *By the Ionian Sea*, Gissing produced two short essays recalling his travels in Italy. The first, 'Christmas on the Capitol' records the author's

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 212.

⁹⁸ p. 218.

⁹⁹ p. 221.

impressions of Rome during his first visit to the city in December 1888. In January 1889 the author received a request from Tillotson & Son for a piece of some five thousand words, which initially he felt inclined to decline.¹⁰⁰ However, he changed his mind a few days later, and made the following suggestion:

I was in Rome at Christmas, & I witnessed a good many singular & striking things incidental to the Season. Especially noteworthy were the proceedings in the Church of Ara Cœli ... I have a notion that I could make a paper, interesting, as you say, "to the masses" & about the length you suggest – 5000 words – out of this subject. ... Ara Cœli would be the nucleus of the sketch, & round about it would be clustered various picturesque little odds & ends which impressed my imagination. I should propose to call the paper "Christmas on the Capitol."¹⁰¹

The idea for 'At the Grave of Alaric' was conceived during Gissing's month long journey through Calabria at the end of 1897, and tells the story of Alaric, the king of the Visigoths, who, at the command of a mysterious voice, had conquered and sacked Rome. On his way to Sicily, he stopped at Consentia (modern-day Cosenza) where he fell ill and died. 'At the Grave of Alaric' was published in the *Daily Chronicle* on 31 May 1898. Both articles are poignant reflections of the author's reverence for the ancient world.

Throughout his life, Gissing continued to be driven by personal animosities that impelled him to speak out on matters that caused him grave concern. As evidenced from his anti-imperialist stance in *Vyestnik Evropy* way back in 1881 and his ironic attack on Rudyard Kipling's 'Barrack Room Ballads' in *The Whirlpool* – 'By God! we are the British Empire, and we'll just show 'em what *that* means' – Gissing hated anything that smacked of Imperialistic jingoism.¹⁰² Consequently, when pressed for an article by Harold Gorst, editor of the new

¹⁰⁰ *Diary*, p. 118; Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800 – 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 356-7.

¹⁰¹ *Diary*, p. 119; *Collected Letters*, Vol 4, p. 15 and n.2.

¹⁰² *The Whirlpool*, p. 450.

Review of the Week, he took the opportunity of renewing his attack with “‘Tyrtaeus” - a meditation on blood-thirsty poetry,’ directed at Swinburne’s sonnet, ‘The Transvaal.’¹⁰³ A diary entry dated 11 October 1899, notes that Gissing turned down Gorst’s initial offer of thirty shillings per column, but when this was increased to two guineas, Gissing agreed to write a short piece on Swinburne’s poem.¹⁰⁴

The article is a severe indictment of the poet’s primitive war-cry. Against the archaic tenor of the poem, written in the style of the Greek poet, Tyrtaeus, Gissing argues:

The poet of our day who sounds that Tyrtaean note sets himself consciously against the supreme ideal of civilisation. Consciously. Every man of enough education to pen a rhyme knows that amid all conflicts of opinion, under all disguises of passion, the thought of the civilised world abhors brute strife and looks for the ascendancy of reason.¹⁰⁵

Why then, asks Gissing, does such as Kipling use his art to incite the people to war? The article suggests that the poet is a mere puppet in the political arena. For instance, the Turks in Armenia were committing atrocities on a defenceless population, yet England cared nothing for such an unprofitable cause: ‘Mr. Watson found it warrantable, and wrote not a few sonorous sonnets; but no one laid hand on sword.’¹⁰⁶ Thus, Gissing concludes, the poet can but feed the flame of wrath that has been already kindled by much coarser hands, and is hopeful that though tradition pleads the cause of warrior poets:

... it is a tradition which will no longer bear grave scrutiny, and if, as seems too probable, the number of those who can relish poetry will grow less and less, the true poet will feel ere long no impulse to utter his passing mood of

¹⁰³ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 7, p. 387 and 388, n 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Diary*, pp. 519, 520.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Gissing on Matters of War and Ethics: Two Half-Forgotten Essays,’ *The Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. X, No. 3 (July, 1974), p.2.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3. William Watson (1858-1935), poet.

vehemence before a little group but coldly responsive to this vein. Even now, does not this sonnet seem to shrink painfully, half-shamefaced, in the corner of a huge news-sheet?¹⁰⁷

Thomas Hardy was sufficiently moved by the piece to write: 'I have just read your thoughtful article in the Review of the Week, which comes as the right word at the right moment. May you say many such.'¹⁰⁸

'Tyrtaeus' was published in the first edition of the *Review of the Week*, dated 4 November 1899, followed by a slightly abridged translation of the article in the 25/26 November issue of *Le Gaulois du Dimanche*.¹⁰⁹ A testament to the attention Gissing attracted in Europe is evident from the amount of his work that was translated into French, Russian, German, Danish and Polish during his lifetime.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, from the early twentieth century onwards there has been a demand for translations of his work in Japanese, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, Greek, Romanian, Chinese and Korean.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 7, p. 397.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 388, n. 1.

¹¹⁰ 'The Lodger in Maze Pond,' 'The Day of Silence,' 'Comrades in Arms,' 'A Poor Gentleman' and 'The Salt of the Earth,' were published in *Revue Bleue*, 'Two Collectors' and 'Transplanted' appeared in *Le Gaulois du Dimanche*, 'An Inspiration' in *Revue Hebdomadaire* and 'Our Mr. Jupp' in *Le Monde Moderne*; 'Phoebe' was translated into German for *Aus fremden Zungen* in 1891 and 'A Poor Gentleman' was published in the Polish journal *Czas* in 1902. *Demos* was serialised in the Russian journal, *Vyestnik Evropy* in 1891, and was also published in France, Germany and Poland. Information concerning these publications is contained in *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 'George Gissing 1857-1903,' ed., Pierre Coustillas, pp. 1535-52.

¹¹¹ A collection of short stories was published in *Un'ispirazione ed altre novelle* in 1970 and 1975 and in *Nouvelles choisies* in 1980. *Thyrza*, *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*, *Eve's Ransom*, *By the Ionian Sea* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* have been translated into several languages. Information regarding these works is contained in *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* 4, pp. 1535-52.

In 1899 Gissing wrote only four stories, three of which have been referred to in earlier chapters.¹¹² The fourth tale, 'Snapshall's Youngest,' is an amusing tale of inverted snobbery. Again the author found it difficult initially to strike the right note with the story; after three days he completely rewrote and renamed the piece. Cumberbatch becomes aware of Mr Snapshall at the bankruptcy auction of his possessions. Snapshall is a second-hand furniture dealer with a kind heart; although he has purchased Cumberbatch's goods with the intention of making a fair profit, he finds himself drawn to the young man, and so lets him have his writing-table back at a moderate price. After hearing the bankrupt's hard luck story, for some strange reason he hangs on to a few pieces of his furniture, and is delighted when, some six months later, the young man returns to his shop in order to furnish his new rooms. Again Snapshall's charge is very modest.

It transpires that the dealer is a snob, and as such is impressed with Cumberbatch's gentlemanly bearing. Snapshall has three daughters, each of whom had received a good education and made friends with the 'daughters of rich men,' but, to his chagrin, had never been 'invited to their houses.'¹¹³ To the father's dismay, two of the girls have married tradesmen, so he is now on the lookout for a suitable husband for Jennie, his youngest child. He confesses that on making enquiries about his new friend he has discovered that he is 'a gentleman by birth ... with gentlefolks for relatives,' as a consequence of which he is 'just such a one as [he] wanted to be acquainted with.'¹¹⁴ It now becomes clear that the

¹¹² 'Humplebee' and 'The Scrupulous Father' are discussed in chapter two, the latter story in relation to Gissing's predilection for themes involving obsession; in chapter six there is a discussion on the repercussions of genteel poverty as experienced by Mr Tymperley in a 'A Poor Gentleman.'

¹¹³ *Stories & Sketches*, p. 80.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

dealer retained the young man's furniture in the hope that they could become friends. Snapshall's plan is that if Cumberbatch were to marry his daughter he would support them financially: "What I do want is for Jennie to marry a gentleman. He needn't be rich, it isn't money that makes the gentleman [...]"¹¹⁵ As things turn out, Snapshall's plans come to nought; Jennie, like her sisters, is to marry a tradesman, albeit a rich one: "Oh, but it's hard, after all I've done and hoped! The son of a grocer!"¹¹⁶ A much-relieved Cumberbatch escapes relatively unscathed from the experience.

In 1900 Gissing's output dwindled to three stories, these being 'The House of Cobwebs,' 'A Daughter of the Lodge' and 'The Pig and Whistle.' 'The House of Cobwebs' is interesting because it provides a counter to two of Gissing's earlier stories, 'The Lady of the Dedication' and the 'The Last Half-Crown.' In 'The Lady of the Dedication,' the author focused on the role good fortune plays in achieving a successful literary career, while 'The House of Cobwebs' centres on the poverty and squalor that is often endured by struggling writers of scant means. There is an interesting passage in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* that seems to suggest a degree of empathy with the struggling writer:

Is there, at this moment, any boy of twenty, fairly educated, but without means, without help, with nothing but the glow in his brain and steadfast courage in his heart, who sits in a London garret and writes for dear life?¹¹⁷

In contrast to Harold Sansom of 'The Last Half-Crown,' who lacks the will to struggle on, Goldthorpe has the ability to adapt to his circumstances. In his search for cheap accommodation in order to finish his first novel, Goldthorpe discovers a row of derelict houses that have been inherited by Mr Spicer, a poverty-stricken

¹¹⁵ p. 83.

¹¹⁶ pp. 87-8.

¹¹⁷ *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, p. 209.

old man, whose title to the property ends in one year. Flattered by the idea of a writer living under his roof, Spicer agrees to let a room to the young man, and the two of them settle into a companionable relationship. Goldthorpe becomes increasingly unwell living in the squalor of his insanitary, cobwebby room, so when his novel is rejected he returns to his family home. Eventually the book is accepted and the young writer returns to London to celebrate his success with Spicer. When he arrives at the old man's home he is appalled to find the cottages in a state of collapse. Happily Spicer was not seriously harmed, and from his hospital bed he recounts the story of the storm that destroyed his home.

There are two heroes in 'The House of Cobwebs,' one the aspiring novelist, the other Mr Spicer, the impoverished old gentleman who, after his home collapses in ruins, finds solace in tending his neglected garden. Again the author of *The Private Papers* has a relevant observation to make:

... I am not sure that the kitchen garden does not give me more pleasure than the domain of flowers. Every morning I step round before breakfast to see how things are "coming on." It is happiness to note the swelling of the pods, the healthy vigour of potato plants, aye, even the shooting up of radishes and cress. This year I have a grove of Jerusalem artichokes.¹¹⁸

Spicer's greatest joy is his garden. Even though his property is in ruins, he means to go on cultivating his garden. As he tells Goldthorpe: 'I shall put in spring lettuces, and radishes and mustard and cress. ... how I grieve that you were not with me at the time of the artichokes –'¹¹⁹

Gissing's only short story throughout 1901 was 'The Riding-Whip,' although publication of both *Our Friend the Charlatan* and *By the Ionian Sea* took place in

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 145.

¹¹⁹ *The House of Cobwebs*, p. 27.

the early part of the year and 'Dickens in Memory' at its end. In addition work had also commenced on a revision of the serialised 'An Author at Grass' for Constable, published in 1903 as *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. In 1902 the author was busy working on an abridged version of Forster's *Life of Dickens* for Chapman & Hall.

After completion of the introductions to the Rochester Edition of Dickens, Gissing more or less severed his business link with Colles, Pinker now being responsible for the disposal of the whole of the author's output, including his work on Dickens. Colles never quite came to terms with his client's abandonment of him after the contretemps over the prefaces, as Gissing's rather shame-faced letter attests:

Most assuredly, there was never, that I know of, anything but entire good will between us. For certain purely private reasons, I tried another way of getting my work disposed of, & as this method has so far proved satisfactory, I do not care to make any change at present. Short stories, by the bye, I have practically ceased to write, & my whole literary production in the twelvemonth amounts to very little indeed. No literary agent loses anything worth speaking of in not managing my affairs.¹²⁰

However, Colles clearly felt no lasting animosity towards Gissing since he wrote a touching obituary of the author in the *Athenaeum* on 2 January 1904.

The first three months of 1902 were spent convalescing at Arcachon, where Gissing completed his abridged work on Dickens and two short stories, 'Christopherson' and 'Miss Rodney's Leisure.' After settling in at St. Jean de Luz he began work on 'Will Warburton' and wrote an article for the *Times* entitled 'Mr. Swinburne on Dickens.' The Miss Rodney of 'Miss Rodney's Leisure,' was

¹²⁰ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 9, pp. 59-60.

Rachel Evelyn White, a fellow patient at Naylands Sanatorium in 1901, of whom Gissing wrote to H G Wells:

The most interesting person here is a Miss White, a classical scholar at Newnham – a very vigorous type who will serve me one of these days. Humorous, erudite, smokes cigarettes – the friend of everybody one can mention.¹²¹

Brief reference to ‘Christopherson’ and ‘Miss Rodney’s Leisure’ has been made in chapters four and seven respectively.

In 1903 the author devoted most of his time to completing *Will Warburton* (1905) and working on *Veranilda* (1904), an historical novel that had long been an unfulfilled ambition, but shortage of money was still a cause of concern, so in November 1903, just one month before his death, Gissing stopped work on *Veranilda* in order to write ‘Topham’s Chance.’ As the author himself commented:

A terrible interruption, but I will do the D. M. story, for I agree with you that it may be worth while. You shall receive the MS. not later than *Thursday* next.¹²²

It is highly probable that this untimely interruption prevented Gissing from finishing *Veranilda*.

As has been demonstrated through his many representations of the ‘shabby-genteel,’ despite much argument to the contrary, Gissing’s apparent intolerance of the poor was directed only at those who were incapable of reconciling themselves to their lot, not at those who had the capacity to make the best of their situation, however grim. Austin Harrison, Gissing’s one time pupil and the son of Frederic

¹²¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 8, p. 211.

¹²² *Collected Letters*, Vol. 9, p. 165. ‘Topham’s Chance’ was published on p. 9 of the *Daily Mail* on 9 December 1903.

Harrison, espoused the commonly held view among critics that the author despised the poor, and he had obviously expressed this opinion in a letter to his former tutor concerning, among other things, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Gissing's response strongly refuted the accusation, thus giving the lie, not only to Austin's misreading of the text, but also to those ill-disposed, unreliable critics who proliferated the nineteenth century literary world:

I am delighted to have your letter, & very glad indeed that you found interest in "Ryecroft." But do you really think I am "hard on the poor"? Of a truth I did not mean to be so. There are human sweepings, in London & elsewhere, with which I hold no terms of kindness, but "the poor" – the decent, hard-driven man or woman who will never know what it is to feel secure of next month's food & lodging, with *them* I sympathise profoundly.¹²³

Gissing means the hard-working, undeserved poor, people like the Burdens of 'The Day of Silence,' who are able to sustain a loving family relationship in spite of their poverty.

As W V Harris points out: 'It is in the stories of *The House of Cobwebs* ... that Gissing's mastery of his own realm of the short story becomes undeniable.'¹²⁴ These tales of the late nineties tend to be lighter in tone than hitherto, each story an individual triumph in terms of its characterisation, its narrative and its significant incident from which emerges the moment of truth. It was during his third phase of short fiction that Gissing perfected the technique of capturing a moment of immense significance from an ostensibly undramatic incident. This he achieved simply by freezing the moment at which the protagonist realises that his unrelieved life of disappointment and failure can in fact become the catalyst for positive action, by finding the strength to make the transition from resignation

¹²³ Ibid., p. 92.

¹²⁴ 'An Approach to Gissing's Short Fiction,' p. 142.

to resolve, in other words he experiences an epiphany. For example, in 'The Salt of the Earth,' Thomas Bird knew that it was a weakness to be so cavalier with his money, but nevertheless 'he felt better at heart' for yielding to the weakness.¹²⁵ In the third of her series of articles for the periodical *London* on 'The London of the Novelists,' Edith Wheeler reveals a fine grasp of the qualities that combined to give Gissing his unique edge in the field of short fiction:

In [his] most painful books there is a contrast of light and shade; there is the beauty of quiet endurance and heroic endeavour side by side with the suffering and the shame and the ignoble toil.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ *The House of Cobwebs*, p. 277.

¹²⁶ Bouwe Postmus, 'Riches in a Little Room: Ethel Wheeler's Appreciation of Gissing,' *The Gissing Journal*, Vol. XXXII, No. 3 (July, 1996), p. 8.

CHAPTER TEN

Conclusion

Gissing's entry into the world of short fiction was on the one hand unpropitious in that its origin in America occurred as the direct result of an event that put an end to a promising academic career; on the other it was fortuitous because his extraordinary success in that country gave him the courage to persist when he experienced hard times back in England. As a boy Gissing had dabbled with most literary genres, trying his hand at poetry, drama, short fiction, essays and travel writing, thereby acquiring skills that stood him in good stead in his adult life when he found it necessary to diversify to survive.

The American phase of the author's short fiction is significant in view of the wealth of thematic material contained in those stories that has formed a persistent thread throughout the second and third phases of his short work, and many of his novels. In 'The Sins of the Fathers' for instance, the tragic consequences that stem from Laura Lindon's possessive nature is but one example of a continuing series of manifestations of powerful forces that work to destroy human happiness. The theme of obsession in Gissing's first story recurs in 'Cain and Abel' and 'The Quarry of the Heath' from the author's second phase; in 'Christopherson' and 'The Scrupulous Father' from his third and in the novels *The Emancipated* and *Born in Exile*. Obsession is only one of many themes that have their origins in Gissing's American stories to appear again and again in later works. A second frequent theme, generally more suited to the comic tales, is that of

misapprehension, which made its first appearance in ‘A Terrible Mistake,’ recurred a number of times in the 1880s, for example in ‘My Clerical Rival’ and ‘An Heiress on Condition,’ and in ‘Lou and Liz’ and ‘The Ring Finger’ during the nineties. Occasionally, though, the mistake may have a tragic outcome; in ‘Transplanted’ the young benefactress’s misjudged good intentions end in tragedy for Long Bill. There are tragic consequences too for the heroine of *Thyrza*, who stakes her entire future on a misinterpreted conversation.

In addition to becoming known for his stockpiling of reusable themes, Gissing also earned a reputation as a follower of the doctrine of ‘forlorn hope,’ no doubt as a result of the abrupt curtailment of his own academic aspirations. A bleak entry in his *Commonplace Book* designates hope as a chimera:

The story of Pandora, as told by Hesiod (*Works & Days*: 59-105) ... She lifts the lid of the box in which Prometheus has shut away all the woes that afflict mankind, & they spread over the earth – only Hope remaining. Significant that Hope is regarded as having its place among evils, - so rarely fulfilled.¹

Significantly, by the time Gissing returned to England, his melodramatic and comic tales had begun to give way to stories based on the concept of failure, and those most likely to lose hope and fail are of course the poor. From 1880 onwards, therefore, the author’s short works focused almost exclusively on man’s daily struggle for survival in light of the Pandoran legend.

Closely related to the loss of hope, is the arbitrariness of life, the fact that a single insignificant incident can trigger a chain reaction that has consequences out of all proportion to the original act, thereby putting an end to hope. Gissing was clearly influenced by this phenomenon and its particular relevance to failure and

¹ *Commonplace Book*, p. 62.

the poor, since in nearly all of the stories written between 1880 and 1884 the protagonist's failure inevitably occurs as a result of the negative properties of causality, 'The Last Half-Crown' and 'Cain and Abel' being but two examples that spring immediately to mind. In short fiction, human experience is often depicted in terms of a sudden reaction to a personal crisis. Gissing's recurring themes of personal defeat and painful adjustment provide an ideal framework for his inconclusive endings and his unique true to life characterisations of society's impoverished rejects. At this stage in his career the words 'failure' and 'poor' were key elements in Gissing's short fiction.

As noted in the previous chapter, Gissing vehemently refuted the commonly held view that he was intolerant of the poor, with the words "the poor" – the decent, hard driven man or woman ... with *them* I sympathize profoundly.² Contrary to the general run of critics, Virginia Woolf saw through the author's feigned antipathy and argued that his hatred of the poor masked a genuine pity for their condition: 'to hate the vices of the poor is the way to incite the best kind of pity.'³ Her opinion has its counterpart in a quotation from George Sand's *Consuelo* that Gissing recorded in both his *American Notebook* and *Extracts from My Reading*:

*Là où il y a beaucoup à plaindre, il y a beaucoup à pardonner, et là où l'on trouve à pardonner, sois certain qu'il y a quelque chose à aimer*⁴

As Pierre Coustillas suggests in his notes to Extract 17 of *Extracts from my Reading*, the author's interest in George Sand probably stems from the fact that her work was almost exclusively concerned with love, so that unsurprisingly,

² *Collected Letters*, Vol. 9, p. 92.

³ *Critical Heritage*, p. 532.

⁴ *American Notebook*, p. 23; *Extracts from my Reading*, p. 35.

especially at the time of his expulsion and exile, he found much in her writing ‘to justify or excuse his behaviour.’⁵ However, bearing in mind that Nell Harrison’s prostitution grew out of poverty, the quotation would also seem to imply that Gissing’s sympathy and pity extended to the whole gamut of the undeserved poor.

Although Morley Roberts was inclined to think that Gissing’s ‘natural sympathy was only for those whom he could imagine to be his mental fellows,’ he nevertheless conceded that in his work the author displayed a compassionate attitude towards all those ‘decent, hard driven’ individuals who, through no fault of their own, found themselves trapped in inescapable poverty.⁶ As Roberts points out in *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, substituting Maitland for Gissing: ‘Almost every sympathetic character in all his best books was for him like the starling in the cage of Sterne – the starling that cried, “I can’t get out! I can’t get out!”’⁷

In a letter to Roberts, Gissing refers to a review in the *Spectator* of *In the Year of Jubilee*, which criticises ‘the brutish stupefaction of his men & women’ and his realism that ‘inheres only in his rendering of detail.’⁸ Gissing’s angry rebuttal of the criticism reveals a wide range of individual characterisations and the author’s heartfelt sympathy for those exiled figures that exist on the periphery of society, alienated by their poverty from their appropriate social class:

My books deal with people of many social strata. There are the vile working-class, the aspiring & capable working-class, the vile lower-middle, the aspiring & capable lower-middle, & a few representatives of the upper middle class. ...

⁵ *Extracts from my Reading*, p. 35.

⁶ *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, p. 132; *Collected Letters*, Vol. 9, p. 92.

⁷ *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, p. 132. Quotation from Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey* (1768; London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 96.

⁸ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 5, 294.

But what I desire to insist upon is this: that the most characteristic, the most important part of my work is that which deals with a class of young men distinctive of our time – well educated, fairly bred, *but without money*.⁹

Examples of this exceptional class of young men are to be found in ‘The Last Half-Crown,’ ‘The Lady of the Dedication,’ ‘The House of Cobwebs,’ ‘The Poet’s Portmanteau’ and ‘The Justice and the Vagabond.’ Arthur Golding of *Workers in the Dawn*, Osmond Waymark of *The Unclassed* and especially Godwin Peak of *Born in Exile* are the finest representatives of class alienation in the author’s larger works. Gissing’s preoccupation with the ‘genteel poor’ is one of the most distinguishing features of his work, particularly his short fiction.

For several years following his return to England in late 1877 Gissing was deeply absorbed in political and philosophical activity, involving, as revealed in his letters of the time, a period of deep introspection.¹⁰ During the course of a series of mind shifts the author appears to have settled for at least a theoretical solution to his search for direction:

... the subject I have most desire to master is nothing less than the laws of the universe, - in other words the science of all sciences. I want to know what are the laws which govern the evolution of the species on the earth, physically considered, & then to know the laws by which the mind of man is governed; for it is evident that the science of Psychology will soon become as definite as that of Physiology.¹¹

The author’s interest in psychology first made its appearance in ‘Phoebe,’ a story written towards the end of his second phase of short fiction. Despite the loss of her newly found wealth, a lifetime’s exposure to poverty had prepared Phoebe psychologically to cope with her disappointment and instilled in her the capacity

⁹ Ibid., p. 296.

¹⁰ Gissing touches on the laws of cause and effect in *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 265; on social injustice in *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 307; and on his belief in the primacy of Art in *Collected Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 146.

¹¹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1. p. 265.

to re-engage in the struggle for survival. Subsequent to his interest in psychology Gissing developed an equally strong interest in the philosophical aspects of human nature, which revealed the character-shaping influences that are vital to the development of resilience and moral fibre.

In an article entitled 'George Gissing, Henry James, and the Concept of Realism,' Janice Deledalle-Rhodes claims that Gissing's 'attentiveness to the psychological coherence of his characters and to their idiosyncrasies produces portraits of individual personalities' of so high a calibre that 'it would be hard to find a stereotype in his work.'¹² Gissing's strength is in his psychology, his power to penetrate the minds and thoughts of his characters, which, as John Goode points out in *Ideology and Fiction*, reveals, 'through a plotless network of circumstances' that 'the possibilities of liberation are limited to mental states.'¹³ Characters like Letty Coe, Hilda Castledine, Justice Rutland and Humplebee are enabled by their oppression to understand the psychology of that oppression and thus compromise for their lack of freedom through the medium of the imagination.¹⁴ On the other hand, as noted above, 'Phoebe,' is highly relevant to Gissing's insight into the psychology of poverty, which renders Phoebe incapable of enjoying her new wealth, but at the same time able to cope with the loss of it. Gissing had an instinctive feel for the unique qualities hidden within everyday existence. In fact, in view of his perceptive analyses of characters' 'inner world of thought and feeling,' the author may be said to rank alongside such twentieth-

¹² Janice Deledalle-Rhodes, 'George Gissing, Henry James, and the Concept of Realism,' *The Gissing Journal*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 4 (October, 1997), p.15.

¹³ *Ideology and Fiction*, p. 143.

¹⁴ Letty Coe and Humplebee are the leading characters in stories of the same name, Justice Rutland in 'The Justice and the Vagabond' and Hilda Castledine in 'A Victim of Circumstances.'

century modernists as Joyce and Woolf.¹⁵ Virginia Woolf's essay in *The Second Common Reader*, warmly commends the author's psychological insight:

Gissing is one of the extremely rare novelists who believe in the power of the mind, who makes his people think. They are thus differently poised from the majority of fictitious men and women. ... the brain works.¹⁶

From a psychological viewpoint alone Gissing can be seen as an innovator in the field of short fiction, a connecting link between the experimentalists of late Victorian realism and the stream-of-consciousness pioneers of the early twentieth century.

Although his article in *Harper's Weekly* is not uniformly laudatory, Henry James was clearly sufficiently impressed by the author's deep 'sense of common humanity' to concede:

It is impossible not to be affected by the frankness and straightness of Mr Gissing's feeling for his subject ... He loves the real ... he gives us, in the great welter of the savourless, an individual manly strain.¹⁷

Because of Schopenhauer's belief in the primacy of the artist, which allows that 'in the mood of artistic contemplation preceding and succeeding the creative act, the will is in abeyance,' Gissing's characters possess that 'individual manly strain' in contravention of the philosopher's doctrine of pessimism. The creative spirit is paramount; therefore the artist is at liberty to instil in his characters a spark of resilience that, since they reject egoism, cannot be considered at odds with the Schopenhauerean creed. These characters are victims of circumstance who, whatever the provocation, remain conscious of a moral imperative to stand firm

¹⁵ *George Gissing: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings about Him*, ed. Joseph J. Wolff (De Kalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 156. Quoted from W T Young's 'George Gissing,' *Cambridge History of English Literature*, XIII (London: Cambridge University Press, 1917) pp. 505-514.

¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, *The Second Common Reader* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin Books Limited, 1944), pp. 169-70.

¹⁷ *Critical Heritage*, p. 294.

against adversity and doggedly persevere – they may have failed but they have not surrendered. Gissing was unique in his ability to delineate accurately the obscure, but courageous lives of London's genteel poor. By the mid-1890s he had mastered the art of perceptive characterisation that captured the innate nobility of the ordinary individual who dared to engage in the struggle to coexist with mankind within a hostile environment. At times the author would bring his stories to a close with a covert comment on society's indifference to the plight of others; for instance in 'Two Collectors,' Freshwater discounts Alfred Wormald's attempt to introduce himself as the author of 'The Songs of Youth,' a volume specifically ordered by the collector, as the delusive ranting of a broken-down bookseller, for whom 'there ought to be a home'.¹⁸ A subtle feature of Gissing's short fiction was his commingling of irony, pathos and humour in order to introduce an untenable viewpoint that carried its own subtle indictment.

Clearly, Gissing worked within very strict parameters to achieve his unique style of realism, which featured unexceptional people living unsuspected extraordinary lives in the relative obscurity of shabby-gentility. Consequently, he was intolerant of writers who tended to violate his self-imposed boundaries, even the venerable Cervantes, whose *Don Quixote* Gissing read towards the end of his life in the original Spanish:

Well, by the grace of heaven I have now finished the *First Part* of Don Quixote – that is to say, the first two volumes of the 4 of which my edition consists. ...

With some reluctance I begin the *Second Part*. What devil was it suggested to Cervantes that most fatal idea that ever occurred to a great writer – the introduction into the story of the *book itself*? You remember how Sanson Carrasco comes to Don Quixote, & tells him of the publication of his adventures, & of their success with readers. Alas! Could not Cervantes see

¹⁸ *Human Odds and Ends*, p. 196.

that, at a blow, he destroyed the credibility of his story. If he thought it a touch of Realism, he was strangely misguided; for how *could* the adventures of D. Q. be supposed to become known to an author, & to have been written & published & become popular in *one month's* time? – This enrages me; I could shed tears over those disastrous pages, which make the Don henceforth rather a self-conscious actor than the noble madman of his former time. Alas! Alas!¹⁹

Although Gissing's self-confessed subjectivity may have rendered him an imperfect realist, he never wavered from the views he expressed in 'The Place of Realism in Fiction,' and without exception, from the 1890s onwards, he took care that both his characters and his narratives bore an authentic ring of truth.

Despite the popularity of his stories, Gissing was far from happy about his dependence on the short fiction market. However, although he frequently referred to his tales as mere 'pot boilers,' his equally frequent declarations of artistic integrity suggest that the standard he set for his short work was no less rigorous than that he achieved in his novels. In an earnest letter to Gabrielle Fleury explaining the profound philosophical ideals that illumined his new novel, 'The Crown of Life,' he reiterates his enduring commitment to art:

... it has never been my habit to write flippantly, idly; I have never written only to gain money, to please the foolish. And my reward is that – however poor what I have done – I do not feel it ignoble.²⁰

Furthermore, an entry in the author's 1893 diary proves without doubt that the author paid just as much attention to detail in his short fiction as in his novels: 'Got up at 3.30am. to explore the City; idea for a short story. ... Then to work as usual, and wrote 3pp. of 'Hester the Fleet-footed.'²¹ This compares very favourably with an entry describing the effort he put into his research for 'The Iron Gods,' later rewritten and published as *Eve's Ransom*, which reads: 'In

¹⁹ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 9, pp. 4-5.

²⁰ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 7, p. 267.

²¹ *Diary*, p. 310. The story was published as 'Fleet-footed Hester' in *The Illustrated London News* at Christmas 1893.

morning long walk through Handsworth and Aston, getting ideas.’²² Nevertheless, the author always felt ill at ease with what he considered to be an inferior branch of literature, and as a consequence was constantly threatening to give up his most lucrative source of income. But Gissing’s determination to ‘put an end to short story writing for the present’ proved easier said than done, and, as is evident from his letter to Bertz, the dichotomy between the author’s desire for artistic acclaim and his need to write for profit, reached crisis point in 1896:

All my serious work has long been at an end. Two months ago I wrote a miserable story for “Cosmopolis,” and repented as soon as I sent it; but the price was £20, & I could not afford to lose the money.²³

Having written some thirty-five tales in 1895, the author’s output dropped dramatically in 1896 to only five. Thereafter until his death, he seems to have reached an acceptable compromise, producing major works like *By the Ionian Sea*, *The Private Life of Henry Ryecroft* and *Veranilda* that satisfied his aesthetic needs, and the occasional short story to boost his income.

Gissing’s determination to maintain the highest standards in his novels in spite of their failure to attract a large readership reaped its reward with the publication of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. The book was a resounding success that went into four editions in its first year of publication and has rarely been out of print ever since. As H G Wells tried to persuade his friend, at the end of his life he was highly respected among his literary peers:

Your fame in England grows steadily & you are the most respectable and respected of novelists next to Hardy, Meredith & James. You should come & savour it.²⁴

²² *Ibid.*, p. 288.

²³ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 6, p. 159.

²⁴ *Collected Letters*, Vol. 9, p. 161.

Particularly satisfying from the point of view of Gissing's continued posterity is the fact that *Ryecroft* has been translated into numerous languages since its publication in 1903. Interestingly, a translation into Japanese of the book's Spring chapters was published in 1909, followed by an edition of the complete volume in 1924, and thereafter the text formed part of the Japanese school curriculum until 1928, when the book was banned in consequence of a rising tide in that country of militaristic nationalism.²⁵ Publication resumed in 1960, the latest edition having come out in 1995.²⁶

But it was not just his novels that drew acclaim from the critics, as Hamilton Fyfe's review of *The House of Cobwebs* attests:

Every story in it is a little masterpiece, if they were French, we should have all our superfine critics of literature falling down and worshipping, yet I dare swear there is no collection of character sketches in any language which keeps up a higher level than this.²⁷

By the time Gissing reached the third phase of his short fiction his stories had lost much of their bitterness and he had become more inclined to spare his characters' undue suffering. Quite often in his later work, he seems minded to be compassionate in order to temper the general awfulness of his characters' lives: in 'The Day of Silence' for example, Mrs Burden is mercifully allowed to die before she can learn of the death of her husband and son. As Wendell Harris points out in his 'An Approach to Gissing's Short Stories,' it is during his last phase that:

Gissing's mastery of his own realm of the short story becomes undeniable. ... It is as if one were witnessing an exhibition from the collection of a connoisseur of representative but delicately individual pen-and-ink sketches

²⁵ Shigeru Koike, Giichi Kamo, C. C. Kohler & Pierre Coustillas, *Gissing East and West* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1970), pp. 4-6.

²⁶ *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* 4, p. 1541-2.

²⁷ Pierre Coustillas, 'Thomas Seccombe Writes the Gissing Entry in DNB,' *The Gissing Newsletter*, Vol. XIII, No. 4 (October, 1977), p. 6.

from life, a sampling of blends not chosen for their exceptional piquancy but for their subtle combination of common ingredients.²⁸

The author's own realm consists of a unique blend of stories that examine the lives of those who inhabit the margins of society, who together make a powerful case for their right to be counted.

²⁸ 'An Approach to Gissing's Short Stories,' p. 142.

APPENDIX A

Manuscript held by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

ANSWER TO GOLDSMITH'S CRITICISM ON HAMLET'S SOLILOQUY

(see his essay on "Metaphor")

Goldsmith's criticism on Hamlet's soliloquy seems to me to be extremely unjust, - he was evidently prejudiced.

After saying that Hamlet has no cause for suicide, taking the lines :-

"Whether 'tis nobler in the mind, to suffer
The slings & arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And, by opposing, end them."

he says: "Here he deviates from his first proposition, & death is no longer the question." Shakespeare's meaning here might certainly be misunderstood, &, if the lines were read without knowing the context, the meaning Goldsmith gives them seems probable; but as it is much likelier that they should be right, than wrong, we need not go out of our way to apply a meaning to them which is inconsistent with the line of thought. It seems to me that in those words "to take arms", the idea of killing himself is conveyed, & not as Goldsmith says "the exerting his faculties in order to surmount them". For directly afterwards the thought of death is carried on:

"To die – to sleep – no more;"

& it is very unlikely that those two intervening lines should contain an idea different from that which the rest of the speech contains.

He next accuses Hamlet of being a Pagan, because he dreads what may follow death, & expresses a doubt as to what will then actually happen. And might not Hamlet's words on this point be put into the mouth of the most devout Christian? I see no reason why they should not be.

“But that the dread of something after death, -
That undiscovered country, from whose bourne [sic]
No traveller returns, - puzzles the will.”

Shakespeare expresses a thought common to all, at one time or another, the only difference being, he clothes it in words better than any man who ever lived could have done. There is no word here which could shock the most particular. I suppose Goldsmith takes offence at the word “something”: & have we ever been told what the something is that immediately follows death?

He says; “Hamlet had just been conversing with his father's spirit, piping hot from purgatory”, intimating thereby, that because he had conversed with a spirit, he ought to know all about the state that follows death. And he certainly would have done, had the spirit been communicative; but, if you remember, he was expressly forbidden to tell the “secrets of his prison house”, & only threw out vague hints, calculated to increase rather than diminish Hamlet's doubts.

He next attacks the line:

“Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.”

one of the truest things Shakespeare ever said. He says: “A bad conscience will make us cowards; but a good conscience will make us brave”. I will ask, Who has a good conscience? Who can look back on his life, & say – ‘I have lived well, &

as a Christian should, & am ready for death any moment'? No-one. And this is what Shakespeare means; that conscience, i.e. the knowledge that we have committed many sins, & are not certain that they are pardoned, makes us dread death, & we are therefore cowards.

He next gives us a summary of the whole soliloquy in his own words, coming to the most ridiculous conclusions, & making a very good parody of the speech.

And now, having exhausted all that he can say against the chain of argument, he attacks Shakespeare's English. He says: "This soliloquy is not less exceptionable in propriety of expression than in the chain of argumentation," & begins the list of improprieties with the words

"To die – to sleep – no more;"

which he says are capable of many interpretations. "It may signify that to die is to sleep no more." It may certainly to an illiterate boor regardless of all punctuation; but doubtless Goldsmith thought that the dash between "to sleep", & "no more", signifies that here an obstruction in Hamlet's throat hindered his speech for a moment! He goes on: "Or the expression 'no more' may be considered as an abrupt apostrophe in thinking, as if he meant to say 'no more of that reflection'". It is certainly possible to construe the meaning thus, but I think it would hardly be consistent in Hamlet to say "I'll think no more on't", & straightway to go on with the same thought. But it is very plain to me that the line means "to die – to sleep, - only that, no more."

He next takes offence at the line:

“The oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely”

& says: “According to the invariable acceptance of the words *wrong* & *contumely*, they can signify nothing but the wrongs sustained by the oppressor, & the contumely or abuse thrown upon the proud man.” I grant that the first part of the line, ‘the oppressor’s wrong’, seems at first sight to have this meaning, but I certainly deny that the second part admits of the same interpretation, meaning evidently, ‘the abuse thrown on him by the proud man’.

Again perhaps ‘*spurn*’ is not a substantive in common use, but is it not as good a word as any?, for it conveys more meaning than many would, & who will refuse to Shakespeare the liberty of creating a word, he the great master of words?

And now Goldsmith shows a piece of very bad taste, so bad indeed, that I think he must have inserted the following sentence, merely for want of something to say, for I cannot believe [sic] that a man of the taste, which everyone who reads Goldsmith’s poems must see that he possesses, would say such a thing. He says: “No figure can be more ridiculously absurd than that of a man taking arms against a sea, exclusive of the incongruous medley of slings, arrows & seas jostled within the compass of one reflection.” He here attacks a most expressive poetical image, “a sea of troubles,” & calls those two most beautiful lines “an incongruous medley”. After this he indicates several other words & phrases, but in such a manner that it is not worthy of notice.

APPENDIX B

Gissing, George

John Milton. Holograph signed. 3p. Dated "Lindow Grove, 1871" (this date which has been initialled by Gissing probably added at some later time).

Accompanied by letter of authentication from Ellen S. Gissing to [Raphael King] Aysgarth, nr. Leyburn, Yorks, Feb. 19, 1931. 1p.

Manuscript and letter held in The Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

JOHN MILTON

G. R. Gissing

Next to Shakespeare, Milton is without doubt the greatest of English poets.

During his lifetime, he was engaged a great deal in politics, and wrote many works, on education and religion, but his chief fame rests on his sublime contributions to English poetry.

General Poetry

Poetry, is one of the great, and perhaps the greatest instrument of the education, and enlightenment, of the general public. Milton's own estimate of poetry was, that its purpose is to carry the mind beyond the dull routine of everyday life, & to impart life to material objects. In many poems there is a great deal more truth than in many histories. The present life is full of the elements of poetry & it is the business of the poet to collect these & bring them to the light. This gifted age abounds in men, who, by their great genius, & love of nature have done, & are still supplying beautiful additions to the poetry of our country.

Intellectual Qualities.

In speaking of the intellectual qualities of Milton, says Channing, we may observe that the great splendour of his poetic fame, obscures the extent of his mind. To a great many people he seems only a poet, but in fact he was a profound scholar, learned in the ancient & modern languages, & also a large amount of science. Milton's name is almost identified with sublimity, for we are so accustomed to hear his works praised for this quality, & ourselves to feel it, that at the mention of his name, we at once are led to the sublime. Of all poets he is the sublimest, no subject is so vast as to intimidate him, he both describes Hell with its appropriate

awfulness, & our first parents in all their purity before sin entered their hearts. This character of power & sublimity runs throughout all his works. With a few touches he impresses his mind on the work.

Poems

Paradise Lost his greatest work is the noblest monument of human genius. This great work was commenced when the author was quite blind. All the ancient heroic poems the Iliad, Dante's Inferno, are inferior to it in conception. Of this the first two books are generally considered the most sublime, & though those, wherein is described Paradise & our first parents, are much more beautiful, yet many persons for the sake of the lofty tone & sublimity of the first two, would give these up. The reason of this is, that the vastness of the subject & the manner in which it is treated, overawe us. For instance, Satan is the principal figure & the way in which he is described is awfully grand. The mighty Archangel, fallen, & shunned for the moment by the Divine power, yet is unvanquished. He calls up from the depths of Tartarus his mighty hosts, the companions of his former happiness, & now the sharers in his misfortune, & incites them to eternal war with heaven. But at the sight of the vast host he weeps – glimpses of good appear even in his character. From Hell we flee to Paradise where all is fresh & lovely, as before it was horrible & terrific

Style

Milton's style of versification helps to produce the grand effect. His fine sense of poetry led him to choose blank verse for an epic poem. If we compare his noble, flowing lines with the jingle of many poets who attempted the octave stanza, we shall all the better appreciate him. He moulds our language into whatever form he likes, as Michel Angelo would form out of a shapeless mass of marble, a divine

figure. All the treasures of sweet & solemn sound are at his command. Though his works, & particularly *Paradise Lost* are so much admired & deservedly so, there is much truth in Dr Johnson's criticism. He says, that it is one of the books "That the reader admires, & lays down, & forgets to take up again". The cause of this is that it is too learned for the general public. It cannot be thoroughly admired by any but those who have learning enough to see the great learning of the author.

Milton's poetry is chiefly characterised by seriousness, he was cast on times too solemn & eventful. But though his poetry is serious, it is still healthful & bright, if he is not gay he is not spirit-broken; & his poetry rather cheers than dispirits the reader. *Lallegro* [sic] proves that he understood well the bright & joyous aspects of nature. If we but think however, there was much in his life, to induce him to melancholy, one of which things was his blindness. However, he does not yield to this melancholy inducement. In his *Penseroso*, where he was tempted & had every chance of accumulating images of gloom, we yet learn, that the gloomiest views he took of nature, were only adopted to bring on earnest [sic] & wholesome musing.

Lindow Grove, 1871

GRG

Authentication by Ellen Gissing to Raphael King as follows:

Aysgarth
Nr Leyburn
Yorks

Feb 19, 1931

Dear Sir

Mr. Algernon Gissing, my brother, has sent to me your letter - & I am very pleased to write re-assuring you that the George Gissing M.S. of "John Milton" written at the age of 13 is authentic -

I am, of course, George Gissing's sister & know that this among other early papers was preserved carefully. I was not the vendor but I know the paper on "John Milton" & can assure you of its authenticity.

Yours truly

Ellen S. Gissing

APPENDIX C

Manuscript held by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Preface

The following Chapters I wrote shortly after a fortnight's stay at Ilkley, & with the country fresh in my mind. Some people may object that the walks are too long, & particularly that ladies could not attempt them. All I have to answer is that they were never meant for ladies, who should always ride, & only for those gentlemen who have a real love for nature, & who do not mind giving a little toil in return for the very great pleasure they will receive. I myself walked them all, with the exception of the last. I did not go to Barden tower, on the same day I saw the rest of Bolton, but only because I had not time.

Hoping that anyone who visits this charming country may receive as much benefit, both to mind & body, as I did.

I remain,

George

G R Gissing
Wakefield July/72

WALKS ABOUT ILKLEY

GRG July/72

Chap I

Rombald's Moor

Behind Ilkley rises a hill, the summit of which forms a wide tract of moorland, known as Rombald's Moor, & separates Wharfedale from Airedale. Over this moor many wild & beautiful walks may be found. From Ilkley to the top of the moor is a stiff pull, & there are many places in the ascent which merit the pedestrian's attention. Walking for about a quarter of a mile in a southward direction from Ilkley, along the base of the hill, we arrive at a deep ravine, on each side rough, dark rocks, in the season covered with many ferns, & a tumbling, boisterous mountain stream flowing down the middle. Arrived at the top of this ravine, we continue our ascent, & near the top quite unexpectedly arrive at a deep, wild, rocky valley. This is the Valley of Rocks, & well does it merit its name. On either side are the most picturesque groups of rocks, - enormous rocks, here & there so placed as to make a hollow sort of cave beneath large enough to stand & walk about inside. When we have clambered up the opposite side of this valley we have a splendid view of Wharfedale, & almost directly below us, Ben Rhydding, the celebrated hydropathic establishment. Descending now, as if towards Ben Rhydding, we arrive at the celebrated Rocks known as the "Cow & Calf." The "Cow", 50 or 60 ft high, is a precipice forming a sudden end to the Moor. The flat top is entirely covered with names of visitors, & also many verses of scripture, which tradition says was the work of an old hermit who lived up there - certainly a quiet enough place, I should think, before

Ilkley was such a great resort of pleasure-seekers as it now is. The “Calf”, a large rock just below the “Cow”, but not so high, can be mounted by means of holes, cut all the way up, to place your feet in; all of which are not very safe, & certainly for one of the walking dolls, called ladies, at the present day, inaccessible. On the top there are a few names. The view of the “Cow & Calf” from the railway is very picturesque, the Calf looking as if the slightest touch would set it rolling off into the valley. Ascending again, on the top of the hill & at the edge of the moors, we find a series of large holes in the earth, extending for a half a mile. These were formerly thought to be British dwellings; & certainly, in some cases, the position of the stones piled one above another on the side, seems to favour the idea that man had a hand in their construction; but lately some of them have been dug open, & the conclusion arrived at is, that they were lime-pits; but, supposing this to be the case, the question yet remains to be solved, how lime-pits got up there. The pits, which are known as Lanshan Delves, form a striking contrast to the land surrounding, in the kind of vegetation which covers them; for while all around is heather, & rushes, & Bilberry plant, here is beautiful grass, short & smooth as if it had been put under a patent garden mower. Standing here we see in the distance a large reservoir, which supplies Otley with water, & large tracts of moor on & on till we come to flat country.

Chap II

Rombald's Moor (continued)

Starting from Ilkley, & walking up the hill side, past Ilkley Wells House, after walking for nearly a mile on the moor, brings us to a little wood through which a pathway leads to the Rocks known as the "Panorama Rocks". For about a quarter of a mile along the hill-side large rocks are scattered in the greatest confusion, making here & there grand & beautiful groups, & everywhere the ground so thickly covered with ferns, that, when walking, they often come considerably above the knees, - a place in which both artist & botanist might revel. Standing on the top of any of these rocks we have a glorious view of the whole of Wharfedale. Looking to the North the river takes a sudden turn, & far away along the banks we see Bolton Woods, & all the glorious panorama of hills beyond. Southward is the same pictures [sic] of hills, with the smoke of Otley in the distance, & beyond Otley Chevin, which bounds the prospect. Opposite us are the Middleton Woods, & above, in the distance Beamsley Beacon, that glorious, windy point, which will be described afterwards. Indeed for anyone wishing for a good view of Wharfedale, there is no better place than the panorama rocks.

Walking on along the hill side, across a meadow or two, we come to another wood, much thicker than the last. As soon as we enter it, we arrive at a roaring stream, which every few yards by tumbling over the rocks forms a little waterfall. This delightful little glen is known as Heber's Ghyll, from the fact that the ancestors of Bishop Heber lived at the foot, in the valley. With a little trouble &

scrambling we can follow this stream all the way down till it flows into the river, but the nicest part is in the wood, where, as we walk, we see every minute a little waterfall, & below it a deep, dark pool, formed by the constant falling of the water. Below the wood the stream flows beneath the road & then across meadows into the river. There is then a beautiful walk along the banks of the Wharfe as far as Ilkley bridge.

Chap III

Rombald's Moor (continued)

Let us start from Ilkley & follow the Keighley road. It leads up past the Wells House, & right away up across Rombald's Moor, an astonishingly good road considering that you cannot go three yards of it on either side without getting into a bog. As we ascend, the view over Wharfedale extends, & new ridges of hills appear above the old ones, we saw half a mile below. On the right hand side, an old stone informs us, in characters scarcely legible, that we are four miles from Keighley. And a wild walk most of it is. When we have climbed a good way up, on the right of the road is an old cross, & a little further on along the road we come to a gate, from which we get our first peep into Airedale. From this point we can see both Wharfedale & Airedale, but most of Airedale, & we see how much wider Airedale is than Wharfedale. After this we begin to descend, & at last reach Keighley, which is a pretty large, smoky, manufacturing town. Most of the inhabitants are mill-hands, & indeed the town altogether is such a one as one would hurry through to get to the country again at the other side. Once out of the town we begin to ascend again, & after a tough four mile walk reach Haworth. There is but one street in this village, & that so steep that it is hard work for human beings to get up, how carts do is a mystery. At the top of this little street is the church & behind it the Parsonage where Charlotte Brontë & her sisters lived, & wrote the tales which have made them so famous. In the church is a marble slab on which are recorded the deaths of each of the family of the Brontës. The church itself by virtue of three inscriptions lays claim to an absurd antiquity even the year 600, before Christianity was preached in that part of England (see

Black's Guide to Yorkshire). Up behind the church & for miles away, stretch wild, - windy moors, their silence broken by no sound save that of the Plover or partridge.

We now start to walk back, across Airedale & commence the ascent on the other side. And now we are nearly at the top let us turn round & take one last look at this beautiful valley. Right below us is Keighley in its smoky canopy & farther down the valley we see Bingley, & through all, the river Aire flowing in a general, lazy manner, what a contrast to its neighbour the tumbling, foaming, roaring, Wharfe!

Chap IV

Fairy Dell. A walk along the other side of the river, southward, brings us to the foot of a deep, dark valley known by the very appropriate name of Fairy Dell. For no better place could there possibly be for the abode of the Fairies. Cool, shadowy, only disturbed by the merry ripple of the stream over the stones, & now & then the strong whistle of some Thrush or Blackbird. Following the stream we pass some of the most delicious spots, now & then the sun glances through the trees & glitters on the water, & again we come to spots as dark as if it were night, the trees bowing down almost to the water, & on your hands & knees you creep, struggling through Foxglove, five feet high, & large flourishing bracken & male fern. But after a splendid walk, or rather crawl, (for who can walk in such a place) of more than a mile, we begin to hear a roaring, & splashing of a waterfall, & after a sudden turn in the stream we suddenly have a most glorious view. Three falls, one above another, & a little space between each, the sun glittering & flashing on the dancing water, & then down below the lowest of all, a deep, clear, dark, pool. How glorious to stand up to the neck in such a pool, on this hot summer's day! In spite of our long walk which we have before us we must stay here for half an hour.

“Hello! What? What do you say? Been to sleep! No!” Yes, indeed, lulled by the waterfall we have been to sleep, & actually lost an hour. Did I say lost? No, not lost, for when in months to come we are far away in the smoky town, this place will come before our minds like a bright dream refreshing both our minds & bodies.

Walking on through ploughed fields, (& this is the worst part of the walk), we at last come out above Middleton Woods. And standing here we have a glorious view. Below us lies Ilkley, shining with its white buildings, & far above we see right over Rombald's Moor, & the white Keighley road leading away for miles, & bringing to the mind unpleasant suggestions of feet worn by stony roads, & back scorched with broiling sun. Then comes a cool walk through Middleton woods, but over a road which shakes you to pieces, then over the river & back to Ilkley.

Chap V

Beamsley Beacon

The best way to get from Ilkley onto the Beacon is to cross Ilkley Bridge & go up on the road past Middleton Hall, leaving this on the left. It is a stiff walk up this road on a hot day, & by far the most uninteresting part of the walk. When we have got to the end of the long lane leading past the Hall, & out onto the open moors we see a finger-post shewing the way to Blubberhouses (which walk we will leave to another day). Standing at the top of the lane, we follow the road on our left hand, which leads along, past several farmhouses; & then a short way up towards the beacon. Here there is a gate in the wall & many indistinct tracks which lead up to the beacon. But we will take none of these. The best track is that way which sense tells us is straightest onto the top of the beacon. Walking on over the heather we shall, after a good climb, arrive at the highest point which is marked by a large heap of stones. From this point the view is glorious. Looking towards the north, you see ridges of hills rising one above another till they fade away in the distance. Far away below us lies Ilkley, & high above it Rombald's Moor, & the hills on the other side Airedale. Up the valley we see the river winding, its banks covered with trees, & with hard looking we can discern Bolton Abbey. Looking up the hill side, far above Bolton, we see a large reservoir. In the valley we can see Addingham, & the road to Ilkley for miles. Looking south we have an even more extensive view. We see Otley Chevin & hills far beyond it, & to the right a large tract of flat country covered with smoke, which shows the presence of large towns. And all this while we have to hold on these stones to prevent being blown away by the wind.

Commencing the descent on the other side, we get to the bottom of the beacon much sooner than we got up, & pass Mr Popplewell's house, the highest built house about here, & then walking across several meadows we come to a deep, narrow valley, very dark on account of the trees which overshadow it, & following the stream, which flows through it, we come to that beautiful little waterfall known as Black Foss. It is a higher fall than that in Fairy Dell, & falls straight down, clear of rocks, into the dark pool below. From this fall we can follow the stream down to the river, & just below it is a ferry boat, by which we can get across the Wharfe, & have a pleasant walk back along the road.

Chap VI

Blubberhouses

Let us follow the road up through Middleton woods, as in the last walk, as far as the finger-post, & there follow the road it points to. This will lead us over the wildest country about Ilkley. We leave the Beacon on our left, & for a long time walk over moors to which the eye can find no end. After walking that for about four miles, we get to the highest point, & look down upon two villages below us; one is Blubberhouses (that to the left), & the other Fewston. The road leads down into Blubberhouses, which is a pretty little village, in a very wild position. Let us walk on to Fewston which is about a mile off. This is very like Blubberhouses, & through it runs the high road to Otley. Striking off on this road, we go up hill & down, with all the way a glorious view, till we reach the top of the last hill & get the first view into Wharfedale. We can now either go on to Otley about 2½ miles farther, or turn of [sic] sharp to the right on a road which will lead us direct to Ilkley; &, as it is getting late, let us take this road. It is a nice road, leading along the banks of the river through Denton Park. Just after passing through the Park we arrive at the stepping stones, over which we will cross, as they shorten the road a good deal, & we are almost directly in Ilkley

Chap VII

Bolton

And now let us set off for our last, & finest walk. We follow the road, up the valley, till we get to Addingham, & after that the country begins to be beautiful. From Addingham, a walk of two miles along a beautiful lane brings us to Bolton Bridge. We have now two walks to the Abbey; we can go either over a style [sic] on the bridge, & across the meadows, or walk along the road. But as there are several interesting things to be seen on the road we will follow this. After we have walked a short distance we come to the Devonshire Arms, a pleasant country Inn, generally very full of visitors. About half a mile past this, the pedestrian cannot fail to be struck by an old tree on the right hand side of the road, whose trunk, in one place, presents such a striking likeness of a lion's head & face, that at first sight you would almost think it was carved. And a stone which is placed in the mouth by way of a tongue, adds greatly to the effect. We now pass beneath a large, old arch which goes across the road, & find ourselves immediately at the Abbey, which has been described so often & so well, that no description of mine will add to the interest the tourist will take in it. Close by the Abbey are the stepping-stones, across the river, fifty-seven in number, & at the other side, a little waterfall, which falls from the top of the bank into the river. Let us now go back again to the Abbey side, & follow the carriage drive along the side of the river. It is a most glorious walk, through thick woods, & every now & then a glorious view of the windings of the river; we pass the islands & when we are here, on our left hand in the wood is the tree known as the Bird's foot, because its roots have grown over a large stone, & resemble a bird's foot clasping

it. It is now surrounded by a fence to guard it. Shortly after this, as we walk along, we begin to see foam floating down the river, & this, together with the increasing rockiness of the river side tells us we are nearing the [S]trid; & soon we are at it. There it is, roaring & tumbling down over the rocks, the whole body of the Wharfe going between rocks, so little distance apart, that we could almost stride from one to the other. It is a glorious sight! Leaving the [S]trid & walking up the bank, through the wood, we come to a summer house, from which we have a glorious view of Barden Tower, & the hills beyond. Indeed the country there seems so inviting that we must go. It is a pleasant walk along the river, but the Tower is nothing. There is an interesting old inscription in front, but no beauty of architecture. We now cross the Wharfe by a bridge, & walk back along the opposite side to that on which we came. From this side the scenery is even more beautiful than from the other. From many places we get a view of the Abbey, & wherever there is a view, seats are placed. We pass Simon's Leap, a high hill behind us, & visit the valley of Desolation – a wild place, its desolation contrasting strongly with the surrounding country, we cross the stepping stones again to the Abbey, & walk back to the bridge, across the meadows, to either the Devonshire or Red Lion, where we can get a good dinner

APPENDIX D

Manuscript held by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

THE GRANDFATHER'S NEW YEAR'S STORY

“Gran’pa” said little Nelly, when she had at last succeeded in climbing up onto the old gentleman’s knee, “do tell us a pretty tale.”

“Oh yes! please do!” said Maggie, “A very funny one to make us laugh.”

“But you know what mama says,” put in Willie, a thoughtful child. “Tales should instruct as well as amuse us.” And all the children cried out together, “Oh yes, gran’pa, a tale, a tale!”

The old man thought for a moment & then, looking round on the rosy faces that were lit up with joy at the expectation of a story, he said “Well, children, you shall have a story; & I’ll promise you Willie that you shall learn something from it. But it is such a very queer tale you’ll perhaps think it foolish when I have finished.”

“Shall we! No, no, gran’pa!” cried all the children together. So the grandfather, smiling at their eagerness, began his tale:

“Well, my dear children, you must know I was sitting in the room by myself on New Year’s Eve, after everyone had gone to bed, & naughty thoughts began to come into my head. I felt discontented that all little children had gone out to

parties & were enjoying themselves, but I was too old to go out. It didn't seem right that I could no longer dance as I used to do, & I thought that no one cared for me now that I had got white hair & wore spectacles."

"Oh! gran'pa," cried little Nelly, "that *was* naughty."

"Hush!" said the others quietly, & grandpapa went on. "Yes, Nelly, it was naughty, & I knew it was, but I could not keep away the thoughts. Well, I had been like that for a short time, looking hard into the fire, when I began to fancy that one of the red coals looked like that wooden Father Christmas that Willie brought home from the Christmas tree. The likeness kept getting stronger & stronger, till at last the old man actually jumped out of the fire, & stood in front of me. He had grown a little & his head reached up to my knee as I was sitting. I did not feel frightened, indeed I felt rather angry with him because he had brought me no presents & no invitations, so I only said 'Why! How's this? I thought you had left us a week ago!' 'So I did' said the old man with a white beard, 'so I did; but do you see after I had gone I thought I had really treated you too badly, &, as you are old like myself, I began to think of some present to bring you. Yet I could find nothing to suit you, for my bag was full of toys only for the children. But the idea has just come into my head & I have come to invite you to see the christening of the New Year.' 'Indeed, I shall be very glad to come,' said I, & I began to feel something like I did when I was your age & going out to a party; 'but,' & I remembered I was not so strong as I used to be, 'is it far?' 'Oh no!' cried Father Christmas, 'just step with me into the fire & we are there in a minute.' It was very queer but I did not feel in the least afraid. 'Give me your hand,' cried the old man. I gave him my hand & all at once found myself smaller

than the kitten that was dozing on the rug. 'Now jump!' shouted Christmas, & at once we were on the lowest bar of the fire-place. We then walked through the fire, but, far from being disagreeable, it seemed to be a long passage, with red carpet on the floor, & flags of all colours hanging on the walls. Down the centre of the ceiling was a row of glittering lamps which gave such a dazzling light that I had to shade my eyes with my hand. The passage seemed to be a very long one, but at the end I could just see a streak of brighter light than even that which we were in. Just then I began to hear a sound of bells, which reminded me very much of the bells in the old church we visit every Sunday. However they seemed very far off & as I was anxious to reach the great chamber I said nothing to my companion, & we walked on very quickly. Now too I regained my usual size, & everything around me grew in proportion. At last we drew near to the streak of light which turned out to come from behind two large folding doors, which were not quite closed. 'Here we are,' said my guide. 'But stop! You must be dressed for the occasion,' & he took from the large bag which he carried with him a crown of holly, thick with berries, which he placed on my head, & then gave me a pair of gloves & a very thick scarf, both quite white. 'Your beard & hair are already white, I see,' said Father Christmas, & laughed heartily. I laughed too, for it seemed good fun then. Our loud laughing brought to the door the porter. He was the very image of the old man with the hour-glass that I have shown you so often in my scrap-book; in fact he was Time himself. He looked hard at me, but Father Christmas nodded to him & said, 'A friend of ours, all right. Happy New Year, when it comes!' We then passed on into what seemed to be the ante-room, but when we had turned our backs I could hear old Time grumbling to himself, 'Happy New Year indeed! I wonder who's that youngster he's got with

him. Somebody that thinks himself old I'll be bound! Well, well, these young fellows now-a-days will be the death of me! I've hard enough work to keep up with them as it is!'

We passed through another door & found ourselves in a banqueting hall, but so large that I could see nothing at the opposite side. In the middle of the room stood a font, ready for the christening, & round about it a great many tables spread with all sorts of good things. More curious however than all this was a long row of figures of old men standing on one side of the hall against the wall. It was impossible to see to the end of the row, but, as far as I could see, I noticed that they seemed to get older & older as they got farther off. In front of them was a high throne, & on it was seated a figure very much like the old man nearest me in the row, but not quite so old, & having a golden crown on his head, with many other symbols of royalty. Everyone in the room, the person who seemed to be King included, had his eyes fixed on a spot in the centre of the ceiling. My curiosity was now raised to such a pitch that I could bear it no longer, & turning to Father Christmas, who like the others was staring at the ceiling, I asked him who all these queer old fellows might be. 'Those,' said he, 'who stand there in a row are the Years. They have all sat on the throne where old 1873 now sits, & they have all had to get down to make place for another, as he will have to do directly for the New Year. They do not always stand like that, they are waiting at present to see Young 1874, who will descend directly to be christened by his father, & then will take the old fellow's place.' He stopped speaking & stood quietly looking up at the ceiling. I looked in the same direction & saw a large cloud in the middle of the ceiling. Presently 1873 rose from his seat & walked

down the steps to the bottom of the throne. As soon as he had reached the floor the cloud on the ceiling opened & the New Year appeared. He sank gently to the ground supported on each side by a clock with wings. I looked at the clocks & noticed the hands pointed exactly to five minutes to twelve. No one in the room moved or spoke, but I saw old Time peep through the door &, as he turned away, I heard him growl out 'Oh! Very nice this! Why, he's almost full grown already! A fine race he'll lead me I've no doubt!' Old 1873 then led the New Year to the font & christened him, just as you, Nelly, were christened a short time ago. Just as he had finished the two clocks with wings began to strike, &, at the same time, gently flew up to the ceiling. The minute they struck the twelfth time they entered the cloud. Then old 1873 took off his crown & placed it on the youngster's head, & '74 ascended the throne in state. Then began the merry making. All the old years gathered round the throne & began to offer presents to the young King. First came a very old-fashioned year & offered him a beautiful dress woven from the purest snow-flakes. But the youngster was proud & would not take that. 'No,' said he, 'I will dress differently to that. Those kind of dresses for the New Year have quite gone out of fashion. Bring me a coat made of rain-drops, mixed with an occasional sun-beam, and a good scarf of real yellow fog. That shall be my coronation dress.'

I then began to mix with the old Years, & listen to their conversation. They grumbled very much at the youngster's presumption. 'The young rascal,' said a very old Year, 'why can't he be content with the fine old dress that we always have worn. But he's just like the rest of them, so forward!' Then another very old Year came walking up. He seemed to be much respected for they all made

way for him, & I heard some of them whispering, 'Here comes old 1564, listen how he'll brag.' He walked up & shook hands with '74, & said 'Well, I hope you'll have a lucky reign. You'll do well no doubt, but of course you can't be expected to give the world another *Shakespeare*.' Many other years then came up, some of them very, very old, & all of them boasted of some great benefit they had conferred on the world. The last I noticed was – 'Wish you luck, youngster,' said he, 'By-the-by have you any presents for the girls & boys? You remember I gave them The Chatterbox; I'm afraid you've nothing that will please them so much.' 'Now,' said young '74, 'let's have a song.' And all the Years at once set up a loud song in praise of the New Year. They had no sooner begun however, than they made such a noise, that I woke up & found myself sitting in my arm chair. Outside the bells were ringing in the New Year."

"Why! You were asleep after all then, gran'pa?" cried little Nelly.

"Of course I was children," replied gran'pa laughing. "Come let us go to supper."

GRG

APPENDIX E

Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE**Dramatis Personae**

- Roderigo - A gentleman exiled from France and father of Cleopatra
- Don Diego - A young gentleman in love with Cleopatra
- Don Gregario - Admiral of the fleet
- Cleopatra - Daughter of Roderigo
- Sailors, Messengers, Pilgrims, etc.

Act I Scene I

A room in Roderigo's house

Enter Roderigo

Rod: How shall I get this treasure? if I go as I am I shall be found out and condemned, Who could go with me? Wo [sic] dare I tell the secret to? For a great price is set upon my head if I go back (Enter Cleopatra)
Stay, I'll call my daughter

Cleo: Father!

Rod: (starting) Why Cleopatra how long have you been here

Cleo: Why what have you been thinking of father? what troubles you?

Rod: (aside) Shall I tell her? No, yes I will (turning to her) Cleopatra

Cleo: Yes father

Rod: You remember when we set out from France that I could not bring all my things so sudden was the decree that exiled us if I tell you this, speak of it to no one

Cleo: You may trust me father

Rod: Yes I may I am sure Well you must know that having a great deal of gold that couldn't be carried away I trusting that some day I should be able to go back and bring it away hid it in some mountains and now I want it and know not how to get it.

Cleo: Cannot you go secretly and dig it up by night?

Rod: No love the chance is to [sic] great. What would become of you if you were to lose me? No [sic] leave me Cleopatra I will take some rest (lies down on a couch) Exit Cleopatra

Act I Scene II

A garden (enter Roderigo at one end and pilgrims at the other)

I Pil: I pray you sir have you anything to bestow on poor travellers [sic]

II Pil: We have come from a far of [sic] country and are strangers here.

Rod: Good men, pray tell me from where came you and where do you go

I Pil: We have come sir in a ship from Palestine and arrived the other day in Spain with nothing to live on have subsisted since on such stray coppers which we receive from travellers [sic] I beseech you sir give us something to eat and drink for we are exhausted.

Rod: I will call for something for [sic] and in the meantime tell me where you go (rings bell) (enter servant)

Ser: Sir did you ring

Rod: Bring some food and drink for these good men for they are weary (exit servant)

II Pil: We are bound for any part of France were [sic] we may get our living

Rod: Truly you are just who I wanted (Enter servant) (bringing food and drink which she sets on table brought in by another servant) (Exit)

Rod: And now while you eat and drink tell me will you let me dress myself up as a pilgrim and go with you

I Pil: You sir?

Rod: Yes for I am going for a particular buisness [sic] which is secret.

II Pil: But sir –

Rod: Never mind the journey so you will have me

I Pil: With pleasure sir.

Rod: Stay here for to-night and early to-morrow morning you will find me at this garden gate ready fill your bags in my house and each of you get a wine skin from my cellar

I Pil: You shall be obeyed sir

Rod: And now go to your rest for you must be weary be punctual in the morning and bring two spades from the garden for I shall want them Adieu

All: Adieu (Exit)

Act II Scene I

The sea shore Enter Don Diego dressed as a woman and Cleopatra

Diego: And now as I have done as you wished dearest I beseech you escape in the ship that is now leaving for France. You will find your father there and if you dress as a man you will not be taken.

Cleo: But I cannot leave you here alone.

Diego: Never mind me I shall take the first opportunity to escape and I shall find you in Spain.

Cleo: I will do as you bid but I do not like to leave you here. I will come back the ship sails this evening meet me here and I will be ready (Exit)

Diego: Yes I will meet you I care not for myself so [sic] she gets safely home. (Exit)

Enter Sailors

I Sailor: Has the captain come on board yet

II Sai: He will be here soon we shall start in half an hour. (Exit)

(Shoutings heard behind Enter sailors and cross over) Enter Cleo: dressed as a man at one side and Diego at the other

Diego: Cleopatra you are ready quick get on board the sailors wait

Cleo: Adieu love we shall meet again in 'Spain' (Exit both)

Sailors shout behind
noise of oars heard.

Act II Scene II

Stage dark Scene a Wood

enter Pilgrims, Roderigo dressed as one with dark lantern and two spades

I Pil: Is this the place sir?

Rod: Yes this is the place set down the spades and come with me

II Pil: Brother stay here till we come back give me the lantern

I Pil: Here it is if you are successful, whistle and I will join you (sits down) Exit
Rod: and II Pil:

I Pil: (sits silent) How long they are I hope nothing has befallen them (brings out bottle and drinks) (whistle heard behind) Ha! That's the signal they have found the place (puts up bottle) I'll join them (Exit)

Enter Rod: 2 Pilgrims bearing a large box

Rod: Thanks friends we have proved successfull [sic]

I Pil: Now let us eat before we go father

II Pil: We will brother you have the wine skins.

Rod: Yes here they are now sit you down and rest bring out the food and lay it on the grass
(They bring out meat and two wine skins)

Rod: Your health brother How far is it to the sea coast I mean to take ship to Spain you shall go with me

I Pil: The nearest way from here is ten good miles with the box to carry (voices heard behind)

I voice: Has it gone this way

II voice: I saw the marks not far behind going up here

Rod: (speaking low) Hide the lantern quick and lie down in the grass

I Pil: (rising cautiously I think they are gone

II Pil: By what they said I think they were looking for a stray beast

Rod: I think so too We had better be moving take up the spades and you brother help me with the box (they lift up the box) This way mind how you walk come on. (Exit)

Act II Scene III

The sea shore – noise from behind – two guns fired – a scream –
Enter sailors

I Sailor: We've caught the Pirate but just as we had him two drunken fellows fired and killed a man

II Sai: What will they do to them?

I Sai: Captain has sworn to hang every man at the yard arm

(Enter Don Gregario leading in a young man with a rope round his neck
sailors following [unreadable word])

Greg: Tell me young man what are you a moor, a turk or a renegade

Cap: I am none of these.

Greg: What are you then

Cap: A Christian woman I beseech you here my tail [sic] before you kill me?

Greg: A Christian woman tell us your story then but be quick

Cap: My lord I will My name is Cleopatra my father was banished from France when I was very young and fled into Spain here after I had grown up a young man named Don Diego fell in love with me and afterwards he accompanied us to Algiers from where I have just come from [sic] (Enter Roderigo at a distance)

My father left us there to go into France to get a treasure which he had hidden before he left Whilst we were in Algiers the king hearing of us sent for me I fearing some misfortune persuaded Don Diego to dress himself as a women and be my servant A short time after this ship which you have just taken being about to depart for Spain Don Diego persuaded me to dress as a man and go as Captain whilst he staid [sic] there trusting to be able to escape soon That is all my tale my lord and now if you wish take my life for I have no wish to live

Rod: (running forward and falling down at her feet)
O my dear daughter have I found you I beseech you my lord Admiral spare her life

Greg: I will for I fully believe she is innocent of anything

Rod: And now my lord if you will come to my house to dinner you will be very welcome

Greg: I accept it with pleasure for I confess I should like to hear something more about it

Rod: If you will come my lord I shall be glad to tell you all about it and then we can think about rescuing Don Diego

Greg: Come then I will despatch a vessel well manned to rescue Don Diego for Cleopatra will never be happy without him.

Rod: I shall be glad to contribute my share towards setting out the ship

Greg: But come gentlemen we can talk about all this at home let us make haste for it is getting late.

The End

APPENDIX F

Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

THE LITTLE DOVE
from the German

Dramatis Personae

Theobald	-	A knight
Otilia	-	His wife
Agnes	-	His daughter
Rosalind	-	A lady
Emma	-	Her daughter
Orso) Lupo)	-	Pilgrims
Leonardo	-	A page
Servants, messengers etc		

THE LITTLE DOVE

Act I Scene I

A garden in Theobald's grounds

Enter Ottilia and Agnes they sit down on a seat and begin to sew a dove flies in.

Ottilia: Do not be afraid it is nothing but a bird that has taken refuge from a kite see it is a snow-white dove and in its fear it has hidden itself behind you (taking it up) shall we have it cooked for dinner?

Agnes: Cooked! Surely mother you are not in earnest. The poor bird has come here for safety we must not kill it. Oh see how pretty it is it is as white as snow and its feet are red like coral see how it trembles it looks with its eyes as if it were begging us not to kill it no you dear little thing nobody shall hurt you you came here for safety and you shall be taken care of

Ottilia: You are right my dear child you have guessed my meaning I only wished to try you take the bird to your room and feed it we must never turn away the unfortunate who come to us for help and even animals have a claim upon our kindness. I will order a cage to be made to keep it in.

Agnes: Yes mother and I will put it in a corner of my room and it will soon be tame and learn to eat of my hand

Ottilia: Go then my dear and give it some food

Agnes: I will mother
(Exit)

Act I Scene II

The same enter Ottilia and Agnes

Agnes: Mother the bird is so troublesome in a morning it wont let me rest at all I know what I'll do to prevent the troublesome bird from disturbing me in my sleep I'll fasten the cage as [sic] night so that he cannot get out in the morning

Ottilia: No you had better learn from the bird to get up earlier early rising is good both for the health and spirits and should you not be ashamed of being more idle than a dove

Agnes: I'll try mother but here comes the dove (dove flies down) Oh you pretty little thing (the dove flies onto the top of a tree) Oh mother look were [sic] the dove's gone to

Ottilia: Call it back (she calls it and it comes and settles on her hand) Now Agnes I hope you will always be as obedient to me as the dove is to you it will give me even more pleasure than you have felt will you promise me this?

Agnes: Yes mother
(Exit)

Act II Scene I

A room in Theobald's house Enter Theobald, Ottilia and Agnes they sit down and sew then enter Rosalind and Emma.

Ros: I hope you will forgive my intrusion noble knight Although I am a stranger to you I have sought your protection I am Rosalind of Hopenburg and this my daughter Emma my husband has died of the wounds he received in battle last year and with him [sic] I seem as if I had lost my all but now my neighbours two avaricious knights are trying to oppress me one is seeking by false pretences to possess [sic] himself of my cornfields and meadows and the other covets my woods on the other side of the castle they were once my husband's friends but their covetousness has turned them into my enemies Do not - I entreat you refuse your help What will become of me and my poor child if we are deprived of our property.

Emma: Noble knight be a father to me and do not turn me away

Agnes: Oh dear father do have pity on them they have come to you for shelter and mother says we should never refuse help to the unfortunate.

Theo: You are right my dear child and with Gods help I will protect them (Exit Lady Ottilia)
What are the claims of the two knights to your property (Enter Ottilia with refreshment)

Ros: Well as much as I can tell they have no claim at all

Theo: Well so far as I can see you certainly have justice on your side I will go and see what I can do
(Exit)

Act II Scene II

The same Enter Theobald, Ottillia [sic], Agnes, Rosalind and Emma

Theo: Good news your enemies have given up their unjust demands and everything is at peace again When I declared war on all who attempted to do you wrong they gave in

Ros: May God reward you for your goodness to me and my orphan child may he shield you from all misfortune and save you from all danger. I will now go back to Hopenburg

Agnes: And must Emma leave me Oh I am sorry Emma I have often wished to give you a keepsake I will give you my little dove I will go and fetch it
(Exit)

Act III Scene I

A room at Rosalind's house

enter two pilgrims, Rosalind and Emma

I Pil: Madam is the country about here very woody

Ros: It is rather how long have you been in the Holy land

I Pil: Twelve years madam we have just come back Where does Sir Theobald live

Ros: He lives at Falkenburg Castle

II Pil: Sir Theobald is a very brave knight I have great respect for him.

I Pil: Is the castle far off here

Ros: It is about six miles

I Pil: If his castle were not so far out of the way and if I could hope to find him at home I would certainly pay him a visit

Ros: The castle is not so far out of the way and you are almost sure to find him at home having only returned from an excursion two days ago

II Pil: I am delighted to hear that it will give me much pleasure to see him as I have a lot of things to say to him We will start early in the morning

Ros: I will order a boy to be ready for you

I Pil: Thank you good night

Ros: Good night
(Exit all)

Act III Scene II

A wood with a stream running through it

Enter Orso and Lupo with Leonardo

Orso & Lupo talk aside

Leonardo listens

Lupo: This is the hateful dragon's nest the home of the man who has brought so many of our people to the scaffold he shall suffer for it now we will bind him hand and foot and leave him to perish in the flames of the castle

Orzs: It is a dangerous undertaking if it fails so much the worse for us however the knights treasures are worth the risk

Lupo: To me the thought of punishing him is sweeter than all his riches though they are not to be despised If we succeed we shall be rich and can give up our employment and live in comfort we will put on the knights handsomest clothes you can wear his gold chain and I his knights cross with precious stones Then we will escape into some foreign country where we shall be taken for two great lords

Orso: That would be splendid still I can't help feeling anxious

Lupo: What have you to be anxious about is not everything in readyness [sic] have we not accomplices enough at hand as soon as we light three tapers in the pilgrim's room seven brave fellows will come to our help We can let them in through the garden door which is easily opened from the inside No No there is no fear but what we shall succeed

(Lupo slips and a dagger falls from his side Leonardo sees it but says nothing Lupo gets up and hurriedly puts the dagger back)

Lupo: This boy may have seen I am armed and have his suspicions roused as soon as he is on the bridge I will push him into the stream then we shall be quite safe (Leonardo listens)

Leo: I dare not go over it makes me giddy

Lupo: Don't be afraid boy come here and I will carry you over

Leo: (pretending to be frightened) Let me go back we might both fall and if you took me over safely how should I get back let me go home it is not far to Falkenburg and you cannot miss your way now

Orso: You may depend upon it that boy has seen nothing and if he had seen your armour what matter let the poor wretch go

Lupo: As you will but for greater security we will destroy the bridge if the boy knows all he cannot hinder us and it would not be possible for anyone to reach Falkenburg before we have finished our work (the [sic] cross over the bridge)

Lupo: You are right boy The bridge is very dangerous and quite rotten with age it will be better to destroy it at once (they break the bridge then Exit)
Exit the boy running.

Act III Scene III

Scene a wood

Enter Rosalind and Emma then enter Leonardo running he falls down panting for breath.

Leo: Oh my lady the two men are not pilgrims but robbers and murderers they are going to murder Sir Theobald and his family and plunder and burn the castle

Ros: Oh Emma run at once to the Castle I will follow with this poor boy as soon as he can move Tell them to make all possible haste and not spare their horses.
(Exit Emma)
(Enter Emma with servants)
Why are you standing here mount at once and hasten away

I Ser: It is impossible my lady the two villans [sic] have too much start of us

Ros: You Martin are a quick runner you might go the footpath is a third of the way nearer

Leo: The only bridge over the torrent is destroyed nothing but a bird could cross it now

Emma: A bird I see how we can send a message to Falkenburg if we were to fasten a letter to the dove it would certainly take it to Falconburg [sic]

Ros: Thank God for the thought go and fetch the dove
(Exit Emma)

Act IV Scene I

A room in Theobald's Castle

Enter Theobald Ottilia and Agnes

Enter servant

Sr: My lord two pilgrims have just arrived

Theo: Let them be attended to give them food and lodging
(Exit servant)

Agnes: O look there is my little dove at the window (she goes to the window and lets it in)

Ottilia: Look what a pretty red collar it had [sic] on and there's a letter what curious fancies children have (Theobald takes letter and reads)

Ottilia: What is the matter

Theobald (reading aloud)

Noble sir

The two pilgrims who will visit you this evening are robbers from the large band you dispersed The name of the elder is Lupo and the younger Orso. They wear armour and carry daggers under their pilgrims dress. This night they intend to murder you and your family there are seven more ruffians lying in wait for an appointed signal (three lights in the pilgrims room) God grant that this dove may reach you safely and in time to warn you there was not [sic] other way of sending to you

Your grateful

Rosalind

Ottilia: How wonderful the ways of the lord let us thank God for his great mercy.

Act IV Scene II

A room in Theobald's castle

Enter Theobald and Lupo and Orso

Theo: Who are you

Lupo: Poor pilgrims come from the Holy Land and going to our home in Thuringia?

Theo: How are you called

Lupo: My name is Herman and my young cousin Conrad

Theo: You speak falsely (drawing his sword) You are not going to Thuringia but have come here to plunder and burn strip them that they may appear in their true colors [sic]

(servants strip them they appear in armour)

put them into a dungeon

(Exit)

Act IV Scene III

A yard

Enter porter dressed as pilgrim with soldiers

Por: You hide yourselves till I tell you to come out (they hide)
(a knock at the gate)

Por: Quite right be still and all come in
(Enter robbers)

Por: Now is the time (soldiers spring out and bind them)

Theo: Such is the end of the evildoer he has dug a pit for his neighbour and fallen into
the midst himself

The End

APPENDIX G

Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

“Rabba” the wizard of the Alps

Dramatis Personae

Rabba	the wizard of the Alps
Ricardo	an envious peasant
Daro	servant to Rabba
	A peasant
	A spirit
Emilia	wife to Ricardo

Act I Scene I

A street in a little village Rabba is supposed to have just passed through
Enter Ricardo

Ric: Again that man! how hateful he has grown
To me whom he holds with the vulgar band
As slaves to his desire. I shall not be so,
I will no longer this imposter [sic] serve.
This village to his wish is but a slave.
They think him mighty, but I think not so,
He has no power to rule us as he please
No longer shall he rule me as he did
When with these people I did worship him.
I will oppose him, and my vengeance then
Will bring him open to these peasant's [sic] view.
This night unto his house I'll go, and there
I'll watch what 'tis he does. No more I'll him
Obey, but he shall me in all my wish
(Exeunt and Enter A peasant reading)

Peas: Ricardo you run to your destruction, seek not to try your power with mine,
sufficient you will not be successful.
Ha! what is this? no name too at the end, Ricardo warned, and why Ricardo
then? Some evil gathers round us! We must warn Ricardo of his wrong.
Why here he comes!
(Enter Ricardo musing)

Ric: That way will do, he shall be mine this night
And then I'll rule the village as he did.
Poor simple fools, aught I say they'll believe.

Peas: (as.) Ha! is it so then I must watch him now.

Ric: This dy [sic] he passed me and I noticed him,
A worn old man, he cannot resist me.

Peas: Hem! Hem!

Ric: (starting) Oh! Is it you, I just was thinking o'er
The words old Rabba spoke to us to-dy.

Peas: (aside) Villain! Thou canst not now deceive me, I
Have got thy secret and will keep it safe.
(aloud) a good old man to him all thanks are due,
To him is laid our goodly crop this year.

Ric: I love him from my heart! (aside) this night my love,
I'll prove to him.

Peas: This letter a young boy
Brought to me now, your name is at the head,
But no one signs his name towards the end
(giving him the letter)

Ric: (reads to himself then starting) Who brought you this?

Peas: A little lad I said,
He lives not at this village that I know
(aside) This letter proves it all, this wicked man
Has plotted 'gainst old Rabba, by his art
He's found him out. His ruin I will work
(aloud) I must now to my work good man
Adieu! (Exit)

Ric: Ha! Yes! adieu, for did he hear me speak
About old Rabba's death, adieu to him
It shall be. Yes, that letter, Oh! I would
That I never entered on this plan!
But it is gone to [sic] far to now draw back,
I'll go and in calm sleep I'll hide my woes!
(Exit)

Scene II

Rabba's hut, outside. Enter Daro with a bundle of wood. He sets it down. Night

Daro: My master's message I did safely take,
Some mischief's waking for my master now,
Is calling spirits from their dark abode.
Hark! (thunder) there they go. The wind is high tonight.
I will to bed. Ah! Bed! I wish that now
I had the bed I had, when a great lord
My master was, and I the serving man
To him. But 'tis no use soon night will come,
I will away to bed as I did say for
(sings) We'll cast away care,
We'll cast away care,
And never be driven by mortal's foe, care.
(Exit)

Scene III

Stormy night lightening [sic] and thunder. A lonely place among the Alps
Enter Ricardo armed.

Ricardo: This way that peasant's coming I will hide,
And as he passes I will shoot at him
The wind blows cold, why is he out to-night,
It all confirms that he has found me out,
A lantern he does carry, he draws ne'er [sic],
Now fail me not my courage. (he hides enter peasant with lantern and armed)

Peas: Here I did track him to but here he went
From out my view, he must be hereabouts,
If I do meet him I will put on me
The carriage of a robber, and will bear
Him to his home. (Taking off his sword he puts it on the ground then takes up his lantern and Exits)

Ric: (coming forth takes up sword) Ha! He has left his sword,
'Twill not be long e'er he come back for it,
Then I must hide (hides again, then enter Daro)

Ric: (aside) Ha! This his servant is,
The man once dead the matter will be left
Alone for me.

Daro: My master bid me forth,
To search these mountains for a peasant man

Ric: (aside) Oh! That is me (stepping out)
(aloud) Your money to me give!

Daro: Alas! I have no money you to give.

Ric: Come child! This will not do to trifle thus (he siezes [sic] him)

Daro: (struggling) Loose me! From your rough grasp. Ho I am dead. (Ricardo stabs him he falls down)
Oh! spare me, spare me !

Ric: My hands are stained with blood, I must go on (Daro moves)
Is he not dead, then this will finish him (fires pistol at him at the report the Peasant runs in.)

Peas: Ah! thou vile monster here! Draw and defend yourself. (they fight)
Thou canst not kill me! (He falls)
Yes! villain thou hast slain me
But behold,

If thou in thy bad cause dost still persist
Thyself must suffer. Now adieu! adieu!
(dies)

Ric: Oh! his last words, but words I must not fear,
Deeds I must do, now come what may
I'm here (Exeunt)

Act II Scene I

Night. The inside of Rabba's hut, globes and other apparatus lying about.
enter Ricardo.

Ric: Two deeds of blood my hand has done to-dy,
Another yet remains 'ere [sic] I shall stay.
(hides) Enter Rabba and Daro with books under his arm

Rabba: Daro put down those books thou mayest leave me,
Things will go on not right for you to see,
To bed go thou, nor grumble with thy lot,
For means for you to once more rise I've got.

Daro: My master I'll obey you, I will go
To bed, and with you keep in weal or woe. (Exit)

Ric: (aside) that boy not dead, I killed him [sic] this sword!

Rabba: (reading from a book) Spirit of Evil rise and come to me! (A spirit appears)

Spirit: What wouldst thou mortal with our fallen race?
That shouldst summon me before thy face,
Master, we servants are to this just now
What wouldst thou have but tell me why and how.
And I the steepest mountains soon will climb,
And on your messages run race with time.

Rabba: Tell to me spirit, why Ricardo me
Does with such eagerness gaze at, and what
Will come of it.

Spirit: The future to us is not great now
Ricardo has his eye upon thee, go
Be on your guard, I saw young Daro fall,
He was not dead, Go and thy guard give all
To mortals, from them you have most to fear
Is there aught else to tell thee whilst I'm here

Rabba: Spirit begone (Exit spirit)
Ricardo thou come forth
Thou canst not touch me.

Ric: (Rushing out and falling on his knees) Rabba I do pray
Forgiveness in this matter, and confess
'Gainst thee I raised this plot, but here do vow
To ever live thy faithful servant, Oh
I beg of you forgive me if you wish
That I should see another rising sun.

Rabba: (rising him up) Ricardo rise, nor fret o'er this thing more,
All mortals to such errors are inclined
I freely do forgive thee, and do hope
That evermore thoul't never try to match
Thy skill with mine, thou canst not there succeed.
Now to thy dwelling go. I pray you think
No more of this bad deed.

Ric: My noble master! I do thank thee much
For this my undeserved pardon giving,
My lips, their gratitude to thee, do want
Force to express themselves, I now will go.
Adieu to thee, my noble friend, adieu
(Exeunt)

Scene II

The inside of Ricardo's cottage, enter Ricardo and his wife Emilia

Emi: I pray you husband, tell me what it is
That thus thy peace and quietness disturbs,
Thou art not as of yore, within thy sleep,
Thou murmerest [sic] "Rabba" and then clench thy fists
And murmur "I will do it though his ghost should haunt me all my years,"
Oh! tell to me
The cause of this!

Ric: I must be left alone,
My wife old Rabba oft did help us in
Our time of need, and why not help us now?
Our crop is bad, we daily do grow poor,
My wife oh leave me, I must rest awhile (throws himself on a couch)

Emi: Thy will is to me law, I thee will leave,
And trust that when I do return to thee,
Thy mind will have some peace (Exit)

Ric: (rising) Begone! Thou tempter, tempt me not to sin!
Old Rabba's pardon but increased my wish
His place to have, my wife does question me,
I cannot long conceal this rash desire.
I will not yield, but if evil drags me on
Towards my fate, for so my fate it'll be,
If ever I against thou, old man go
Once he was great, so say the people here,
A lord deprived of his right and land
Who knows? Someday he may recover it.
It shall not tempt me. Oh! where can I find
Peace for this mind, it will not leave me, go!
Thou tempter, I will not unto thee yield,
I have the power and resist thee I will.
That thought again! Oh! It will drive me mad!
Some weapon this degraded life to end.
Once 'mongst these peasants I had good report!
But now! Oh now! that dreadful night of sin!
Oh! My brain turns! I sicken at the thought,
Oh! Oh! (falls senseless) Enter Emilia running with peasants.

Emi: Oh! help him! does he breathe?
Oh! yes he does,
He will go mad, men bear him to
The air (they carry him out)
Some secret presses sorely on his mind,
Some dreadful secret, which he dare not tell
I'll go to him (Exit then Enter Ricardo)

Ric: It is all settled now,
His life I'll have, now tempter I do yield
Before tomorrow's sun the earth has lit,
Old Rabba will be dead, and I, yes I
Will be in his high place, Ha! Ha! 'tis good,
Once though 'twas horrid, yet that dy [sic] has gone.
I will prepare my weapons for to-night
(Exit)

Scene III

Rabba's hut, night, enter Rabba

Rab: Some mischief's on th' alert, the clouds say so,
I must to guard 'gainst it. Alas ! alas,
When I was that great lord I slept in peace,
My servants guarded me, then I feared nought,
A giant owns those large and noble woods.
Some dy [sic] I may return, but oh 'tis vain
To think of it. My books I will to now, (takes up a books and sits down)

Enter Ricardo cautiously with a knife in his hand.

Ric: Ah! reading, then I thus may take him safe,
These books ere long my own, these spirits due
At my command.

Rab: Yes! Yes! I thought so mischief is abroad
But who brings it, I cannot tell forsooth.

Ric: He knows not I am here with all his art
So now's my turn, my courage fail me not
(he makes a plunge with a knife at Rabba a spirit appears with a sword
guarding him)
This shall not daunt me I will have my prey.

Rabba: (starting up and struggling) Ha! is it thou again, begone foul fiend!

Ric: (stabs him) Take that old Rabba,
now! where art thou now?

Spirit: Ha! Ha! (vanishes) Rabba falls.

Ric: That spirit's laugh some evil did portend,
Oh! What have I done. Oh! wretched, wretched man! (Exit)

Rab: I am but wounded, Daro come to me (Enter Daro)

Daro: Oh! my dear master! What mischance hath hap'd.

Rab: Dear Daro! carry me into the house
Of Ricardo, his wife will nurse me their [sic],
And the report be spread about the village
That I have fallen and recieved [sic] a hurt.
Carry me gently! (Exeunt)

Scene IV

Ricardo's cottage inside
enter Rabba supported by Daro.

Rabba: Daro you may leave me, I shall rest. (Exit Daro)
Oh happy day! My fortunes are returned
And I again a lord. The Giant's dead,
And on his death bed sorrowing of his sins,
He ordered that I should be sought, and then
My lands returned to me, Ricardo owns
My treasures it is true, but this [sic] one way of bringing it out,
Will fetch it back. My spirits do serve him.
I'll come some night unto his hut and as
A spirit, with this ring will carry him
Far, far away. Ha! here Emilia comes.
(Enter Emilia)

Emi: Oh Rabba! Ricardo has not come back,
He was nigh mad, perchance he's killed himself,
Alas! what shall I do?

Rab: Grieve not
Emilia,
Let's hope Ricardo will come back again,
We can but hope, come we will walk a bit
And ease your mind, with this pure evening air.
(Exeunt)

Act III Scene I

Inside of Rabba's hut Ricardo discovered sitting Night.

Ric: My hopes at last are gained, but, Oh what hopes?
What gain? to be by spirits haunted,
To have no peace of mind, yes this is gain!
Oh that I had not nourished this desire!
Now happy peasant. I should be at rest
My mind of troubles and sinfulness void!
But this is useless! Spirits do obey me,
And all do serve me true, but then what's that?
When I have not a moment's peace of mind!
I shall go mad! Oh what can I but do?
Oh what will give me but a moment's rest? (Daro is heard singing)

Daro: For we will be happy, happy, happy
For we will be happy, happy and gay,
Away, away, all care, away!
For we will be happy, happy and gay.

Ric: Ah thoughtless boy, it is for thee to sing!
Would that I could! What vision meets my eyes?
(Enter the pretended ghost of Rabba)
What wouldst thou with me?

Ghost: Traitor thou knowst well!

Ric: I do not know! What art thou? and where from?

Ghost: Ricardo listen to me! Thou well knowst
How thou hast wronged me! by tomorrow's sun,
Has lighted up these mountains, leave this house!
Another warning wait not! if thou dost
Thoroughly repent it. Go, I leave you now.
(Exit)

Ric: Hold! Stay! Alas! its gone, this hut to leave,
And by tomorrow's sun, yet 'twas not real!
I'll not believe it no, it shall not trouble me
It was an image fancied by my brain,
But still his warning rings within my ears,
But I'll not yield to it, I'll not give up
This hut so lately won, I will not do it!
To rest I'll go. (Exit)

Scene II

Ricardo's cottage

Enter Rabba.

Rabba: Last night I did not fright enough I know!
To-night he shall depart. My ring will bring
A hundred spirits to my aid at once,
Then they shall carry him far, far away.
My lands returned to me. Ha! yes, 'tis true
'Tis no illusion, then a lord I am
Once more a lord, I thought 'twould never come!
Then honest Daro shall rewarded be,
At my command, Ricardo he does scare,
And brings all tidings of him unto me,
And poor Emilia, I'll requite her pain,
She thinks him dead, and that idea 'twill do
To let her keep, I must full soon set out
To view my lands, I shall be joyfull [sic] then
Ha! Ha! farewell my spirits and my books,
I'll have them kept in some strong place, where none
May touch them, and that nameless art shall learn.
No more I'll be the "wizard of the Alps"
Nor hold these foolish people in my sway
The dy [sic] goes on apace, I will away.
(Exit)

Scene III

Rabba's hut night.

Enter Ricardo

Ric: Ha! nought has come of it, I thought 'twould not,
 'Twas but illusion, now I am at ease
 Rich as a king, and powerful in my sway.
 Where'e'er I turn myself the lord I am,
 The land I'll keep for I am strong enough,
 Now I am settled down, 'twas but the start,
 And now it seems to me as nought, as if
 'Twere everyday life, well! 'twill come to be,
 Some spirits I'll call up
 (Enter Rabba as a ghost)
 Ha! Here again, 'tis not illusion then!

Rabba: Thou hast not done it as I told thee to
 Now villain! thou shall dearly pay for this

Ric: Spirit arise! (Enter spirit)

Spirit: What wouldst thou with us master now?

Ric: Drive him away and I'll requite of all pains

Rabba: Thou canst not do't for I care not for thee,
 Thou seest this ring? Obey it quick, arise spirits innumerable [sic] (spirits
 rise)
 Bind him tight,
 And bear him far away! advance on him (spirits sieze [sic] Ricardo, Rabba
 exits, Ricardo struggles)

Ric: Obey your master, thoust no power o'er me
 Loose! I command, stand aside!
 Thou shall not sieze [sic] me,
 Oh I pray thee leave me (Enter Rabba dressed as a lord)

Rabba: Spirits away with him, ne'er mind his cries,
 (they vanish with Ricardo)
 Now he is gone, and I once more are [sic] free,
 Yes free as air, and ever more to be,
 My land is all returned, stands
 As once it stood, not held by tyrant's bands.
 Ricardo far away is carried now,
 Reward Emilia its determined how,
 Daro with me is living as a page,
 All's peacefull [sic] now, nor any wars I wage
 Gainst others, or the others against me
 My hut is empty, and myself now free,

All things are settled as you've heard me tell
And now my friends to you I'll say farewell.
(Exit)

The End

GRG
1868

APPENDIX H

Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

The Smuggler's Cave

Dramatis Personae

Bill Myers - The Smuggler

Tom Jones }
Jim Hanks } - Smugglers
Bill Scriven }

Lieutenant - Captain of an Excise Ship
O'Flaherty

Growl }
Stretcher } - Sailors
Smudge }

Langdon - The Informer

The Smuggler's Cave

Act I Scene I

Enter Growl with a sailor

Sai: Is Lieutenant O'Flaherty on board

Growl: Yes

Sai: Then take this note to him and say the bearer waits to see him.
(Exit Grow [sic])

Enter Growl

Growl: Come below
(Exit)

Act I Scene II

On board ship Enter Growl and O'Flaherty

Flaherty: Mr Growl you will take charge of the ship and keep her as near as possible to where she is now. I expect to be absent about an hour.

Growl: Aye Aye sir

Stretcher: May I go Sir if there is anything to be done I should like to see it.

Flaherty: We shall only find hard knocks and little glory. However a midshipman should see everything Can you spare Stretcher, Mr Growl.

Growl: Oh yes sir if you please

Flaherty: Lower the boats then look sharp lads
(Exit)

Act I Scene III

Sea shore stage dark enter Flaherty, Stretcher and Sailors.

Flaherty: Let two boats remain off shore till they see a blue light burned then come on shore and help us

Stretcher: All right sir

Flaherty: Stretcher, we have a chance of catching that accomplished rascal Myers through the means of another who has offered to betray him and who is to meet us off yonder point and conduct us where Myers and his gang are to be found if we come to blows at any time just keep behind me and don't be after getting yourself killed or hurt or I'll never take you to see any more fun remember that.

Stretcher: I'll obey your directions sir

Flaherty: Now two of you accompany me, the others keep silence and on no account quit the boat (he advances) It's very extraordinary I cannot have mistaken the spot or the hour it was just here the man Langdon appointed to meet me, something I'm afraid is wrong, or can the fellow have been imposing on me (he advances and sees a man leaning against the cliff.) That must be the fellow Langdon why what can he be about (he whistles twice) (two sailors go up to him, they touch him and he falls down).

Stretcher: He has'nt [sic] been dead above a quarter of an hour he's still warm sir.

Flaherty: Then his murderers cannot be far off call all the people in and we'll hunt them the poor wretch could scarcely expect any other fate were he discovered.

Stretcher: What do you know the man sir?

Flaherty: Yes he's the informer Langdon the very man that was to have conducted us to Myers retreat

Stretcher: Here sir here's a bit of card he'd round the man's neck and close to him was this pistol and handkerchief.

Flaherty: Very well do you take charge of those things Stretcher and on no account lose them Stretcher do you go back with Smudge to the boat burn a blue light close down to the water shade it by the boat's side so that it may not be seen from the cliff above and then as soon as the boats come in order to [sic] hands to remain in each and bring the rest up here

Smudge: Aye Aye sir
(then Exit with Stretcher)

Stretch:er: Hallo, Hallo
(smugglers run down)

Smudge: Run in – they are smugglers – run in
(they fight sailors are overpowered O’Flaherty is siezed [sic] and all the
men are bound)
(Exit)

Act II Scene I

A cave

Enter O'Flaherty, Stetcher, Smudge, all bound and smugglers

Stetcher: Were [sic] are you taking us

Smuggler: Hold your tongue you young whelp stoop down your head or you will hit the rock (he stoops)

Smuggler: (laughing) The youngster thinks he's a giant howsomever he won't ever be much bigger than he is now will he Jim?

Hanks: No he's nibbled his last biscuit come heave a head master
(Enter Bill Myers)

Myers: Cast off the handkerchiefs from the prisoners eyes
(they take them off)
Who are you and what did you come on shore to-night for

Flaherty: You know perfectly well who we are and with regard to our object on shore you certainly are not qualified to question me

Myers: Then I must answer for you, you come instigated by the wretch who lies there in hopes of taking me and my men in my nest. He has recieved [sic] his reward the very moment he was thinking he had got us secure a pistol bullet went through his head. What do you think you deserve speak and answer me (levelling his pistol at him)

Flaherty: I came on shore in pursuit of my lawfull [sic] Duty to aprehend [sic] you or anyone else breaking the revenue laws further than that I have no feeling of ill will against you or anyone connected with you

Myers: Very fine talking Mr Lieutenant, but that won't do here you came to injure us there's no doubt about that from what you own yourself and you must take the consequences.

Flaherty: You will suffer for it if you injure me or any of my people.

Myers: We don't want to hurt any of your people but you and that young cub of an officer must be prepared to die this very night your man there we don't intend to hurt and he may if he likes join us which he will be very glad to do. If not we will carry him away over the water far enough away from this

Stetcher: No that I wont you cold-hearted scoundrel you. my commander there is a truer and braver man than any one of you and you to think of murdering him because he's doing his duty it just shows what a white-livered crew you are but howsomever if you'll let them go without harm you may make a shot fast to my feet and heave me over the cliffs outside there you can but kill me and I don't fear you so heave away my hearties.

Myers: What you say my man can't be done these to die for conspiracy with a traitor to betray us we shall keep you shut up for some time and then carry you over to America perhaps or some distant part But we shan't [sic] take your life, so now you know what you have to expect. Take those two off and heave them over High Peak Cliff be sharp about it now
(they bind them and then exit)

Stretcher: Never fear sir, they'll hang for it yet and I shall live to see you revenged.

Act II Scene II

A common

enter O'Flaherty and Smudge bound, with the smugglers Jones, Hanks, and Scriven.

Jone: We give you and the youngster lieutenant three minutes to prepare for death after that we mean to hand you over the cliff by the hands and when you can't gripe [sic] any longer you must go Just understand we do this in mercy to you, so you mayn't say we sent you out of the world unprepared. Youngster you hear what is said so just make ready you haven't many more minutes of life

Scriven: The times up!
(they lift them over the edge of the cliff and let them hang by their hands)
(Exit laughing)

Smudge: Are you there sir

Flaherty: Yes Smudge I am but I am afraid to use any exertion to lift myself up lest the earth should give way you are light though try to drag yourself slowly up by your arms, then tear the bandage from your eyes and come to my assistance

Smudge: I cannot sir, I cannot
(He tries to lift himself up and shouts)
I must let go, good by [sic] sir

Flaherty: So must I so goodbye if we do not succeed so make a final effort and spring up so now – (they both try to spring up but cannot they both fall)

Act II Scene III

A chalk pit

Smudge and O'Flaherty discovered.

Smudge: Are you hurt sir

Flaherty: No Smudge, but rather wet from a puddle I've fallen into So those confounded rascals have been playing us a trick all the time however it's better than we expected and it shows they are not so bad as we thought them

Smudge: So I was thinking, but how have we to get out of this sir

Flaherty: (sitting down on a rock) Why as I have not a notion were[sic] we are we had better wait till daylight or we shall run a great chance of going over the cliffs in reality The sun will rise in little more than an hour hence I hope and then we shall be able to ascertain whereabouts we are.

Smudge: (sitting down)
It's very odd sir, that Myers did not murder us as he did the poor wretch found under the Cliff.

Flaherty: I fully expected he would, but after all there are several reasons against such an act He put the spy to death both for the sake of vengeance and that he may not betray them and show us the smugglers hide. There is also a wild notion of justice amongst these outlaws and as they know we are but doing our duty in pursuing them they have not the same bitter feeling towards us as the [sic] have to any of their companions who turn traitors. Some years ago also Myers was in my custody and I treated him as I would any fellow creature with some kindness and consideration perhaps therefore gratitude may have induced him to spare our lives.

Smudge: Do you think we should be able to discover the cavern

Flaherty: I fear not even if we did it would be emptied of its contents. Now I shall try to get a bit a sleep, do you do the same

Act II Scene IV

Sea shore

Enter Flaherty, Smudge and Stretcher talking.

Flaherty: But do you think we should be able to discover the cave

Stretcher: No sir certainly not it may be close to us or it may be five miles off.

Flaherty: We must see about that by the by Stretcher, I gave you some things to take care of.

Stretcher: Here sir they never overhauled my pockets which shows they have some manners at all events (handing him a pistol handkerchief and card)

Flaherty: (reading of the card)
This is the way we punish informers and traitors

Stretcher: Perhaps sir you don't know who the man was who took the lead of the rest in the cave

Flaherty: Who was he

Stretcher: No other than Bill Myers himself I knew him directly and several of those with him To my mind Myers murdered the man as a warning to others not to attempt to play a like trick on him

Flaherty: You may go and call Growl here.
(Exit Stretcher and after a little time enter Growl)
I am going to arrange a plan Growl for catching this rascal I think the way would be to let all the boats visit the shore and carry out a strict search in the meantime I will go and visit the authorities and state what I know

Growl: Aye Aye sir

Flaherty: The sooner you start the better, for some of them may be about there yet come Smudge, you must go with me to the judge
(Exit)

The End.

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