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Education or Exile: Individualism and Social Utility, 1870–1914

by Gareth Adrian Reeves

Abstract

The success of education depends on how its aims are defined. At the *fin-de-siècle* and in George Gissing's novels, education serves two main purposes: on the one hand, the pursuit of individualism, the Paterian drawing of multitudes into one consciousness, associated with dandies and dilettantism; on the other hand, social utility, which involves educating the poor, acts of philanthropy, and so on. In many of Gissing's characters, there is a tension between these two purposes, and since all schooling is imperfect, education continues long into adult life. As argued here, the contradictions in Gissing's presentation of the world through literary realism can be attributed to the complexities and contradictions involved in this bifurcation of the purpose of education. The two strands are apparently irreconcilable in Gissing, and where the individual does not succeed in identifying one purpose for education, they become exiles, if only intellectually.

This research is given greater breadth and legitimacy by the inclusion of Marie Corelli, an author whose canonical status has wavered and whose fiction was popular in her day. Corelli is also a special case because her didactic novels, and her essays, promise social utility — through moral (Christian) instruction for the masses — yet ultimately provide a Christianised version of Paterian aesthetics. She appeals to a coterie, as did Walter Pater, yet that 'coterie', by exploiting a mass readership through what is here described as a literary kind of cultural performativity, proved to be vast.

Gissing and Corelli, though working in the same period on similar themes, are strikingly different in their approaches, since Gissing's literary realism shows the effects of the tension between the two aforementioned educative purposes from a minority culture perspective, whereas Corelli's romance, limited by a mass readership, can only perform such cultural issues and ultimately serves as Christian inculcation.

Education or Exile: Individualism and Social Utility, 1870–1914

by
Gareth Adrian Reeves

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Durham University
Department of English Studies
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of *Duncan Keith Reeves*, who encouraged me to pursue a PhD regardless of the financial difficulty. He was a manual worker; now that I've reached the end of this arduous journey, I realise that I am too.

The corrected thesis is also dedicated to the memory of *Simon J. James*.

Introduction: The (Ab)uses of Literacy[1]

> 'Education she did get, by hook or by crook; there was dire pinching to pay for it, and, too well knowing this, the child strove her utmost to use the opportunities offered her.'[2]
>
> 'an imperfect novelist, but a highly educated man'[3]
>
> 'Could he not return from his exile, and — ?'[4]

George Gissing: the name evokes images of starving intellectuals, the struggling poor, and the politically oppressed. The Heraclitean dictum that character is fate cuts both ways, and Gissing's characters often suffer ludicrously, even comically, cruel fates, most of them imbued with a pathetic force by their intense striving for better lives, in many cases doing so through education and cultural literacy. From the extensive literature on Gissing, exemplary monographs have sought to place the author and his work in his own time and alongside the work of contemporary authors (Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context*) or to explain his work in a cultural context (John Sloan, *George Gissing: The Cultural Challenge*), in relation to narrative and money (Simon J. James, *Unsettled Accounts: Money and Narrative in the Novels of George Gissing*), and in terms of place (Rebecca Hutcheon, *Writing Place: Mimesis, Subjectivity and Imagination in the Works of George Gissing*). Works containing important chapters on Gissing associate his work with consumer culture (Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*), popular British Aestheticism (Diana Maltz, *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870–1900*), and burgeoning mass literacy (Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*). Although many of these works explore education and/or culture, this thesis tries to distinguish itself by taking the topic as its main focus, exploring it in relation to both the author

[1] *The Abuses of Literacy* was the original title of Richard Hoggart's classic study, *The Uses of Literacy* — Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 3rd edn (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2021), p. 366.

[2] George Gissing, *A Life's Morning*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984), p. 66.

[3] Referring to Gissing. Virginia Woolf, 'George Gissing', in *The Common Reader Volume II* (London: Vintage, 2003 reprint), pp. 220–5 (p. 225).

[4] Arthur Golding in Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2016), p. 433 (vol. II). In this edition, the page numbers reset for Volume II. Subsequent references therefore indicate, as here, when the page/s can be found in the second volume.

and his work while aiming to provide useful context by drawing comparisons to a noncanonical contemporary, Marie Corelli, and such canonical authors as Robert Louis Stevenson, Walter Pater, and H. G. Wells, while incorporating up-to-date cultural and social history that shapes our understanding of the late-Victorian/Edwardian/pre-First World War period. Education in Gissing is an underexplored yet important topic and thus requires more in-depth research than it has previously received, *pace* David Grylls's *The Paradox of Gissing*, Tom Ue's work on reading in Gissing, Samuel Vogt Gapp's *George Gissing, Classicist*, William Greenslade's *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel: 1880–1940*, and the abovementioned works by Sloan and James, which touch on education through culture.

The success of education depends on how its aims are defined. At the *fin-de-siècle* and in Gissing's novels, education serves two main purposes: on the one hand, the pursuit of individualism, the Paterian drawing of multitudes into one consciousness, which is associated with, *inter alia*, dandies, languor, and dilettantism; on the other hand, social utility, which is achieved through educating the poor, acts of philanthropy, and so on. In many of Gissing's characters, there is a tension between these two purposes, and since all education is imperfect, it continues long into adult/professional life; as Dinah Birch suggests in her discussion of John Ruskin's justly celebrated 'The Nature of Gothic' in *The Stones of Venice*, the processes of education 'do not stop at the school gates'.[5] The contradictions in Gissing's presentation of the world through literary realism, as argued in this thesis, can be attributed to the complexities and contradictions involved in this bifurcation of the purpose of education. The two strands are apparently irreconcilable in Gissing, and where the individual does not succeed in identifying one purpose for education, they become exiles, even if only intellectually. Henry Ryecroft is haunted by this tension in his countryside escape, Arthur Golding fails to resolve it and so leaves the country (and later succumbs to suicide), and Richard Mutimer's educational

[5] Dinah Birch, *Our Victorian Education* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 142.

programme ends in failure due to individualism undermining his aims for social improvement. There are also rare exceptions, such as Godwin Peak, who is a born exile, and Cyrus Redgrave, who is a pure individualist, a version of Everard Barfoot taken to an extreme logical conclusion.

Gissing's focus on education, in his personal life and his works, is useful in considering the value of the humanities. He attended Owens College and would have gone on to become a successful academic had things worked out. One of the aims of the College's Arts course stressed the general value of the subject, in line with the Classics, which (across all universities/colleges) was as much a cultural subject as a linguistic one. Unsurprisingly, despite a short stay at the Manchester college, Gissing considered education to be expansive — incorporating the Classics and great modern literary, historical, and socio-political works in several languages — and therefore to bestow a multitude of gifts. The individual and the personal are generally favoured above the useful in Gissing's fiction. This makes his work relevant to the study of English literature, which since its inception was anti-utilitarian and has accordingly been subjected to heavy criticism as a university subject.[6] Gissing would have been well suited to teaching the subject, indeed could have made a significant contribution to how it is taught, but the exigencies arising from his expulsion forced him on a different path.

His collected works offer both less and more than a system of education, yet it is important to bear in mind the young man in the artist, since his keen interest in education never deserted him. Early in 1879, he told his brother Algernon that popular education was a worthy long-term aim: 'The people must be taught that they have minds, that their intellectual part is not a mere aerial harp for the empty currents of ecclesiastical wind to play meaningless tunes upon'. Gissing was hoping to write and deliver a lecture entitled 'Intellectual Emancipation', which sadly never came to fruition. Only a glimpse of its content is provided in a letter to

[6] See Carol Atherton, *Defining Literary Criticism: Scholarship, Authority and the Possession of Literary Knowledge, 1880–2002* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 29–36.

Algernon: 'The establishment of a complete system of education, supplemented by a thorough net-work of free libraries, is the first thing to be aimed at. To that end we have a destructive task to perform; we must destroy the State-church, & do our utmost to weaken its hold upon the popular mind'.[7]

Many *fin-de-siècle* writers were obsessed with the theme of education, and several were well suited to pedagogical or research careers, yet for various reasons the calling was never fully realised. Gissing was thwarted in his aim to become an academic due to stealing, yet was still able to earn money as a tutor. Michael Millgate suggests that Thomas Hardy 'may have known more than many a man with a university education, but he lacked the kind of intellectual as well as social assurance that such an education might have given him.'[8] What was true for Hardy, at least according to Millgate, was not necessarily the case for Gissing or Corelli, the former not lacking intellectual assurance and the latter not lacking social assurance. Nonetheless, what unites these disparate writers is a lack of university education. The Oxford-educated Oscar Wilde had considered a career in education, either as a tutor or, following in the footsteps of the poet–critic Arnold, as a school inspector.[9] Wells, as Simon J. James argues in *Maps of Utopia*, was essentially an educator throughout his whole career. Arthur Conan Doyle's most popular character, Sherlock Holmes, is in many ways a meditation on education, and *The Lost World* makes much of breakthroughs in scientific understanding (in the field of palaeontology).[10]

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[7] Gissing, *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, 9 vols, ed. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990–1997), vol. 1, p. 146.

[8] Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist*, quoted in Andrew Cooper, 'Voicing the Language of Literature: Jude's Obscured Labour', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28.2 (2000), 391–410 (391).

[9] Michèle Mendelssohn, *Making Oscar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 46.

[10] Schooling teaches children in the hope that the knowledge imparted will be useful in later life; Holmes limits his knowledge to what is useful for sleuthing. See, for example, Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, in *Sherlock Holmes: The Novels*, introduction by Michael Dirda (New York: Penguin, 2015), pp. 1–127 (p. 18): his knowledge of literature, philosophy, and astronomy is described by Watson as 'Nil', whereas his knowledge of sensational literature is 'Immense' and that of chemistry is 'Profound'. In 'The Naval Treaty' (1893), on a train passing through Clapham Junction, Holmes points out some Board school buildings: 'Beacons of the future! Capsules with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future', *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, in *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes, Volume I*, ed. Leslie S.

The success of the expanded readership and publishing opportunities in the wake of the Education Act/s is attested to by Rudyard Kipling, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Stevenson, and Wilde, among others, who brought bestselling talent to a genre, namely children's fiction, that was previously lacking in it, creating works still enjoyed by children today. However, the infiltration of education by imperialist ideology was also evident in some of these works, as well as in scholarships, competition winners, Cecil Rhodes, etc.[11] The infiltration of such ideology into children's literature is now most readily associated with Kipling. However, he was only part of a popular trend, and indeed was outsold by G. A. Henty, whose works are no longer read by children, not least because the imperialist ideology that they espouse has lost its general appeal.

The following sections explore, first, some of the history of education throughout the nineteenth century, proceeding chronologically after seeking to define the Education Acts and the board schools; it aims to provide a sense of what educational provisions existed at the *fin-de-siècle*. This is followed by a chapter-by-chapter summary of this research, outlining the overall thesis. Then, the education of lower-class readers is discussed before the evolution of the novel resulting from universal education. Finally, this section closes with a brief consideration of Gissing's short stories, which tend to be overlooked compared to his novels.

The History of Nineteenth-Century Education

The Education Acts 1870/1 were passed at a significant point in British history: ostensibly passed on the back of the Second Reform Act, to create an informed electorate who could read (mainly newspapers), the 1870 Act coincided with Matthew Arnold's grand pronouncements on culture and education (Gissing, of course, read and admired Arnold; *Culture and Anarchy*

Klinger, with additional research by Patricia J. Chui, introduction by John le Carré (New York: Norton, 2005), pp. 385–748 (p. 688).

[11] Mendelssohn, *Making Oscar*, p. 41.

was first published in *Cornhill Magazine* 1867–68 and as a book in 1869); it occurred, somewhat paradoxically, at a time of great increase in private schools (or reestablishment of great private schools); it was less than two decades after the Indian Mutiny and six years before Queen Victoria was crowned empress of India.[12] Since school education is also indoctrination, the Act was thus an imperialist (i.e. national, commercial) gesture as well as an act of ostensible educational reform. It was the year of Charles Dickens's death, a novelist who began his career writing popular entertainments such as *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist* and later successfully produced popular serious literature with *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, and *Our Mutual Friend*. John Ruskin began his *Fors Clavigera* lectures in 1871, Pater's controversial work *The Renaissance* was published in 1873. The legislation obviously had no immediate effect, and this is part of the reason why it is difficult to chart its influence. The first generation of board school-educated children had come of age by 1882, but the educational reform was inchoate at this point. Leonard Bast in *Howards End* is one of the first fictional products of the Act, someone who actively seeks embourgeoisement, but Forster's novel was published in 1911, some forty-one years after the Act. Despite what the Education Acts promised, there was no sudden leap in literacy; instead, there was a gradual increase.[13] Rather, they represented an extraordinary boost to publishers and ultimately helped redefine literary value by widening the marketplace and the canon. Improved commercial success also meant an increase in risk-taking. It meant that talented writers were willing to focus their talent on previously derogated or 'controversial' genres, such as the shilling shocker (*Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886)), the novel of supernatural romance (*The Sorrows of Satan*), and children's literature (*The Jungle Book* (1894), *Treasure Island* (1883), etc.).

[12] Stephens, *Education in Britain*, pp. 99–133 *passim*.
[13] Williams, *Long Revolution*, p. 198.

Although the Elementary Education Act 1870 did not immediately bring about equality of education or equal career opportunities, or increase the quality of education available, it ensured over a reasonable period of time universal school attendance and 'the reduction of gross educational inequalities between classes, communities and sexes'.[14] An indication of the original Act's shortcomings are evident in the eventual passing of the Education Act 1902. Among the critics of the original Act was Frances Warwick, who argued, in relation to the Education Bill (1901), that the notion that so-called apathy of the people undermines real educational reform was grossly exaggerated, although he saw a good deal of indifference among parents in relation to the education of their children among the lower classes.[15] His only answer to foreign competition, specifying America and Germany, is a more efficient system of education.[16] Sir John Gorst's ideal of a proper system of education is one where 'the industrial classes should have access to all the schools, colleges, and universities in the land […] the best boys and girls from the ranks of the people should have access to the secondary schools, and through them to the Universities, and that they should have the best opportunities for making use of their talents', whereas Warwick sees a disparity between this ideal and the reality, with very few of the 'right children' (i.e. the most intelligent and industrious) winning scholarships that allow them to 'get a footing on the rung of the ladder'.[17] Evening schools were 'one of the great stepping-stones to higher education', yet extracurricular activities in London Board Schools, such as dancing and acting, were criticised unfairly.[18] There was much to be hopeful for as well as disappointed in. The idea of a scholarship ladder was mentioned in 1871 by T. H.

[14] W. B. Stephens, *Education in Britain 1750–1914* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 90. As noted by Harold Orel, the broadening of the British educational base was a result of several factors: the Education Act 1870 and subsequent Bills of 1876 and 1880; the mechanisation of printing; and the development of mass-circulation periodicals that specialised in fiction. Quoted in Barbara Rawlinson, *A Man of Many Parts: Gissing's Short Stories, Essays and Other Works* (Amsterdam; New York: BRILL, 2006), p. 213.
[15] Frances Warwick, 'The Cause of the Children', *The Nineteenth Century and After: A Monthly Review*, 50.293 (1901), pp. 67–76 (p. 68).
[16] Warwick, 'Cause of the Children', p. 69.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 71 and 73.

Huxley, a member of the London School Board, who envisaged its bottom in the gutter and its top in the universities and believed that any child with the strength to climb might reach the place intended for them.[19] Despite criticisms and shortcomings, a more meritocratic, less aristocratic, education system than that of the early to mid-nineteenth century was being aimed for with some undoubted success.

To understand the contrast, it is worth outlining the history of education during the early to mid-nineteenth century. Henry Brougham's 1825 treatise on popular education declared that 'The people themselves must be the great agents in accomplishing the work of their own instruction'. As Janice Schroeder notes, 'there was greater demand for credentialed teachers, more and better schooling, broad access to reading material and expert opinion, and opportunities to learn both in public and at home. Evidence of such trends permits a broad generalization of Victorian culture as highly informed and knowledge acquisitive.'[20] Brougham's well-meaning precept is transvalued in Gissing's pessimistic fiction, itself influenced by French realism: the autodidactic characters are thwarted in their aims to progress culturally and socio-economically in life. Illness, hereditary- and/or class-related disadvantages, and bad luck ultimately exert equal if not greater force on their lives than literature and learning. Some late-nineteenth century authors, intellectuals, and cultural authorities including Grant Allen, Havelock Ellis, T. H. Huxley, Francis Galton, Henry Maudsley, and Wells denounced the American and French revolutionary doctrine of 'natural equality'; universal education was a threat to the idea of equality, 'a denial of the "vast inequalities" which stratify the human species'.[21]

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[19] Gillian Sutherland, in collaboration with Stephen Sharp, *Ability, Merit and Measurement: Mental Testing and English Education 1880–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 107. Richard Hoggart discusses the psychology of working-class boys on the scholarship ladder in *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life*, with a foreword by Simon Hoggart and introduction by Lynsey Hanley (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 262–75.

[20] Janice Schroeder, 'Victorian Education and the Periodical Press', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 50.4 (2017), pp. 679–86 (p. 680).

[21] Sara Lyons, *Assessing Intelligence: The Bildungsroman and the Politics of Human Potential in England, 1860–1910* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), pp. 1, 3.

Every school in late-Victorian Britain aimed to measure merit to establish the usefulness of a child for the state, although the majority of working-class children would be found wanting. In the 1830s, ‘Macaulay turned India into a laboratory for the meritocratic idea’, whereas Trevelyan ‘applied that idea to the very heart of the British state’.[22] The arbitrariness of the assessment of merit is seen in the fact that Macaulay wanted Indian men to demonstrate their knowledge of European history, literature, and cultural values, rather than knowledge of Indian history or Sanskrit culture, putting them at a disadvantage and imposing on them a new caste system in which they were subordinates.[23] The centralisation of one group as demonstrating the correct values allows it to class non-conformation to its values as demerits, disadvantaging other groups and deriving from this an intergroup hierarchy. In *fin-de-siècle* Britain, the centralised group was the aristocracy, yet the class itself was in decline, and the residual cultural values were dispersed among the lower classes, leading to a new hierarchisation along aristocratic lines, manifesting *inter alia* in education.

The modernization of Britain’s state apparatus was necessary for prosperity at home and abroad, and entailed an overhaul of the system of recruitment, which the Northcote-Trevelyan Report (1854) saw as pooling resources from the aristocracy, who were able through patronage to establish careers in public service for their less competent family members.[24] The ineptness of contemporary government administration, including the civil service, was famously satirised by Dickens in *Little Dorrit* (1857), as the Circumlocution Office; earlier, Thomas Carlyle had referred to this incompetence as ‘Donothingism’ in *Past and Present*

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[22] Adrian Wooldridge, *The Aristocracy of Talent: How Meritocracy Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2023), p. 155.
[23] See Wooldridge, *Aristocracy of Talent*, p. 154. For a discussion of the Indian supporters of English educationists, see Pramod K. Nayar, ‘Moral Readership and Political Apprenticeship: Commentaries on English Education in India, 1875–1930’, in Jonathan Rose (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of Reading: Subversive Readers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp. 138–61; Nayar (ed.), *Colonial Education and India, 1781–1945: Volume II* (London: Routledge, 2019).
[24] Wooldridge, *Aristocracy of Talent*, pp. 155–6.

(1843).[25] Gissing considered Dickens at a disadvantage to Thackeray in terms of satire, yet he considered the Circumlocution Office the exception, even though he considered it more amusing than realistic.[26]

In his collection of essays, *The Idea of a University* (1852/1858, originally delivered as lectures), John Henry Newman noted the divide between individualism and economic utility in debates about a liberal education. He felt that certain great men insisted that education 'should be confined to some particular and narrow end, and should issue in some definite work, which can be weighed and measured'.[27] In Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895), Geoffrey Tempest has a university education that, he feels, can only be used in the service of literature and is otherwise worthless.[28] Gissing describes the title character of 'Miss Rodney's Leisure' (1903) as having the air of a university-educated woman, and she is able to create order in her 'own little corner of the world', influencing the Turpins' decision to evict Mr Rawcliffe, who has the status of a gentleman which is undermined by his drunkenness and apparent inability to pay arrears.[29] Miss Rodney teaches Mr Turpin and has applied her intelligence to daily life, representing a rare case in Gissing of someone who is not merely bookish but possesses a rounded education. Gissing does not suggest whether this is innate, although the real-life basis for this character, Miss Rachel Evelyn White, a Cambridge lecturer in Classics, sheds light on her refined dress sense and deportment described in the opening of the story.[30] If Miss Rodney

[25] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. Harvey Peter Sucksmith, introduction and notes by Dennis Walder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 837n.
[26] George Gissing, *Collected Works of George Gissing on Charles Dickens: Volume 2: Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, ed. Simon J. James, with afterword by David Parker (Grayswood: Grayswood Press, 2004), pp. 106–7.
[27] John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 110.
[28] Marie Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan, or The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire: A Romance*, ed. Julia Kuehn (Kansas City, MO: Valancourt Books, 2008), p. 3. Subsequent references are to this edition. A young Winston Churchill considered a classical education 'one long useless, meaningless rigmarole' to the majority of public schoolboys who received one, though he later changed his opinion — Jonathan Rose, *The Literary Churchill: Author, Reader, Actor* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 20.
[29] Gissing, 'Miss Rodney's Leisure', in *Collected Short Stories*, 3 vols, ed. Pierre Coustillas, with the assistance of Barbara Rawlinson and Hélène Coustillas (Grayswood: Grayswood Press, 2012), vol. 3, pp. 329–44 (p. 344).
[30] Gissing, 'Miss Rodney's Leisure', p. 329n.

has indeed received a university education, she has shown what Newman argues for in *The Idea of a University*, that a liberal education is a good in itself. Although Newman is referring to a university education, the attitude he describes is prevalent in debates about the purpose of all kinds of education, as shown throughout this thesis.

By the *fin-de-siècle*, heated debate about the purposes of education, particularly universal education, had reached its zenith.[31] In *The Long Revolution*, Raymond Williams notes that the organisational structure of education provides 'an active shaping to particular social ends' and that the educative content is a selection with 'a particular set of emphases and omissions' from the culture of the society.[32] Williams outlines three general purposes for educational systems. First, the major purpose involves training of the members of a group to the 'social character' or 'pattern of culture' which is dominant in the group or by which the group lives (the accepted behaviour and values of society). It is a natural training that everyone must acquire, but when the social character is changing, or if there are several alternative social characters, this training can become indoctrination. Second, there is a general education or education for culture, specifically the general knowledge and attitudes appropriate to an educated person. Third, there is the teaching of particular skills, or specialised training (allowing one to earn a living).[33] Education has a limited sense of pedagogical instruction including, with a particular emphasis in the late-Victorian/Edwardian period, reading and literacy; there is a broader, yet individual, sense of enlarging one's consciousness through dedicated autodidacticism; British education is a historically determined social symbol that confers a certain class-inflected status and distinction on the recipient, or at least is perceived

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[31] See, for example, Simon J. James, *Maps of Utopia: H. G. Wells, Modernity, and the End of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 1–19.
[32] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2013 reprint), p. 153.
[33] Williams, *Long Revolution*, pp. 154–5.

as doing so, as presented by Gissing most explicitly in *Demos*, *Thyrza*, and *The Odd Women*.[34] Gissing also presents various formal learning opportunities available to women: ladies' training schools (to teach the foundations of culture or, more accurately, the performance of culture); continental education, with an emphasis on linguistic skills; the University of London, which allowed women to study at two of its colleges.[35]

In his fiction and nonfiction, Gissing rarely directly addresses the effects of the Education Act 1870 (his numerous volumes of letters and diary contain almost no mention of it or of board schools), a fact made the more striking by his being so well placed to write about them.[36] As Maltz notes, Gissing instead uses terms such as 'half-educated', 'quarter-educated', and 'sham education' to express his distaste for universal education and inadequate schooling.[37] On the other hand, in Gissing's first published novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), Sam Tollady, sharing his thoughts on the condition of England, expresses pity for the millions of pre-Education Act children who suffer want of education because their parents are either too poor or too careless to send them to school.[38] As this thesis demonstrates, education, including 'high culture' derived from education, is one of Gissing's central preoccupations as a novelist and thinker, and he began writing his novels as the first Board-educated children were coming of age. Therefore, the question of why he avoided presenting the effects of the Education Act directly — why he addresses the Act usually in passing and nearly always negatively — requires investigation. It is only partly a matter of timing — the younger novelist and friend

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[34] The necessity of teaching people to read is an 'essential of education' according to Corelli in 'A Vital Point of Education', in *Free Opinions Freely Expressed on Certain Phases of Modern Social Life and Conduct* (London: Constable, 1905), pp. 1–14 (p. 1).

[35] For a discussion of genuine and shallow education among women, see Pierre Coustillas, *The Heroic Life of George Gissing*, 3 vols (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2016 reprint [2011/2012]), vol. 1, p. 292. Coustillas compares Miss Davis with Ella Gaussen, who is 'hopelessly lost among shallow fools'.

[36] Mr Newthorpe in *Thyrza* believes that it was passed for the sake of keeping Britain's manufacturing industry competitive internationally — Gissing, *Thyrza*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2013), p. 38.

[37] Diana Maltz, *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes 1870–1900: Beauty for the People* (Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 198.

[38] The unusual authorial interjection, ['There were no school boards as yet in England.]', is ironically one of the few direct references to Board schools in Gissing's *oeuvre*, *Workers*, p. 164. See also Gissing, *Workers*, pp. 90 (vol. I) and 139 (vol. II).

Wells wrote about the Education Act both directly and positively, albeit with reservations — and partly a matter of outlook (Gissing was too old to be Board-educated himself, and his sons Walter and Alfred, both of whom were born in the 1890s, were not either, although Gissing was dead before his youngest was able to pass through primary education).[39] His faith in education as a force for social improvement was certainly shaken by 1885, and by 1889, he believed that human nature was not sufficiently malleable for education to effect such change.[40]

Chapter Summaries

This thesis explores the ways in which late-Victorian/Edwardian education produces exiles. **Chapter 1** compares Gissing and Corelli. The French boarding school-educated Corelli is exiled but her exile is performative (a heroic, defiant 'self'-exile from critical approval), whereas Gissing, who is classically educated, was exiled (to America), yet in a sense performs too — in a more authentic way through his characters. Corelli feels closer to one of his characters than she does to him.

To understand education, it is necessary to understand the related concept of culture. It is therefore important to note the antecedents of culture, particularly high culture or minority culture, as it was understood at the *fin-de-siècle*. Thomas Carlyle preached a form of self-help, improvement through reading, and Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* provided a popular summa of the subject. Whereas Carlyle is readily associated with individualism (as is his American friend Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists), Arnold is more ambivalently associated with it:

> Since in *Culture and Anarchy* culture is a transcendent register of valued knowledge — 'the best that has been thought and known in the world' — it cannot be produced or, rather, has already been produced; all that a body under the influence of culture can achieve is a full realization of its own

[39] Gissing told Bertz that he had always felt guilty of a crime towards his younger son due to their distant relationship. Alfred entered the Gresham Grammar School in 1910. Coustillas, *Heroic Life*, vol. 3, p. 206.
[40] Maltz, *British Aestheticism*, p. 197.

> belatedness: culture is always already there, replete in its truth and justified in its right to prevail over everything lesser than itself.[41]

The rise of universal education provoked a defence by Gissing and Corelli, among others including Henry James, of English and/or European culture. What is remarkable is that Corelli attracted a mass readership, blending aestheticism and an appeal to the prestige of British canonical or standard authors (the latter with her appeals to authority through the schooling system: the standard authors taught in schools were symbols of literary and moral value) with moral education.[42]

This research is given greater breadth and legitimacy by her inclusion; her canonical status has remained uncertain since the mid-twentieth century yet she was popular in her day and wrote novels that incorporate romance elements or arguably romances rather than novels, even in *Wormwood: A Drama of Paris* (1890), which convincingly performs literary realism, or as Annette Federico argues, is 'dependent on decadent tropes'.[43] Corelli is also a special case because her didactic novels, as well as her essays, promise social utility — through moral (Christian) and classical instruction for the masses, as the prime minister William Gladstone saw — yet ultimately provide a Christianised version of Paterian aesthetics. She appeals to a

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[41] Marc Demarest, 'Arnold and Tylor: The Codification and Appropriation of Culture', in *Culture and Education in Victorian England*, ed. Patrick Scott and Pauline Fletcher (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), pp. 26–42 (p. 30).

[42] The fact that Corelli's fiction is interested in education may explain why she attracted the interest of Methuen & Co., which was originally established, in 1889, to publish Algernon Methuen Marshall Stedman's own textbooks but later published her fiction alongside novels by Kipling, Conrad, and others (Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 7, pp. 100–1n). An exploration of educational publishing in this period is beyond the scope of this thesis, although it is interesting to note that, in England, school boards had selective power over which textbooks to adopt or decline (Alexis Weedon, *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 112).

[43] Annette Federico, *Idol of Suburbia: Marie Corelli and Late-Victorian Literary Culture* (Charlottesville, VA; London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. 73. Regarding Corelli's canonical status, she has attracted substantial scholarly attention during the last 30 years. Of her novels, *The Sorrows of Satan* was reprinted by Oxford University Press as a World's Classic in 1998, *Wormwood: A Drama of Paris* was reprinted by Broadview Press in 2004, and *A Romance of Two Worlds* was reprinted by Edinburgh University Press in 2019; of the smaller publishers, Valancourt Books reprinted *Sorrows* and *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul* in 2008 and 2009, respectively, and Zittaw Press reprinted *Vendetta* in 2009. In his introduction to *Romance*, Andrew Radford argues that Corelli's first novel deliberately vacillates between novel (*Bildungsroman*) and romance — Marie Corelli, *A Romance of Two Worlds: A Novel*, ed. Andrew Radford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp. xiii–xix. All subsequent references are to this edition. In 2006, Christine Ferguson remarked that Corelli's 'literary fate provided an object lesson in the ephemerality of popular success, and it arguably continues to do so', *Language, Science and Popular Fiction in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle: The Brutal Tongue* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 49.

coterie, as did Pater, yet that 'coterie', by exploiting a mass readership through what is here described as a literary kind of cultural performativity, proved to be vast.

Corelli's appeal to a mass audience lies in her performance of culture, which aims at respectability. Lynsey Hanley observes that respectability is a matter of perception, and others' perception of oneself can be challenged and changed by self-perception:

> there's nothing inherently good or bad about being respectable. Respectability is a property of your specific circumstances: circumstances which permit you, or at least make it easier, to maintain the appearance and feeling of self-respect. The more desperate your circumstances, the less likely you are to be seen as respectable by other people, but it doesn't necessarily affect your own perception of how respectable you are. You might simply choose to define it in different ways.[44]

Corelli had more self-respect than perhaps any author who has ever existed, and her many readers must have responded to this.

Gissing's culture confers respectability on him and his readers too, though his realism distinguishes him from Corelli. Both writers are useful as barometers of change but also for exploring the limits of their awareness of shifts in the cultural landscape. Gissing, a powerful advocate of education, nonetheless has little positive to say about universal education. Understanding this helps us understand both the limits of the project of state education and the limits of Gissing's sympathies.

Shrinking minority culture and growing mass culture are the two ends of one spectrum that characterises Victorian literature, the consciousness of which deepens during the period. This is the consciousness not only of authors, readers, and publishers but also of educators, politicians, and others. Two representative authors for each end of the spectrum are Gissing and Corelli, respectively. As Annette Federico says of Corelli, '[v]ery few writers at the turn of the century spoke with such fervor and sincerity in defense of "the masses" or with such faith in the public's taste and reading habits'.[45] A reductionist view suggests that Corelli has faith in

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[44] Lynsey Hanley, *Respectable: Crossing the Class Divide* (London: Penguin, 2017), p. 11.
[45] Federico, *Idol*, p. 54.

the reading public because it approves of her works, whereas Gissing berates the masses for not buying his novels. However, Corelli's success is clearly attributable to her sympathy with the new mass readership and a belief that her fiction could educate readers better than schools, especially in respect of religious faith, which gradually decreased over the nineteenth century.

Chapter 2 investigates the issue of minority culture: an education that has blessed or cursed the few and set them in opposition to the masses. Gissing's Ryecroft is not simply his version of Pater's Marius, since the tension between social utility and individualism is more marked, and more guilt-laden, in the former than in the latter. The *déraciné* features as a prominent character type in Gissing's fiction, although such characters often uproot *themselves* (rather than being uprooted) from their natural environment as a deliberate act of individuation, a terminal grasping for cultural distinction. The character who comes closest to succeeding is Ryecroft, yet his rural solitude is only a liminal space between urban suffering and approaching death, a grim parody of retirement.

Gissing felt that mass culture was a contradiction in terms:

> It is my belief that the multitude was never more remote than now from true culture. Men & women of truly cultured feeling are more & more withdrawing into privacy, dreading the clash and clang of sham education & brutal unidealism. We have to recognize that the progress of our time is purely material; spiritual growth may perchance be its result hereafter, but we shall not live to enjoy such fruits.[46]

Curiously, he felt this way only about English-speaking nations; 'Lack of education or more properly of literary and artistic culture, the supreme test which, in his eyes, divided humanity into two separate entities, struck him as a less serious handicap in the Italian than in the Briton and the American'.[47] Gissing was anxious about the gulf between the two groups, mainly insofar as it affected the cultured minority. Modernity is shallow. Sham education is rife. However, he does not lack sympathy.

[46] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 4, p. 276.
[47] Coustillas, *Heroic Life*, vol. 2, p. 22.

Chapter 2 also explores cursed educations which create monsters of individualism: Mr Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Griffin in Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1897), and Godwin Peak in *Born in Exile* (1892). It finds that it is isolation, as distinct from Paterian solitude, that has led these extraordinary intellectuals on their destructive paths, and absence from other educated people has perhaps warped their imaginations.

Gissing's literary realism contextualises Paterian aesthetics. Corelli's romance may suggest that ultimately the genre was not capable of portraying all the facets of the Paterian life, but, as demonstrated in **Chapter 3**, Wilde was able to show in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890/1891) that it was.

The chapter also questions whether this disinterested appreciation of beauty (Paterian aesthetics), an education in itself and one that resists/rejects traditional pedagogies of teaching, produces exiles. It examines the work and life of Wilde and interrogates Gissing's understanding of the homosexual aesthete's cruel treatment in classical terms. As argued in the chapter, the inadequacy of a fashionable education is apparent in the failure of imaginations such as Gissing's and his characters, which blinds them to much of the reality of the late-Victorian period. Maltz suggests that '[m]iddle-class women like Cecily Doran […] and Alma Frothingham […] are debilitated before each novel's action by trendy and inadequate schooling, which leaves them vulnerable to the wiles of aesthetic fortune-hunters and adventurers'.[48] These Paterian dilletantes are also fashionably educated, demonstrating the perniciousness of such phenomena.

Chapter 4 provides answers to the question of whether rejection of a state (imperialist) education leads to (mental) exile from the state. It proceeds from an examination of literature portraying boys who have been successfully fed nationalist propaganda — Corelli's *Boy*, G. A. Henty's romances, and Gissing's *Isabel Clarendon* — to looking at where boys, so to speak,

[48] Maltz, *British Aestheticism*, p. 197.

end up, in Gissing's *The Whirlpool* and *The Crown of Life* (1899). Some become mature in adulthood but others do not; the former find their own way, while the latter are stunted in terms of development, becoming imperialist ideologues.

The teaching of geography and history in board schools usually reduced the former to the memorisation of place names and the latter to learning about British monarchs.[49] Although the ethos of colonialism was transmitted via novels and stories from the public schoolroom to board school boys, very few of the latter had the opportunity to become imperialists, since such careers were lucrative and hence guarded.[50] Thus, state education was largely a gesture, an empty promise. An education that aims at utility might be more amenable to serving the state, but Chapter 4 raises the question of whether individualists are only unconsciously useful to the state, since capitalist ideologues such as Arnold Jacks tend to be drawn to individualism.

Chapter 5 shows that certain types of education and certain learning strategies (classical education, cramming, etc.) can lead to exile from employment, from the species, ultimately from life. It examines what happens to education in working life, examining *New Grub Street* (1891) alongside *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), with occasional references to Wells's *Kipps: A Story of a Simple Soul* (1905), work being seen by some as the natural conclusion of an education, yet for others work thwarts education or proves inadequate. The classically educated writers Edwin Reardon and Harold Biffen see their social utility in writing serious literature, a noble vocation, yet one that cannot provide a living for the authors or, in Edwin's case, their dependents. Jasper Milvain, who is happy to exploit a new mass readership in part created by the Education Acts of 1870/1 and is coldly calculating in his eventual securement of the editorship of *The Current*, knows enough to perform high cultural attainment and is ultimately a commercial success. The reader is left to surmise what he will become.

[49] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 163.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 322.

Samuel Barmby from *In the Year of Jubilee* is used in the discussion as the kind of reader that Milvain types seek to exploit.

Finally, this thesis aims to appeal to those interested in Corelli studies as well as Gissing studies, since it brings together two authors rarely studied side by side, in Chapters 1 and 4. It brings Marxist criticism, cultural and social history, and Freudian analysis to bear on works that have not hitherto received such (or much) attention. It offers the first Freudian interpretation of *Boy* and a rare in-depth analysis of one of Gissing's later neglected works, *The Crown of Life*, particularly in relation to Louis Althusser's work on state ideological apparatuses. In relation to Gissing's early working-class novels and *New Grub Street*, this work builds on the valuable contributions of Maltz, James, Brantlinger, and Poole by focusing more directly on the theme of education.

Poverty and Education

It is in the educated man's experience of poverty we see where Gissing's sympathies lie, despite his commitment to portraying reality objectively. Dr Derwent in *The Crown of Life* is a fairly private individual whose entire aim in life is the 'diminution of human suffering'.[51] There is a distinction implied by the narrator between his experience of poverty as an educated man and the experience of uneducated men: 'like every educated man who has known poverty at the outset of life, he feared it more than he cared to say' (*CL*, p. 83). This suggests, first, that uneducated men will tolerate poverty. Secondly, it implies that being educated allows one to see it as a cruel injustice that must be overcome, even as it is worse for educated men, as Gissing shows elsewhere (Edwin and Biffen in *New Grub Street* being the most striking examples). The narrator tells us that his wife married him when his ability to earn a living was not assured,

[51] George Gissing, *The Crown of Life*, ed. Michel Ballard, p. 82. Subsequent references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text (abbreviation: *CL*).

describing it as 'the fierce fight for a living' (*CL*, p 83). Thus, the struggle for life and education are presented as both independent of each other and interdependent: education distinguishes itself from the baseness of daily toil, yet to be educated is to become conscious of destitution and is thus essential in the struggle for life.

In his life and work, Gissing was interested in the exceptional individual, with mass education being a perceived and acknowledged threat to such exceptionalism and, indeed, individualism. In 1892, he told Eduard Bertz about a new novel through which he originally intended to explore universal education, showing (typically for him) more concern for intellectual exceptionalism than the many board school-educated children coming of age:

> I want to deal with the flood of blackguardism which nowadays is pouring forth over the society which is raised by wealth above the lowest & yet is not sufficiently educated to rank with the highest. Impossible to take up a newspaper without being impressed with this fact of extending & deepening Vulgarity. It seems to be greatly due to American influence, but there can be no doubt that the ground is prepared for it by the pretence of education afforded by our School-board system. Society is being *levelled down*, & with strange rapidity. Democracy scarcely pretends to a noble aim; it is triumphing by the force of its appeal to lower motives. Thus, I am convinced, the gulf between the really refined & the masses grows, & will grow, constantly wider. Before long, we shall have an Aristocracy of mind & manners more distinct from the vast majority of the population than Aristocracy has ever been in England. It will not be a fighting Aristocracy, but a retiring & reticent [one]; scornful, hopeless.[52]

His tone is alarmist ('has ever been'), especially considering the disparity between, to take an earlier example in history, such poets as Sir Philip Sidney and the peasantry in early modern England. The widening gap between the masses and the intellectual aristocracy is Gissing's main concern because it will shrink the latter and produce despondency among intellectuals. His cynicism towards universal education is clear in the above and evident in the novels, for example in *The Nether World* in the description of Amy Hewett as being 'shortly at the point when the education of a board-school child is said to be "finished"'.[53] His criticism of the short length of Board education in the 1880s is certainly valid, however, since the legal leaving age limit was gradually extended over time. Gissing believes in the exceptional individual and the aristocracy of culture, yet the number of his characters who truly excel, who transcend

[52] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 5, p. 33.
[53] Gissing, *The Nether World*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 reissue), p. 367.

hierarchical subjugation (based on class, gender, etc.) is vanishingly low. While Godwin Peak, for example, is an excellent student, he ultimately proves to be a hopeless monster.[54]

In terms of schooling and Gissing's greater concern for intellectual exceptionalism than board school-educated children, he generally has more interest in those who were educated at grammar schools or were privately educated and yet are misfits. In *Eve's Ransom* (1895), Maurice Hilliard's grammar school education is 'just sufficiently prolonged to unfit him for the tasks of an underling, yet not thorough enough to qualify him for professional life'.[55] He speaks 'the language of an educated man, but with a trace of the Midland accent', whereas Dengate's speech has 'less refinement'.[56] Hilliard's education has *almost* prepared him for a better life. If, as Derrida suggests, the voice 'has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind', the trace of a Midlands accent reveals Hilliard's mind to be 'inferior'.[57]

Gissing considers some among the lower classes to be ineducable yet not among the upper classes. Referring to *Workers in the Dawn*, Pierre Coustillas notes the following:

> The concept of charity and of social change as practised by one class or individual for the benefit of another is no part of the narrator's credo. Yet his social conscience is omnipresent, as is evidenced by his unsparing exposition of the evils of society and his vigorous rejection of the effete remedies suggested for them. Education may emerge as the sole remedy, but only a partial one, for if Gissing was throughout his life an apostle of culture he was and remained convinced that, with some individuals, no amount of teaching would ever be appropriate. Education succeeds when dispensed by Helen Norman, Heatherley and their lower-class friend Lucy Venning, but fails signally at the hands of Arthur, whose wife is impervious to all forms of reformation. Culture, Gissing argued in another context, could influence character and develop intellect, but only insofar as it may condition political measures permitting an embodiment of it.[58]

This may strike modern readers as unusually pessimistic, yet Gissing's personal experience with his first wife Nell was similar to that of Arthur and Carrie, who is recalcitrant and resistant to bourgeois assimilation; this experience undoubtedly influenced his literary realism.

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[54] The term 'hopeful monster' was coined by the twentieth-century post-Darwinian German geneticist, Richard Goldschmidt, to describe saltationism. See Charles Darwin, *The Annotated Origin: A Facsimile of the First Edition of On the Origin of Species*, annotated by James T. Costa (Cambridge, MA; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 4n.

[55] Gissing, *Eve's Ransom*, in *Three Novellas*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Grayswood: Grayswood Press, 2011), pp. 1–143 (p. 19).

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[57] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 11.

[58] Coustillas, *Heroic Life*, vol. 1, pp. 171–2.

However, the ineducable in Gissing form a minority, and for some, education/culture into adulthood may in some cases be able to heal the wound that school has created. Rose usefully reminds us what late Victorian and Edwardian schools were actually like: most of them 'did a fair job of teaching the basics, and often something more than the basics. They succeeded in maintaining discipline, albeit via the cane. Granted, most of us would have felt stifled in an old board school classroom, but we should avoid projecting our own needs and demands on past generations.'[59] Education is most naturally associated with children, as it is at the *fin-de-siècle*, yet schools rarely feature in Gissing.[60] When they do feature, it is mainly as a site of adult education, as in *Demos* and *Thyrza*.[61] *The Unclassed* (1884; 1895) initially presents a school as the site of violence between two girls. The opening scenes of *Born in Exile* depict schooling as a Darwinian struggle for intellectual dominance. Rhoda's typing school in *The Odd Women* attempts to reverse the effects of a society that politically marginalises women.[62] In *Workers in the Dawn*, the thirteen-year-old Maud Gresham, despite being educated at a London ladies' school, has fallen behind the eleven-year-old Helen's in the 'foundations of culture'.[63] Jessica Morgan in *In the Year of Jubilee* almost kills herself due to severe mental ill health arising from cramming and intellectual overexertion. In *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, school military drill haunts the main narrator.

The short length of primary education at a non-denominational board school meant that a spirit of autodidacticism had to be fostered in individuals who wished their education to continue: 'Many alumni felt that Board schools, with all their limitations, provided a solid foundation for lifetime education. They taught basic learning skills, introduced the best in

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[59] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 186.

[60] As Jenny Bourne Taylor observes, the study of childhood during this period brought together educational theory, medicine, neurology, and mental science, 'Psychology at the fin de siècle', in *The Cambridge Companion to the fin de siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 reprint), pp. 13–30 (p. 22).

[61] P. F. Kropholler, 'Gissing's Characters and their Books', *The Gissing Newsletter*, 5.2 (1969), pp. 12–16 (p. 14).

[62] Maltz, *British Aestheticism*, p. 182.

[63] Gissing, *Workers*, p. 132.

English literature, then set their pupils free at adolescence to read on their own'.[64] The publishing opportunities provided by the Education Act/s also enabled the production of affordable school editions of English classics, reinforced by mandated by readings of 'standard authors' such as Shakespeare, Milton, and Defoe.[65] The state thus had a dual hold on working-class readers: enough education for class consciousness and dissatisfaction, and early acquaintance with canonical works to inculcate Western socio-political and/or imperialist values.

Novelists as Educators

The novel was a canonical form by the late-Victorian period; to write a merely serious novel was to automatically have esteem conferred upon oneself, which is Bourdieu's autonomous principle of hierarchization, namely degree specific consecration.[66] Wells, in complaining to Arnold Bennett about how the latter ignored his novel *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1900) in *Books and Bookmen*, reveals an acute awareness of the hierarchy of literary forms, with short stories and romances clearly not to be taken as seriously as the novel: 'You are so manifestly not up to Turgenev any more than you are up to Dickens or *Love and Mr Lewisham*. […] For me you are part of the Great Public, I perceive. I am doomed to write 'scientific' romances and short stories for you creatures of the mob, and my novels must be my private dissipation'.[67] Wells is upset that he should forever be associated with popular fiction, as opposed to serious novels.

However, as Rose demonstrates and as Wells failed to appreciate, the uses of literacy are complicated. At the *fin-de-siècle*, in particular, the readership was changing, even as the

[64] Gissing, *Workers*, p. 162.
[65] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 33.
[66] Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed', in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge; Oxford: Polity Press, 2007 reprint), pp. 29–73, p. 38.
[67] Letter from H. G. Wells to Arnold Bennett, 19 Aug 1901, marked 'PRIVATE AND ABUSIVE', *Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells: A Record of a Personal and a Literary Friendship*, ed. Harris Wilson (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1960), p. 60.

perception of readers failed to keep pace; for example, *The Boy's Own Paper* was also read by girls, something partly acknowledged by the slightly later publication of *The Girl's Own Paper*. For British working-class readers in the nineteenth century, each individual reading history was 'a unique jumble of ephemera, junk, and often some classics'.[68]

There was also the expanding leisure time of lower-class men and women, viewed as pernicious by the regulators of culture, for example the press, publishers, readers who had previously considered themselves among the elect, and various authors.[69] The concomitant increase in popularity of the novel as a literary form with the growing reading public was seen to undermine its potential as a symbol of distinction or as educative.[70] Novel-reading was seen by many as a popular pastime, a galling proposition to a serious author like Gissing who saw the value of the novel for educating readers about the cruel realities of modern life and encouraging them to think about issues hitherto glanced over or ignored altogether.

The novel in the late-Victorian period uneasily acknowledges its ambivalent role in the education of readers, as highlighted by Rhoda in *The Odd Women* in relation to Miss Royston:

> All her spare time was given to novel-reading. If every novelist could be strangled and thrown into the sea we should have some chance of reforming women. The girl's nature was corrupted with sentimentality, like that of all but every woman who is intelligent enough to read what is called the best fiction, but not intelligent enough to understand its vice. Love — love — love; a sickening sameness of vulgarity. What is more vulgar than the ideal of novelists? They won't represent the actual world; it would be too dull for their readers. In real life, how many men and women fall in love? Not one in every ten thousand, I am convinced.[71]

Rhoda here criticises the reader of novels as much as the novelist, but she specifically criticises novels with romance elements — denigrated as feminine, sentimental, etc. — and not simply

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[68] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 367.

[69] With some derision, H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett noted the appeal of popular novels among the newly educated masses. Bennett thought that fiction would be appeal to the average reader if there was no difficulty involved in reading it. Ferguson, *Language, Science and Popular Fiction*, p. 53. For a discussion of the 1890s as a time of 'unprecedented plenty' for working people, see Thomas R.C. Gibson-Brydon, *The Moral Mapping of Victorian and Edwardian London: Charles Booth, Christian Charity, and the Poor-but-Respectable*, ed. Hillary Kaell and Brian Lewis (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), p. 107.

[70] James, *Maps*, p. 4.

[71] Gissing, *The Odd Women*, ed. Patricia Ingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 reissue), pp. 67–8. Subsequent references are to this edition.

novels but fiction that is below the best. This implies that there are novels worth reading (realist novels like Gissing's) but most readers are not drawn to them.[72]

Gissing's 'artistic probity', the seriousness of the issues explored in his fiction and the presentation, and the intellectual proclivities of many of his characters are unconventional for the period, but were not simply an attempt on his part to become a canonical author, although that was undoubtedly an influencing factor.[73] He wanted to establish a literary coterie of sympathetic readers; as Coustillas observes (paraphrasing Gissing), 'he was more dependent than most men on sympathy to bring out the best that was in him'.[74] His at times disappointing and painful search for an informed and insightful readership, which began to flourish with the publication of *Thyrza*, is proof that Gissing took these matters very seriously. He rarely trusted reviewers, who in the 1880s and for part of the 1890s were at the mercy of the prim sensibility of circulating-library readers (his early unpublished second novel was called *Mrs Grundy's Enemies*, Mrs Grundy being an offstage character from Thomas Morton's *Speed the Plough* (1798) who was later used to personify the tyranny of conventional proprieties).[75] Indeed, the manuscript for 'Now or Never' was rejected by Smith, Elder on the grounds that it was 'too painful to please the ordinary novel reader[,] and treats of scenes that can never attract the subscribers of Mr. Mudie's library'.[76] The seriousness of the novelist's purpose in avoiding non-discriminating audiences became the subject of debate in the 1880s, with Henry James's

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[72] See Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 117, quoted below (p. 34 of this thesis).
[73] Coustillas, *Heroic Life*, vol. 1, p. 278.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 295.
[75] See Butler, *Erewhon: or, Over the Range*, ed. Peter Mudford (London: Penguin, 1985 reprint), p. 266n. See also Anthony Patterson, *Mrs Grundy's Enemies: Censorship, Realist Fiction and the Politics of Sexual Representation* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013). See also George Moore, 'Literature at Nurse or Circulating Morals', in Moore, *A Mummer's Wife*, ed. with introduction and notes by Anthony Patterson (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2011), pp. 415–30.
[76] Coustillas, *Heroic Life*, vol. 1, p. 204.

written response, published in *Longman's Magazine* to Walter Besant's lecture, 'The Art of Fiction', as well as Stevenson's 'A Humble Remonstrance', also published in *Longman's*.[77]

There is a clash between the dismissal of a class as potentially ineducable and individuals within that class as educable for either civil or criminal life. The narrator of *The Nether World* describes working-class people as being incapable of wit, implying that they are ineducable.[78] This professes to be the 'scientific' observer, in Émile Zola's sense of the adjective, examining the working classes disinterestedly, yet betrays a middle-class prejudice.[79] On the other hand, a better education for the naturally intelligent Joseph Snowdon 'would have made of him either a successful honest man or a rascal of superior scope — it is always a toss-up between these two results where a character such as his is in question'.[80]

Universal Education and the Evolution of the Novel

One of the implications of universal education, in terms of the increasing number of working-class/lower-middle-class readers, was the new possibilities for the novel. There were no Sherlock Holmes-style successes before the Education Act (of such magnitude), let alone Corelli's extraordinary popularity; Stevenson would probably have steered clear of several genres that he explored had he been born in the era of Sir Walter Scott, writing more serious historical fiction such as *The Black Arrow*. In France, there was a divide between popular and

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[77] 'Mr. Besant seems to me in danger of falling into this great error with his rather unguarded talk about "selection." 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. They will tell you glibly that artistic considerations have nothing to do with the disagreeable, with the ugly; they will rattle off shallow commonplaces about the province of art and the limits of art, till you are moved to some wonder in return as to the province and the limits of ignorance', Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction', in *Major Stories & Essays*, ed. Leon Edel *et al.*, Library of America College Editions (New York: Library of America, 1999), pp. 572–93 (pp. 586–7). See also Mark Spilka, 'Henry James and Walter Besant: "The Art of Fiction" Controversy', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 6.2 (1973), pp. 101–19. For a more recent discussion of the reaction to realism, see John Sloan, *Oscar Wilde*, Authors in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 reissue), pp. 75–87 (this discussion does not mention Wilde's famous riposte in the preface to the 1891 edition of *Dorian Gray* to James's opinion that art must be sincere).

[78] Gissing, *Nether World*, p. 32.

[79] Émile Zola, 'The Experimental Novel', in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George J. Becker (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 162–96.

[80] Gissing, *Nether World*, p. 192.

serious fiction throughout the nineteenth century (Balzac's own career and his dismissal of Eugène Sue); later, the precepts of naturalism gradually began to affect Britain, as Rita Felski observes: 'previously value-neutral terms such as 'sentimental,' 'melodramatic', and 'romantic' acquired increasingly negative, feminine, and old-fashioned connotations as labels for those texts which sought refuge from the critical understanding of reality in the form of beautiful illusions and exaggerated displays of feeling'.[81]

The nineteenth-century novel as canonical (the term canon/canonical is applied herein as a retronym or *avant la lettre*), especially in relation to the European novel, underwent an extraordinary bolstering in terms of prestige. Walter Scott, knighted in 1820, had made a very successful living out of writing poetry and novels and, in doing the latter, inaugurated a new genre, the historical novel. Charles Dickens emulated Scott's success but introduced social realism into his novels, developed later by Elizabeth Gaskell and Gissing, among others. The sensationalist popularity of the Gothic novel in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century was subsumed by and incorporated into the *Bildungsroman* in *Jane Eyre*, *Great Expectations*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; in turn, the *Bildungsroman* developed into a genre only faintly reminiscent of its most famous early exemplar, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (in Thomas Carlyle's 1824 English translation). George Eliot brought moral seriousness to the genre, best demonstrated by her grand panoramic novel, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (1871/2). The novel of adventure was both commercially and critically developed into sophisticated books for boys (*Treasure Island*, *She* (1887), *The Jungle Book* and its sequel (1895)) and psychological dramas (for example Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* (1900)). By the 1880s, the prestige of English literature, in part due to the legacy of novelists such as Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot, had reached an

[81] Felski, *Gender of Modernity*, p. 117.

unprecedentedly high watermark. Simultaneously the first generation of children had experienced board school education.

Education in Gissing's Short Stories

As mentioned above, Wells did not care much for short stories, and for Gissing, it was attractive because it was lucrative, although both authors produced some impressive work in this form. Despite the main focus of this thesis being on Gissing's novels, his short stories occasionally provide perspectives not available elsewhere in his *oeuvre* so are briefly discussed here.

For some working-class families, education was an obstacle in the way of earning money: in 'The Day of Silence' (1893), the Burdens' plan their son is, once he has 'passed the prescribed grades of school', for him to go to work; he was born 'to develop thews and earn wages', thews (muscles) indicating manual labour.[82] Since they have no dreams beyond the prescribed working-class route through life, the death of all three members of the family on the same day presents a tragedy of the banal and a grim solution to an endless cycle. Beyond the functioning and perpetuation of the family unit, there appears to be nothing of pleasure except, ironically, such a leisure activity as swimming.

Philip Dolamore, sham intellectual in exile and one of the 'quarter-educated' beneficiaries of educational reform, has little learning and is dangerous to others. In 'The Pessimist of Plato Road' (1894), proudly thinking of himself as a man of high culture, indeed 'a man who might associate with the leading minds of the day', he misleads the young Evelyn Byles and is revealed to be a coward who does not ultimately have the courage of his convictions.[83] Jonathan Wild argues that Gissing here shows that he can present themes ironically that he had previously treated seriously.[84]

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[82] Gissing, 'The Day of Silence', in *Collected Short Stories*, vol. 2, pp. 41–51 (p. 46).
[83] Gissing, 'The Pessimist of Plato Road', in *Collected Short Stories*, vol. 2, pp. 132–43 (p. 138).
[84] Jonathan Wild, *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture 1880–1939* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 48.

Mary Claxton in ‘Out of the Fashion’ (1896) is an example of someone who has not been born into a life of leisure or been well educated yet has innate intelligence and is able to achieve independence.[85] Indeed, as Barbara Rawlinson notes, a greater optimism pervades Gissing’s later work: ‘Miss Hurst in “An Old Maid’s Triumph” [1895] 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. [I]n “Miss Rodney’s Leisure”, Miss Rodney’s blanket strategy for educating the unenlightened differs greatly from the rigidly selective system adopted by Rhoda Nunn’.[86] As his profits increased and his life improved, his optimism increased, yet with the arguable exception of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, his most popular work remains his more pessimistic novels, especially *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, and *The Odd Women*. What might be called an epiphenomenal outcome of this thesis is providing a sense of why this is the case.

[85] Gissing, ‘Out of the Fashion’, in *Collected Short Stories*, vol. 2, pp. 400–2.
[86] Rawlinson, *A Man of Many Parts*, p. 190.

1. Education, Literary Value, and Respectability in Marie Corelli and George Gissing

'It has always been my rule to put nothing of myself into my works […] yet I have put too much of myself into them'[87]

Marie Corelli bears little obvious comparison to George Gissing: her understanding of the market and anti-realist stance distance her not only from him but also from several canonical authors of the period, such as George Moore, George Meredith, and Thomas Hardy. Although there are some superficial similarities (for example, the realism in *Wormwood* reminds us somewhat of Gissing's working-class novels of the 1880s), what truly links them, and what provides the focus for this chapter, is the theme of education, particularly culture/education as a signifier of respectability. A penchant for cultural imperialism marks both authors. However, whereas he tends to imbue his *characters* with these traits, Corelli (or rather Mary Mackay) is her own best fictional creation, an adroitly self-fashioned public persona, an early type of wildly popular celebrity and a self-appointed arbiter of good taste, moral guide, and righter of wrongs. In her cultural performativity, she is largely doing what Gissing's class-conscious characters do, albeit (in her case) on a larger scale. For example, Corelli adopting Shakespeare in the service of her own respectability is something that Jasper or even Edwin in *New Grub Street*, rather than Gissing himself, might do.[88]

Gissing was indeed alive to her performativity. In his diary entry for 29 February 1888, he dismissed her first novel, *A Romance of Two Worlds*, as 'a queer piece of juvenile fanaticism'

[87] Prosper Mérimée, quoted in Kate Hext, *Walter Pater: Individualism and Aesthetic Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 3. Pater himself quoted this; Hext notes that Pater could have applied this to himself, and she highlights the parallel with Basil Hallward in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

[88] As Corelli adopts a kind of cultural performativity in her novels, so Jasper performs a kind of cultural distinction that allows others to trust him: 'You have still to learn […] that modesty helps a man in no department of modern life. People take you at your own valuation. It's the men who declare boldly that they need no help to whom practical help comes from all sides', Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed. Katherine Mullin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 35. Subsequent references are to this edition and appear within the text (as *NGS*). This recalls La Rochefoucauld's maxim (no. 166), 'The world more often rewards outward signs of merit than merit itself', *Maxims*, trans. Leonard Tancock (London: Penguin, 1959), p. 58.

but added that he did not know whether the author was in earnest, suggesting that he was somewhat intrigued.[89] Although he mentions her only once again, in a letter to Bertz in 1900, in which he denigrates her, along with Hall Caine, as a bestselling novelist, it is clear that he was sensitive to a quality beyond mere fanaticism: this quality, as described here, is 'cultural performativity'.[90]

Corelli's writing, which is entertaining, lowbrow, and accessible, is meant to educate. This offers a parallel but also a foil to Gissing's attempt as a realist to write 'minority' literature that will inspire earnest thought and affirm education. Corelli saw the opportunities of a newly literate mass readership with more leisure time than before, and produced novels designed to entertain and influence that group, whereas Gissing saw value in a more literate audience, readers who would shun popular fiction and seek out frank depictions of real life.

Public taste and ability helped form the two authors' approach to art, but there are other intersections: modernity, the New Woman, the lurid as art, and nostalgia/reification of the past above the present. These intersections fall within the idea of cultural hegemony that Corelli and Gissing both play into, adopt, or adapt.

This chapter argues for the importance of Corelli's life in her work, more so than is the case for Gissing, who aimed in his realism to be an impartial observer, though with imperfect success. All Corelli criticism of the last twenty-five years is indebted to Rita Felski and Annette Federico, who moved Corelli studies beyond the biography, hagiography, and/or biographical criticism of Bertha Vyver, Eileen Bigland, Brian Masters, and others.[91] Recently, Joanna Turner

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[89] Gissing, *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 22. For balance, it is worth acknowledging that, in the same entry, he criticises 'the incomprehensible weakness of story' in Charles Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*.
[90] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 8, p. 74.
[91] Kent Carr, *Miss Marie Corelli* (London: Henry J. Drane, 1901); Thomas F. G. Coates and R. S. Warren Bell Marie Corelli, *The Writer and The Woman* (London: Hutchinson, 1903); Bertha Vyver, *Memoirs of Marie Corelli* (London: Alston Rivers, 1930); George Bullock, *Marie Corelli: The Life and Death of a Best-seller* (London: Constable, 1940); Eileen Bigland, *Corelli: The Woman and the Legend* (London: Jarrolds, 1953); W. S. Scott, *Marie Corelli, The Story of a Friendship* (London: Hutchinson, 1955); William Stuart Scott, *Marie*

has produced essential work on uncovering Corelli's real identity. This chapter argues for aspects of Corelli's life and personality being a fundamental component of what is here identified, for the first time, as the performance of culture in her fiction. Thus, it breaks new ground by shifting the focus back on the novels while utilising earlier contributions to Corelli studies combined with the new insights offered by Turner's research. The discussion of literary value builds, in particular, upon the work of Christine Gannon, Julia Kuehn, Andrew McCann, and Simon J. James.

Regarding literary value, McCann usefully points out that Corelli's 'devotion to the market was inseparable from a conception of literary distinction, deeply invested in the notion of great, spiritually uplifting art, that troubles contemporary attempts to map oppositions between high and low culture, aesthetics and commerce, onto her work'.[92] For example, Corelli is performative in her representation of French realism in *Wormwood*, yet the performance is convincing, while her condemnation of decadence is genuine.[93] In *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886), she reproduces debates concerning science versus religion, yet her knowledge of science is sufficient to buttress her pseudoscientific 'Electric Creed', which is ultimately Christian dogma.[94] McCann also notes that Corelli's populism 'participated in the propagation of a British literary canon that derived its legitimacy from the people' as a 'society of isolated,

Corelli: The Story of a Friendship (London: Hutchinson, 1955); Brian Masters, *Now Barabbas Was a Rotter: The Extraordinary Life of Marie Corelli* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978); Teresa Ransom, *The Mysterious Miss Marie Corelli, Queen of Victorian Bestsellers* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999). Ransom's work is now the standard biographical reference, although Masters's occasionally misogynistic and patronising treatment is more scholarly.

[92] Andrew McCann, *Popular Literature, Authorship and the Occult in Late Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 88.

[93] 'Despite Corelli's status as a bestselling novelist and her ostensible missionary purpose, *Wormwood* is completely dependent on decadent tropes' — Federico, *Idol*, p. 73.

[94] See Robyn Hallim, 'Marie Corelli's Best-selling Electric Creed', in *Marie Corelli: Modernism, Morality, and Metaphysics*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Elaine M. Hartnell (London; New York: Routledge: 2021 reprint), pp. 267–8. This volume reprints a Special Issue of *Women's Writing* (13.2) published in July 2006; the original pagination is referenced here, as requested by the editors.

though discerning consumers, and as a nation bonded by the imagined ligatures of uplifting literature'.[95]

The next section of this chapter examines Corelli and Gissing in relation to genre. She roamed freely in different genres, though occasionally this was a form of literary posturing, part of her performance of culture and complex in its implications. Therefore, to clarify her performative qualities, it is important to analyse her relationship with genre. Gissing, by contrast, was consumed by literary realism and never lost interest in it, even in his later fiction: his historical novel, *Veranilda* (1904), though hardly a work of realism in the vein of *The Nether World* or *New Grub Street*, is nonetheless strikingly dissimilar to the popular historical romances of, for example, G. A. Henty.

Her performance was successful with a mass readership in part because she presented herself as these readers' post-school educator, deliberately seeking to elide the role of the press in this, but also because she wrote entertaining lowbrow fiction. Gissing created 'minority' literature that would also inspire earnest thought and affirm education. He was concerned about mass education but did not aim his work at the mass-educated.

This chapter then naturally turns to questions of literary value at the *fin-de-siècle*, namely how Corelli consciously used the value in other writers' works to her advantage, another aspect of her cultural performance. Here, she was peculiarly well placed in history, with a newly literate audience unsure of what literary value really meant. Gissing's *New Grub Street* presents journalists with a similar mindset, those who know how to exploit such readers, but he is not himself that kind of writer. Gissing is distinct from other writers, yet Corelli was

[95] McCann, *Popular Literature, Authorship and the Occult*, p. 90. Her unique fusion of science and spirituality succeeded due to a wilful misunderstanding of certain tenets of localization, including how neurons actually work: 'It is unclear whether Corelli's misinterpretation of neuron doctrine stemmed from her lack of scientific education, from the general lack of scientific consensus about neuronal function, or from a selective reading of scientific and pseudoscientific articles on the functions of the brain', Anne Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 156–7.

not simply a standard bestselling author, and part of the aim of this chapter is to show why this is.

Corelli's appropriation of literary value leads to the extreme of presenting herself as a genius, and the subsequent section investigates how the idea of genius is situated in the past, co-opting the prestige of the canonical dead authors of British literature. Jasper in *New Grub Street* sees genius as a near-mythical property and realises that he does not possess it and must instead work hard to produce popular journalism. In a sense, Corelli is only aligning herself with genius, but through her strong self-belief, she perhaps convinced herself that she really was one.

The next section examines a more obscurantist, and arguably even anti-educative, aspect of Corelli's work, her interest in the paranormal, and how she sought to turn her readers against the literary realism and religious scepticism of such writers as Gissing. Although the latter was rigidly realist in his approach to representing real life, he was not averse to appreciating the paranormal in Dickens.

This chapter ends with a section that considers Corelli's and Gissing's attitudes towards gender, in both cases somewhat complex and controversial. Corelli is an appealing figure to feminists in terms of her self-reliance and defiance of misogynist critics who seek to denigrate her for what are construed as female flaws in her writing. Gissing, for his time, appears to be somewhat feminist, yet his main desire was that women should be good intellectual companions for men. The conservative attitudes of both writers thus become apparent in this issue.

Corelli, Gissing, and Genre

A Romance of Two Worlds announces itself as romance, and adheres to that genre, but is it a scientific romance? Is it pure fantasy or religious allegory? Is it a *Bildungsroman*? Moreover,

does it matter? Does the paratextual apparatus added to the book in a later edition alter the book's genre? (Is the whole thing an advert for the assumed canonicity of its author?) Is it, generically speaking, a bestseller? Not being firmly entrenched in any single category, it can be all of these things and, as demonstrated by the earlier reference to the Gothic tradition, none of these things. In offering everything, but delivering nothing, it only further inculcates bourgeois ideology (Christianity, conservatism, the cult of celebrity, and so on): the consumer has been sold yet another inferior product, worthless and wasteful. Waste is not worthless, however, because of what it signifies: society thrives where there is waste; therefore, where there is waste, there must be worth (plenty of excrement, therefore plenty of food).

Corelli includes Gothic elements in her fiction yet transcends the subgenre's restrictions. Despite the disapproval of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century critics, who dismissed Gothic romance as inferior and more dangerous to public morality than the novel, the subgenre is among the literary categories of canonical fiction where bad writing — overwriting, 'purple prose', melodrama, bathos, mawkishness, and so forth — are apparently legitimate.[96] Many examples could be cited from two of the most famous representatives of the subgenre, Poe and Horace Walpole, and also from works such as Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) or Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897). Anne Williams describes it as the 'black sheep' of fiction, 'pandering cheap and distressingly profitable thrills'.[97] The storm scene in *A Romance of Two Worlds*, the whole of *Vendetta*, and several aspects of *The Sorrows of Satan* clearly belong to this subgenre, and yet Corelli has not survived as part of the Gothic tradition — or, if she has, only as a marginal figure.[98] This is due to her non-committal approach to any

[96] Brantlinger, *Reading Lesson*, p. 25.
[97] Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[98] She is only mentioned once in Brantlinger's wide-ranging book, *Ibid.*, p. 187 (cursorily in relation to her success), and not mentioned at all in Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), which concentrates on the late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth century but mentions later works and authors, e.g. William Butler Yeats and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. For an interesting comparison of *Dorian Gray* and *Sorrows* in relation to degeneration, see Stephan Karschay, *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 168–208.

single genre or canonical tradition, suggesting that multiple generic allegiances demand an adept, protean writer such as Charles Dickens, for example, in order to survive.[99]

In her preface to *Wormwood*, Corelli ostensibly establishes the novel in the Balzacian tradition of realism. Gaston Beauvais is portrayed in 'his own necessarily lurid colours', and the novel is a 'true phase of the modern life of Paris'; and yet, Corelli qualifies this by providing moral judgements and distancing herself from what she sees as the iniquities of France: 'I have nothing whatever to do with the wretched "Gaston Beauvais"'.[100] The novel, despite these gestures towards realism, is in fact firmly anti-realist, deploying similar topoi as Zola does — in, to take the most suitable example, *L'Assommoir* — while explicitly denouncing his methodology. She presents the truth as she sees it, free of the notion that a moralistic/didactic author can be a falsifying agent. *Wormwood* proposes hypotyposis — to put Paris before our eyes, to bring it alive for us — only for the picture to atrophy under the rubric of romance.[101] This generic vacillation both tries to universalise her fiction — to please everyone (of course, her works were invariably negatively reviewed by the 'clever men on the Press')[102] — and strategically attempts to subsume realism.

This leads to the question of whether it satirises realism. Could the novel be described as a satire? Peter Keating sees the anti-Victorian attitudes that began emerging at the *fin-de-siècle* as reaching their apotheosis in this genre:

> While the aesthetes and the decadents tried to shock the middle classes out of their supposed complacency by outrageous behaviour, and the realistic novelists, in Wilde's brilliant epigram, held up a mirror so that Caliban could rage at his own reflection, it was the satirists who carried anti-Victorianism to victory.[103]

[99] There are of course many Gothic resonances throughout Dickens' *oeuvre*, most famously in the striking figure of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*.
[100] Marie Corelli, *Wormwood: A Drama of Paris*, ed. Kirsten MacLeod (Peterborough: Broadview, 2004), p. 62. Subsequent references are to this edition.
[101] See James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 179.
[102] Masters, *Barabbas*, p. 56.
[103] Keating, *Haunted Study*, p. 104.

This is patently not an adequate compartmentalisation of *Wormwood*. Anti-Victorianism, after all, was rooted in realism, even though one of the most representative works of modernism (arguably the highest expression of anti-Victorian sentiment), *Ulysses* (1922), both incorporates and strays far from the genre's rigid parameters. For Corelli, there was no need for mirrors. The bourgeois ideology she deploys teases without ever pulling apart. It is fairer to say that *Wormwood* inadvertently pastiches Zola without ever effectively satirising his naturalism. The novels of Zola that caused the greatest scandal, *Nana* (1880; 1884) and *La Terre* (*The Soil* or *Earth*) (1887; 1888), contain documentary-style accounts of working-class life, replete with innuendo, toil, and seditious yearnings, and it was not simply Victorian prudery which caused them to be banned. A character in *Earth*, for example, is nicknamed 'Jesus Christ' and is a shambolic figure, a drunkard. The naturalistic or 'scientific' approach was not so much the problem as the atheism that she believed was tied up with it.

In *The Silver Domino* (1892), a collection of satirical essays, Corelli-as-anonymous-author only ostensibly approves of Zola: 'With all his faults, the man is a great poet; realism and romance unite in strange colours on his literary palette, and with his forceful brush he paints life in all its varied aspects fearlessly and without any regard for outside opinions. His one blemish is the blemish of the whole French nation — moral Nastiness.'[104] Although this passage contradicts itself ('all his faults', 'one blemish') and although 'forceful brush' may be a slyly negative criticism, clearly Corelli would have identified with painting life 'in all its varied aspects fearlessly and without any regard for outside opinions'. It is important, however, to remember that this was her only anonymously published work; outwardly, it was necessary for the romancier to maintain a distance from Zola. Wilde satirises authors like Corelli in his anarchic comedy, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), when Miss Prism describes her 'mislaid' manuscript for a three-volume novel (by that time, an already outmoded format): 'The

[104] Corelli (Anon.), *The Silver Domino* (London: Lamley, 1893), p. 261.

good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.'[105] Despite a strong commitment to producing a varied corpus of work, Corelli's fiction is ultimately formulaic; thus, the Zola-esque quality of *Wormwood* is a façade, deliberate artifice.

Educating the Masses: Whose Responsibility?

In terms of whose role it was to educate the newly literate masses, Corelli felt her responsibility was to argue for a Christian education. At the new board schools, pupils were taught maths/arithmetic, how to read and write, and some geography and history, particularly in terms of Britain's place in the world. God apparently had little to no place within those walls. The school boards, teaching staff, and other pedagogical institutions were all in service to the state, yet as Christopher Bischof points out, although we know the curriculum, we do not know what teachers actually taught.[106] Despite the possibility that religiously inclined teachers may have referred to the Bible in their lessons, Corelli saw her duty as filling in the religious gaps that the new schooling system had created.

She also believed that eliding the role of the press in educating the masses was a priority, yet here her motivations are (even) less altruistic. In principle at least, the press played a role in distinguishing improving literature from bad literature, moral from immoral or amoral, serious from trash, and so on. Corelli's early novels had suffered at the clawed hands of the critics; therefore, to bolster her own reputation and protect/increase her readership, in her fiction and journalism, she sought to usurp the press's role in determining public taste, which reaches its most powerful statement in the decision not to share review copies of *The Sorrows of Satan*.

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[105] Wilde, 'The Importance of Being Earnest', in *The Major Works*, ed. Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 reissue), pp. 477–538 (p. 501). Also quoted in Keating, *Haunted Study*, p. 105.
[106] Christopher Bischof, *Teaching Britain: Elementary Teachers and the State of the Everyday, 1846–1906* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 3.

Corelli was aided in her task by the transformation of the literary public sphere in the late-nineteenth century, which is characterised by Habermas as a pseudo-public, with the new 'leisure' public no longer being governed by rational critical debate and, as a consequence, apolitical:

> And as the laws of the market enter the private sphere, consumption rather than rational–critical debate reign. Individual reception replaces the network of communication and discourse […]. The interior domain of subjectivity and intimacy connects directly with consumption. A new mass-oriented press, which is no longer a private, independent institution but now dependent on the market and thus forced to advertise, promote and publicize in a new manipulative way, appeals to the nonrational rather than the rational faculty of people. […] While the literacy rates in the outgoing nineteenth century soar, the education of people in terms of preparing them for the rational–critical public sphere and in rational–critical public opinion declines.[107]

As Kuehn notes, 'The press fails, according to Corelli, to realize and honor the fact that it was and indeed should be "a greater educational force than the Pulpit".'[108] The new mass readership's improved ability to read and their increased leisure time are symbiotic elements: a greater ability to read for leisure, but not critically.

Whereas Gissing and Wells came to resent the popularity of romance, in Wells' case his own scientific romances and in Gissing's case the 'mushroom reputations' of authors of romances such as J. M. Barrie, Corelli found its popularity useful in educating the newly literate masses, her didactic form of romance proving useful for conveying moral rectitude and advising on what — and what not — to read.[109] In 'A Vital Point of Education' (1905), Corelli takes issue with the leisured class:

> as matters stand at the present day, there are a large majority of the 'educated' class, who actually do not know the beginnings of 'how' to read. They have never learned — and some of them will never learn. They cannot realize the unspeakable delight and charm of giving one's self up to one's author, *sans* prejudice, *sans* criticism, *sans* everything that could possibly break or mar the spell, and being carried away on the wings of gentle romance away from Self, away from the everyday cares and petty personalities of social convention, and observance, and living 'with' the characters which have been created by the man or woman whose fertile brain and toiling pen have unitedly

[107] Julia Kuehn, 'Marie Corelli, the Public Sphere and Public Opinion', in *Reinventing Marie Corelli for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Brenda Ayres and Sarah E. Maier (Anthem Press, 2019), 61–80 (64–5), doi:10.2307/j.ctvg5bscq.9, accessed 2 Apr 2024.
[108] 'Corelli had already made this point in "Concerning the Slough of Despond" in *The Silver Domino* where she singles out literary magazines for no longer educating its readers', Kuehn, 'Public Sphere', 68.
[109] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 5, p. 26.

> done their best to give this little respite and holiday to those who will take it and rejoice in it with gratitude.[110]

How to read, for Corelli, is how to read romance, and it is therefore implicitly *what* to read. It should be read uncritically: the reader is put under a 'spell' and should lose themselves; there should be no element of free-thinking ('*sans* prejudice'); reading is a 'holiday'. It is surprising that she should reprimand the leisured class for *not* reading in a more leisurely way, yet ultimately she is speaking to her own readers, who were predominantly upper-working and middle class, with obvious famous exceptions such as Queen Victoria and Gladstone, and against her (bourgeois) critics.[111] Wells suggests that Corelli's readership was essentially female and her critics essentially male when he argues that the Education Act of 1870 and the coming to reading age in 1886–1888 of so many children had 'changed the conditions of political thought and action… And while the male of the species has chiefly exerted his influence on the degradation of journalism, the debasing influence of the female, reinforced by the free libraries, has been chiefly felt in the character of fiction. 'Arry reads *Ally Sloper* and *Tit-Bits*, 'Arriet reads *Trilby* and *The Sorrows of Satan*'.[112] Both novels mentioned here are popular romances; Wells, who came to resent the popularity of his own early scientific romances, preferred to write novels with satirical elements, such as *Kipps* and *Tono Bungay*.[113] Aaron Matz helpfully explains the close relationship between satire and realism:

> Realist fiction can indeed be understood as the heir to the satiric tradition. When satire's corrective order begins to wane, we can recognize its enduring energies in the rather less rigid forms of the nineteenth-century novel. But it is no less true that realist fiction also seems to have its terminus, and that we might identify this point as something better named satire. A hyperrealism becomes satirical just as a radical satire becomes realistic. If this kind of logic seems vertiginous, it is only proof of the profound kinship of these two traditions — and of Alvin Kernan's reminder, in *The Plot of Satire*, that "we should not think that a genre distinction is an airtight category." Indeed such porousness becomes only more marked over time. Genres emerge and blur into one another, especially upon the fading of other genres, and upon the expiration of earlier paradigms. Satire and

[110] Marie Corelli, 'A Vital Point of Education', in *Free Opinions Freely Expressed on Certain Phases of Modern Social Life and Conduct* (London: Archibald Constable, 1905), pp. 1–13 (pp. 5–6).

[111] For a lively discussion of contemporary debates about who her readers actually were, see Federico, *Idol*, pp. 54–64. According to Philip Waller, Corelli 'was read by all social classes, with perhaps a preponderance in that expanding group of aspiring upper-working class and lower-middle class; but it was certainly the middle classes and, especially, the literary classes who were most vocal in proclaiming or questioning Corelli's quality' — Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain, 1870–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 790.

[112] Wells, quoted in Federico, *Idol*, p. 60.

[113] See letter to Bennett, quoted above (p. 30 of this thesis).

> realism are both genres of lateness: they come necessarily after other modes and traditions have been exhausted, and in some sense they are expressing the impossibility of writing in that earlier way — in the case of satire, epic; in the case of realism, fantasy or high romanticism — any longer.

It is clear from the beginning of Corelli's literary career, with her first published novel, that her interest lies more in transcending reality than in representing it.[114] Moreover, Corelli's concept of romance is indissolubly tied to Christian belief:

> Unbelief is nearly supreme in the world to-day. Were an angel to descend from heaven in the middle of a great square, the crowd would think he had got himself up on pulleys and wires, and would try to discover his apparatus. Were he, in wrath, to cast destruction upon them, and with fire blazing from his wings, slay a thousand of them with the mere shaking of a pinion, those who were left alive would either say that a tremendous dynamite explosion had occurred, or that the square was built on an extinct volcano which had suddenly broken out into frightful activity. Anything rather than believe in angels — the nineteenth century protests against the possibility of their existence.[115]

This passage, told by an unnamed narrator in the prologue to the novel, adumbrates Corelli's own thoughts on growing secularism in the nineteenth century.[116] By the 1860s, as Jennifer Stevens notes, 'the miraculous elements of the Gospels, Christ's divinity, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and the authenticity of the Evangelists' testaments had all come under rigorous scrutiny'.[117] The sanctity of the Bible, its power and truth, were thus under attack. Corelli, somewhat old-fashioned in her views for the 1880s though still speaking for many Christians, rejects the rational explanation of a supernatural occurrence. Romance recalls the romantic past, which Corelli invokes and evokes to assail modernity, but she also utilizes modern elements in her work to romantic effect, for example electricity in *A Romance of Two Worlds*.[118] These qualities in her work (*pace Ardath* and *Barabbas*) distinguish her from Walter Scott in his proclivity for history/medieval history and royalty (*pace* Prince Raminez)

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[114] 'All fiction contains two primary impulses: the impulse to imitate daily life and the impulse to transcend it' Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London; New York: Methuen, 1970), p. 10.

[115] Corelli, *Romance*, p. 7.

[116] In her essay 'The Soul of the Nation' (1905), Corelli states in relation to a popular revivalism in Wales and other places that it is 'so much instinctive and natural popular rebellion against the insidious flood of atheism which has for the past ten years been striving to poison all the channels of man's better health and saner condition', *Free Opinions Freely Expressed*, pp. 340–53 (p. 344).

[117] Jennifer Stevens, *The Historical Jesus and the Literary Imagination 1860–1920* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 10. Samuel Butler, most famously in *Erewhon: or, Over the Range* (1872) and his posthumously published *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), had controversially challenged such religious doctrine.

[118] There were growing concerns in the 1880s that Britain would, economically, fall behind the United States and Germany, who were pioneering a new economy based in part on electricity — David Cannadine, *Victorious Century: The United Kingdom, 1800–1906* (London: Penguin, 2018), p. 516. Corelli was expressing a similarly growing concern (as demonstrated by her increasing readership), a reaction to the undermining of Christian faith and spiritualism in modern life.

and from Robert Louis Stevenson's romances, which are mostly set in the seventeenth century, with *The Black Arrow* (1883 serially; 1888 as a book) being set during the Wars of the Roses. Corelli's incorporation of supernatural motifs and ideas recalls the Gothic romances of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, yet she seeks to buttress her ideas by displaying a degree of knowledge of the science that she avowedly distrusts.

Corelli's Christian belief and her rejection of scientific scrutiny of the Bible are not amenable to literary realism. Her good characters are essentially good and her bad characters include the devil himself. For George Eliot, an essential component of realism in literature was rejecting such binaries so that readers might better understand the ambivalence and ambiguity they encounter in people in real life: 'what will you do […] with your fellow-parishioner who opposes your husband in the vestry? […] with the honest servant who worries your soul with her one failing? — with your neighbor, Mrs. Green, who was really kind to you in your last illness, but has said several ill-natured things about your since your convalescence?'[119]

Given her mass appeal during the late-Victorian/Edwardian period, it is possibly surprising that Corelli co-opts the discourse of high culture, which was traditionally enjoyed by the elite. Enthusiasm for Corelli's novels, short stories, and criticism sometimes strays into overpraising works that deserve little or none, as is the case, for example, with Curt Herr's introduction to *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul* (1897). His bold assertion that the 'public's addiction to Corelli and her novels never waned until her death' is simply not true, as many of her obituary notices attest.[120] Further, he mistakenly claims that *Ziska* predates *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by two years.[121] Too much is made by Herr, Masters, Ransom, Federico, and MacLeod of Tennyson's reply to her letter soliciting his good opinion. It is

[119] George Eliot, 'On Realism', in Becker (ed.), *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, pp. 112–16 (p. 113).
[120] Corelli, *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul*, with a new introduction by Curt Herr (Kansas City, MO: Valancourt Books, 2009), p. ix. See Ransom, *Mysterious Miss Marie Corelli*, pp. 5–8 for a selection of the obituaries.
[121] Corelli, *Ziska*, p. xiii.

therefore important to shift our concern away from Corelli's particular literary merits or demerits, or celebrity endorsements tenuous or otherwise, and instead focus on the transition from one kind of literature to another that she represents. This transition is not simply from popularity to mass appeal but also constitutes the first example of this kind of popular literature co-opting the discourse of high culture. In *Ardath* and *The Mighty Atom*, for example, she expresses Wildean thoughts on over-education (albeit in a non-Wildean manner); in *Ardath*, *The Sorrows of Satan*, and *Ziska*, she presents high priestesses who both embody and espouse aesthetic doctrine; and, in all her novels, but especially *The Life Everlasting*, scientific discourse helps to legitimise religious belief, which was more heavily scrutinised towards the end of the nineteenth century. It is important to note that Corelli does this quite self-consciously.

Corelli also co-opted scientific discourse, using it against progressivism to inculcate the British public with Christian doctrine, yet some saw her mass audience as a chance for progressive ideas to be disseminated. Corelli was singled out by the prime minister as being able to convey classical learning to the non-classically educated portion of the British reading public; Gissing was much better read in the Classics, yet he lacked the mass audience that she had (Jane Ellen Harrison was perhaps better placed than either of them to achieve this goal). It was Gladstone who saw a potentially effective educator in Corelli, advising her that 'Fiction is a powerful factor in the education of people — let those who read it find great examples and fine thoughts. Always study the classics; if you have read Aristotle and Plato twenty times, read them twenty more.'[122] What he was tactfully suggesting was that Corelli should study the classics seriously and attempt to mediate a classical education to her large readership. According to Ransom, Gladstone reportedly told Corelli that 'I recognise in you a great power to move the masses and to sway the thoughts of the people: it is a wonderful gift, and mind you

[122] Quoted in Masters, *Barabbas*, p. 88.

use it well; but I don't think for a moment you will abuse it.'[123] For an age deeply concerned about the effects of reading on the public, it is safe to assume that Gladstone was quite serious.[124] Later, however, his opinion of her novels changed.[125] However, Corelli became a purveyor of religious ideology. For her, Christianity is good for everyone, but it must strategically insinuate itself into public consciousness via culture. Gissing's sense of culture militates against this kind of indoctrination by the establishment of an intellectual aristocracy through culture. The ideas of Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Friedrich Nietzsche were challenging the precepts of Christian belief; Corelli used the discourse of such thinkers against their progressivism. If mass democracy and atheism seemed to go hand in hand, she represented the Christian counterblast. Of course, she was not entirely original in this, for *fin-de-siècle* public discourse — in newspaper articles, court trials, public debates, and so forth — shaped itself along scientific lines, namely around ideas of health/disease or purity/impurity. Even her Francophobia is unoriginal in this respect.[126]

Enabled by the massification of literature, particularly the novel, Corelli's didacticism successfully incorporates Christian morality and self-valorisation, as she situates herself among the great writers, idolising Shakespeare and herself above all. Gannon points out that Corelli's most popular novel, *The Sorrows of Satan*, 'entrusts the female author with the traditional Victorian woman's task of moral education, but unlike the Victorian mother, Corelli's female literary professional was endowed with the power to educate not only the family but also the entire nation'.[127]

[123] Ransom, *Mysterious Miss Marie Corelli*, p. 52.
[124] See, for example, The National Vigilance Association, 'Pernicious Literature. Debate in the House of Commons. Trial and Conviction for the Sale of Zola's Novels. With Opinions of the Press. (London, 1889)', in Becker (ed.), *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, pp. 350–82.
[125] Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations*, p. 801.
[126] NVA, 'Pernicious Literature', p. 355.
[127] Christiane Gannon, 'Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan*: Literary Professionalism and the Female Author as Priest', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 56.3 (2013), 374–95 (375).

It is surprising, then, that Corelli was, at least initially in her career, somewhat wary of the masses. Villiers in *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self* (1889) offers a list of the author's perceived ills of society:

> Everything to-day is in a state of substantiality and sham; — we have even sham Realism, as well as sham sentiment, sham religion, sham art, sham morality. We have a Parliament that sits and jabbers lengthy platitudes that lead to nothing, while Army and Navy are slowly slipping into a state of helpless desuetude, and the mutterings of discontented millions are almost unregarded; the spectre of Revolution, assuming somewhat of the shape in which it appalled the French in 1789, is dimly approaching in the distance, . . even our London County Council hears the far-off, faint shadow of a very prosaic resemblance to the National Assembly of that era, . . and our weak efforts to cure cureless grievances, and to deafen our ears to crying evils, are very similar to the clumsy attempts made by Louis XVI. and his partisans to botch up a terribly bad business. Oh, the people, the people! … They are unquestionably the flesh, blood, bone, and sinew of the country, — and the English people, say what sneerers will to the contrary, are a GOOD people, — patient, plodding, forbearing, strong, and, on the whole, most equable-tempered, — but their teachers teach them wrongly, and confuse their brains instead of clearing them, and throw a weight of Compulsory Education at their heads, without caring how they may use it, or how such a blow from the clenched fist of Knowledge may stupefy and bewilder them, . . and the consequence is that now, were a strong man to arise, with a lucid brain, an eloquent power of expressing truth, a great sympathy with his kind, and an immense indifference to his own fate in the contest, he could lead this vast, waiting, wandering, growling, hydra-headed London wheresoever he would![128]

Here, sympathy for the British public and concern for the state's lack of consideration of the effects of compulsory universal education offer a salve for the reader but also reveal Carlylean anxiety about the masses in the invocation of the French Revolution. The repetition of 'sham' also invites the reader to consider that Corelli is offering genuine literature, as opposed to sham.

To add further credibility to her works, Corelli employs some of the same strategies that literary realists do, although she is careful to distance herself from such authors. For example, co-opting scientific discourse was not an original idea, either, since *fin-de-siècle* literary realists do this, conveying authority to some readers, threatening to usurp the romance as the preferred mode of novelistic procedure, as well as bringing scepticism to bear on religious ideas and institutions. In her introductory note to *Wormwood*, Corelli protects herself against bio-criticism. It seems fairly obvious that Beauvais does not represent the author, and

[128] Corelli, *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self*, Project Gutenberg, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5114/pg5114-images.html, accessed 30 July 2024.

yet Corelli was clearly concerned that there should be no room for doubt and thus needed to assuage it.[129]

The performance of culture is essential to convey the audacious themes in such a way that readers will take them seriously, to augment her ideas with the prestige of past authors and with recourse to enough science to give them credence. As Philip Waller notes, Corelli puffed her own reputation by including herself in the great tradition of Shakespeare, Burns, Scott, Wordsworth, and Tennyson, all of whom were poets, with Scott establishing his reputation as a poet before publishing novels (at first anonymously), but she also bemoaned the 'disease of the imaginative spirit in [her] moribund contemporary society'.[130]

Corelli, in choosing to be popular, and making it look easy, i.e. planned and achieved, she reminds us of Gissing's characters, rather than Gissing himself, who made few sacrifices to popularity. Jasper in *New Grub Street* chooses to be popular: he knows what the public wants and he knows how to produce the desired journalism. His ego does not rival Corelli's in magnitude, as he admits that he is not a writer of genius.[131]

Whereas Corelli's alignment with the canon is based on her strong belief that she was a literary immortal when she began her career as a novelist, Gissing had to work up to this over a sustained period of producing serious novels, self-publishing his first book and only finding a degree of commercial success later on. Corelli's canonical intertextuality is an effective ploy, one that forms part of her elitism and Christianity, but she would have been aware of its use in converting normally reluctant readers to her cause — indeed, she aligned herself with canonical

[129] The note may have been intended more for critics than the rest of her readership. See letter dated 8 September 1890, reprinted in Corelli, *Wormwood*, pp. 374–5.
[130] Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations*, p. 805.
[131] See section on genius below (p.).

authors precisely because she felt that she was canonical.[132] Gannon suggests that Corelli exploited the Victorian re-invention of Shakespeare as supreme poet: 'It is no coincidence that Corelli chose to settle in Stratford-upon-Avon as she attempted to transform herself into a modern-day Shakespeare.'[133] Caine also exploited this when he had his portrait taken facing a bust of Shakespeare, described by Corelli in *The Silver Domino* as 'like a day-labourer fronting the Sphynx'.[134] Further, Gannon uses the following quotation from *Sorrows of Satan* as an epigraph: 'not one author in many centuries writes from his own heart or as he truly feels — when he does, he becomes well-nigh immortal. This planet is too limited to hold more than one Homer, one Plato, one Shakespeare.'[135]

The gendering here is part of Corelli's irony; the text clearly promotes Mavis Clare (despite Corelli's denial, something of a portrait of the artist) as the supreme writer. As Felski notes,

> the division between elite and popular culture gradually acquired an explicit gender subtext; a 'remasculinization of culture value' took place […] in which the ostensibly distanced and unemotional aesthetic stance embraced by both naturalists and modernists was explicitly valorized over the feminine sentimentality associated with popular fiction.[136]

The canon could be used to fight against prevailing fashions of the day, here represented by Corelli's emergence as a successful and independent woman. Thanks to Samuel Butler, Homer's gender was in dispute in the late-nineteenth century; Shakespeare and Plato (particularly the Plato of *The Symposium* and *Phaedrus*) were politically transgender and bisexual.[137] Corelli saw herself as the successor to these great writers, not simply in terms of

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[132] See Trotter earlier — 'They radiated self-assurance' — and Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880–1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 150.
[133] Gannon, 'Literary Professionalism', 374.
[134] Corelli (Anon.), *Silver Domino*, p. 260.
[135] Gannon, 'Literary Professionalism and the Female Author as Priest', p. 374. For original quotation, see Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 55.
[136] Quoted in Gannon, 'Literary Professionalism and the Female Author as Priest', 376.
[137] There are examples of male and female homosexuality in her work. For the former, see *Sorrows*; for the latter, see the sisterly relationship between the narrator and Zara in Corelli, *Romance*, especially p. 99.

canonical status, but in terms of canonicity as buttressing the politically exceptional aspects of her identity — her gender, her sexuality, and her popularity.

Corelli uses the bulk of her readers' relatively low literary expectations to buttress her own intellectual authority, in contrast to Gissing, whose smaller audience's literary knowledge was more than cursory. Corelli's first novel was a commercial success despite its largely negative or guarded critical reception; in *The Sorrows of Satan*, she explicitly celebrates this independence. The special notice in the first edition of the novel seeks to undermine the power of critics by assimilating them to 'the rest of the public'.[138] For Corelli, this strips them of their critical power, and yet places them in the same position as the very readers she claims to want to impress. This critical freedom also produces contradictory messages about literary value — specifically about the romance and how it relates to money — revealing an intense anxiety about the author's own function as not only author but also critical mediator for her mass audience.[139] The critical mediation finds its rather transparent fictional representation in Mavis Clare — indeed, a bookseller's clerk describes her as 'too popular to need reviews'.[140] Lord Elton, who defends her, condemns reviewers and new poets in the same breath. New poetry was synonymous with difficult poetry; Corelli's inexperienced readers would have baulked at the idea of reading new poetry and therefore would align themselves with Elton — 'what do [reviewers] take the public for I wonder!'[141] Even before she is introduced in person, Mavis is defended against the critics, who are accused by Elton of making the public's minds up for them. Corelli supports the notion of intellectual autonomy of her readership while at the same

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[138] Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 1. For a brief summary of the reviews, see N. N. Feltes, *Literary Capital and the Late Victorian Novel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 119. See also Masters, *Barabbas*, p. 59.
[139] Corelli seemed to welcome all roles — see Feltes, *Literary Capital*, p. 121 for Corelli's belief that authors should be their own business managers/agents.
[140] Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 125.
[141] *Ibid.*, p. 104; see also p. 113.

time deploying a similar strategy to persuade them that what she is offering will provide autonomy.

Corelli's sense of culture is rigidly tied to her Christian sense of moral stratification. For her, culture should be — and can be — good for everyone, providing the reader chooses 'good' novels over decadent works. Her works promote elitism of a moral kind, as Gissing's sense of culture promotes elitism along intellectual lines. Corelli, however, co-opts certain motifs from Pater, Wilde, and others as a means of augmenting her moral authority. *Ardath*, in particular, co-opts Paterian ideology.[142] The 'glorious' Oruzèl, father of all 'true literature', is *mutatis mutandis* Homer, as Hyspiros is similarly Shakespeare.[143] Corelli said of her adoptive father, Dr Mackay, 'A man who has no appreciation of Homer or Shakespeare can scarcely have weight with me in any literary argument'.[144]

Literary Value at the Dawn of Universal Education

The Victorian readership changed significantly during the last decades of the nineteenth century not simply because of the Education Act/s' effects on literacy among the working classes but because of the shifting perspectives among all readers of what reading was and what/who it was for. This malaise soon found its targets — the New Woman, decadence, class

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[142] The following was inscribed in a copy of Corelli's Ardath: 'These 3 volumes were presented by Mlle. Marie Corelli to Walter Pater, in 1889: he handed them to me (F.W. Bussell) being certain that he would never read them', Billie Andrew Inman, *Walter Pater's Reading: A Bibliography of His Library Borrowings and Literary References, 1858–1873* (New York: Garland, 1981), p. 336. George Bentley originally suggested sending copies of the novel to influential people, including Robert Browning, who never read it, and Tennyson, who was generous enough to send a thank-you letter (Masters, *Now Barabbas Was a Rotter*, pp. 85–6). However, Corelli herself suggested sending a complimentary copy to Wilde; there is a possibility that she also suggested sending one to Pater (*Ibid.*, p. 89). The somewhat derogatory reference to *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) in *The Sorrows of Satan* suggests that she had read Pater but was stung by his lack of reply (Masters, *Now Barabbas Was a Rotter*, p. 82). For the younger Corelli, *Ardath* was her greatest work, the 'first profound psychological novel of the generation', suggesting, perhaps with some mischief, that *Marius* was not, although Pater belonged to the previous generation even as he spoke for the current one (Corelli, *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self* (London: Methuen, 1953 reprint), p. 214; this edition is used hereafter).

[143] Corelli, *Ardath*, pp. 129–30.

[144] Masters, *Barabbas*, p. 83. According to Masters, this was the only time she spoke disparagingly of Dr Mackay.

bias, Zolaism, etc. — and highlighted Victorian prejudices and anxieties. Part of Corelli's popularity is that elements of her novels often seem contradictory — anti-New Woman stance yet featuring strong female characters more readily associated with New Woman fiction, anti-Realist while adopting the procedures of realism (as in *Wormwood*) — but ultimately revert to the Christianity of a former period, specifically that of the mid-Victorian period, and also deploy nostalgia for empire, which gained lustre in the age of New Imperialism: 'Corelli's novels attack or expose Victorian vice, hypocrisy, and injustice with all the fire and brimstone the public could crave, yet they also indulge the pleasures of social, moral, and sexual transgression. Contrary energies, what Rebecca West has called her "demoniac vitality", are the makings of a best-seller.'[145]

The question of literary value at the *fin-de-siècle* centred on commercial fiction versus serious literature, and there is overlap in how Corelli and Gissing present this bifurcation. For example, in *A Romance of Two Worlds*, Cellini's opinions on art and commerce are reminiscent of those expressed in *New Grub Street* (1891), albeit describing a simpler binary between the Romantic artist and the commercial one:

> those who adopt any art as a means of livelihood begin the world heavily handicapped — weighted down, as it were, in the race for fortune. The following of art is a very different thing to the following of trade or mercantile business. In buying or selling, in undertaking the work of import or export, a good head for figures, and an average quantity of shrewd common sense, are all that is necessary in order to win a fair share of success. But in the finer occupations, whose results are found in sculpture, painting, music and poetry, demands are made upon the imagination, the emotions, the entire spiritual susceptibility of man. The most delicate fibres of the brain are taxed; the subtle inner workings of thought are brought into active play; and the temperament becomes daily and hourly more finely strung, more sensitive, more keenly alive to every passing sensation. Of course there are many so-called 'artists' who are mere shams of the real thing; persons who, having a little surface-education in one or the other branch of the arts, play idly with the paint-brush, or dabble carelessly in the deep waters of literature, — or borrow a few crotchets and quavers from other composers, and putting them together in haste, call it *original composition*. Among these are to be found the self-called 'professors' of painting; the sculptors who allow the work of their 'ghosts' to be admired as their own; the magazine-scribblers; the 'smart' young leader-writers and critics; the half-hearted performers on piano or violin who object to any innovation, and prefer to grind on in the unemotional, coldly correct manner which they are pleased to term the 'classical' — such persons exist, and will exist, so long as good and evil are leading forces of life. They are the aphides on the rose of art.[146]

[145] Federico, *Idol*, p. 3.
[146] Corelli, *Romance*, pp. 42–3.

A temperament that becomes ‘daily and hourly more finely strung, more sensitive, more keenly alive to every passing sensation’ is a Paterian ideal that finds its negative representation in Gissing, with Edwin Reardon, for example, who in developing a highly receptive literary temperament becomes hypersensitive to the brutal working conditions of literary production, ‘the thousand natural shocks/That flesh is heir to’.[147] The receptivity required to appreciate exquisite beauty becomes exquisite torture under harsh conditions. Although the passage quoted above is from Corelli’s first novel, Cellini sounds like the jaded author of *The Sorrows of Satan*, and by the time of the latter’s publication, Corelli had endured the fiercely negative critical opinions directed towards some of her novels, especially *Barabbas: A Dream of the World’s Tragedy* (1893).

Corelli is Paterian too, in aligning herself with the divinely inspired genius described by Heliobas, which is available to a select few, those who, as Milvain in *New Grub Street* puts it, can sustain themselves purely by cosmic force (*NGS*, p. 8). Whereas Milvain is aware that they he is not a genius yet can still achieve popular success, Corelli believes that she is a Paterian individual, part of the select few, a genius, and so on *but also* popular. Cellini values the emotional intelligence that is required to produce art, introducing the narrator to the new kind of intelligence that is a metaphor for genius, inaccessible through ‘ordinary’ experience. Albert Einstein reputedly said that Mozart’s music was so pure that ‘it seemed to have been ever-present in the universe, waiting to be discovered by the master’.[148] This is an essential part of Heliobas’s argument when he says that the ‘greatest composers of the world have been mere receptacles of sound’, although he adds a Christian component: ‘the emptier they were of self-

[147] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare/Cengage Learning, 2006), ll. 3.1.61–2, p. 285. This soliloquy from Hamlet is alluded to in *New Grub Street* in relation to Alfred Yule: ‘It was not inexplicable that dyspepsia, and many another ill that literary flesh is heir to, racked him sore’, Gissing, *New Grub Street*, p. 82.
[148] Penelope Murray, ‘Introduction’, in *Genius: The History of an Idea*, ed. Penelope Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 1–8 (p. 1).

love and vanity, the greater the quantity of heaven-born melody they held'.[149] The work of the talented artist or creative genius is 'planned by a higher intelligence' and belongs to 'the age and the people for whom it was accomplished, and, if deserving, goes on belonging to future ages and future peoples'.[150] Throughout the novel, there is a persistent invocation of the Renaissance concept of the *divino artista*, a term which Penelope Murray considers synonymous with the genius of later ages.[151] Zara describes 'the immortal splendour' of Michelangelo and praises the 'giants' of the past (Raphael, Shakespeare, Plato) and the belatedness and inferiority of modern art and literature, of geniuses unrecognised in their time but appreciated by posterity (Jesus, Socrates, Byron).[152] Simultaneously, Heliobas's sexism is highlighted. On the one hand, Corelli appears to be progressive, challenging sexism, although she promotes the value of *exceptional* women; on the other, there is a strong Catholic aspect to the 'Electric Creed'. The science of electricity is interesting to her only insofar as it can add credibility, and indeed credence, to Catholicism, evident in Heliobas's explanation of the writing on the wall at Belshazzar's feast as being 'written by electricity'.[153] Corelli seriocomically derives her own literary value from the *status of* canonical literature. Amy Everard, reading *Letters of a Dead Musician*, ridicules a passage: 'Why, this is right-down awful! He must have been a regular madman! Just listen!' She then reads the passage aloud and provides the following commentary: 'If you are going to muddle your mind with the ravings of a lunatic, you are not what I took you for. Why, it's regular spiritualism! Kingdoms of the air indeed! And his cloud of witnesses! Rubbish!'[154] The narrator points out that 'cloud of

[149] Corelli, *Romance*, p. 92.
[150] *Ibid.*, p. 93.
[151] Murray, 'Introduction', *Genius*, p. 5.
[152] *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 70, 72.
[153] *Ibid.*, p. 74. Although electricity for health purposes, or electrotherapy, fell out of favour with the mainstream medical profession in the nineteenth century, it continued to be used in various pseudo-therapeutic devices and for entertainment purposes as well as to cure ailments including (unsuccessfully) erectile dysfunction — Frances Ashcroft, *The Spark of Life: Electricity in the Human Body* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 292.
[154] Corelli, *Romance*, p. 30. Amy is a Protestant and therefore would be unsympathetic to the Catholic aspects of the Electric Creed introduced later in the novel.

witnesses' is from the Bible.[155] The reader wishing to dismiss the passage as nonsense is reprimanded by the revelation that part of it is sacred scripture. Since Corelli allies herself with great literature, readers need to be careful about dismissing *her* work as 'the ravings of a lunatic'. Later, a quotation from Keats is used to confirm her readers' trust, for those who recognise it immediately, or to reprove those readers who do not recognise it; it is key that the character quotes first and attributes later. There is also praise for Edgar Allan Poe — 'How these verses haunted me!' — a melodramatic response reminiscent of Poe's own writing.[156]

A hyper-consciousness of her own literary reputation and an ability to fashion it successfully distinguishes Corelli and helps us to answer questions about how literary value is accorded to some writers and not others. However, like Milvain, she was a writer of her day, and posthumous reputations cannot be controlled by dead authors. In the first of his Tanner lectures on the canon, entitled 'Pleasure', Frank Kermode notes that '[r]eception history informs us that even Dante, Botticelli, Caravaggio, even Bach and Monteverdi, endured long periods of oblivion until the conversation changed and they were revived.'[157] Canonicity is not a controlled, rigorous process of elimination conducted by a handful of eminent critics, and it is impossible to account adequately for the abeyant reputation of a now canonically central poet such as Dante.[158] How can a permanent work of art not be permanently so? Value is not an inherent feature of literature, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith argues in *Contingencies of Value*:

> the value of literary work is continuously produced and re-produced by the very acts of implicit and explicit evaluation that are frequently invoked as 'reflecting' its value and therefore as being evidence of it. In other words, what are commonly taken to be the signs of literary value are, in effect, its springs. The endurance of a classic canonical author such as Homer, then, owes not to the alleged transcultural or universal value of his works but, on the contrary, to the continuity of their circulation in a particular culture. Repeatedly cited and recited, translated, taught and imitated, and thoroughly enmeshed in the network of intertextuality that continuously constitutes the high culture of the orthodoxly educated population of the West (and the Western-educated population of

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[155] Hebrews 12. 1.

[156] Corelli, *Romance*, p. 181. Earlier, the narrator has a similar reaction to a line from Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan': 'How that line haunted me!' (p. 102).

[157] Frank Kermode, *Pleasure and Change: The Aesthetics of Canon*, with John Guillory, Geoffrey Hartman, and Carey Perloff, ed. Robert Alter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 33.

[158] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), p. 137.

> the rest of the world), that highly variable entity we refer to as 'Homer' recurrently enters our experience in relation to a large number of various functions for us and obviously has performed them for many of us over a good bit of the history of our culture.[159]

Smith does not address why Homer was chosen in the first place, instead of another poet of antiquity; however, she goes on to suggest that the idea of the transcendent universal value of certain literary works is undermined by the fact that those who encounter Western classics under cultural–institutional conditions different from those of American or European professors and students tend not to find such works socially or personally interesting. For Smith, the tenets that lay the foundation for assessing literary value are borne out of extra-aesthetic considerations.

Corelli's usefulness to literary criticism today, noted as early as 1970 by Richard L. Kowalczyk, lies in her popularity during a certain period of time and the fact that she could speak to and for the English mass reading public at the *fin-de-siècle*.[160] Peter Keating usefully links ideas of canonicity prevalent at the *fin-de-siècle* to Corelli's place among writers of her day:

> The model against which all […] literary judgements were measured was provided by the great novelists of the earlier years of the century — Scott, Dickens, Eliot, Trollope, the Brontes. Everything they had represented was gradually being whittled away by late-Victorian relativism. The firm morality and idealism that had informed their work were gone, along with the power to blend instruction and entertainment: even the individual narrative voice which allowed them to mediate between the book and the reader was being dispensed with. Story itself was going. In contrast, late-Victorian fiction was seriously, self-consciously artistic; the favoured narrative method was indirect and oblique, with the story hidden away; the morality it explored was all too often relativistic. A vast gap had developed between what many readers expected from a novel and what they were being offered. It was into this vacant space that the modern bestseller moved.[161]

At the *fin-de-siècle*, these writers were used to teach morality to the newly literate, the act of reading possessing a moralising quality beyond the political concern of simply making illiterate people literate. Corelli aligned herself with the moralising aspects of these canonical writers but, as demonstrated above, she also worked hard to manufacture (or mould) her readers'

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[159] Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 52–3. The *precis* directly following this long quotation is based on a passage on p. 53.

[160] Richard L. Kowalczyk, 'New Evidence on Marie Corelli and Arthur Severn: Some Unpublished Letters', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 13.1 (1970), 27–36 (27), accessed 3 May 2016.

[161] Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875–1914* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), p. 330.

literary taste. As Corelli's reputation today bears out, long-term canonicity is not that simple, although her posthumous success surprised Q. D. Leavis,[162] and Corelli was still popular in the 1940s.[163] Christopher Butler notes that '[m]ass art is much more accessible, and its basic reliance on intelligible narrative simply shows that it is "designed for fast pick up by relatively untutored audiences". (This doesn't make it bad.)'[164] Implicit in Butler's parenthetical remark is the idea that if an audience enjoys a novel or work of art, it is a validation of any literary merit, regardless of whether it is 'relatively untutored'. The regulatory forces at work against Corelli include, but are not limited to, literary critics, Francophiles, various naturalists and realists, the three-decker system, and the circulating libraries, and her fiction only served to increase its mass acceptance, since she aligned herself with the values of her readership.

However, it is also helpful to analyse the uses of canonicity and the anxieties it caused, particularly for authors. Gissing and Henry James were both anxious about their canonicity, the former exploring this in a tragic mode of representation, the latter in a comic mode. However, neither writer was as hyper-consciously concerned about their canonicity as Corelli was; and neither, of course, enjoyed anything like the magnitude of her success. As indicated above, she is not a canonical writer today, and yet there is continuing academic interest in her life and works. The first novelist to exploit an incipient mass readership with enormous success promises to help answer complex questions of how literary value is accorded to certain writers and works instead of others.[165] Part of the reason for the recent critical popularity of Corelli, which she never enjoyed during her own lifetime, lies in the following paradox: she was an independent female author who challenged notions of gender and sexuality in the age of the

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[162] Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 138n.
[163] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp. 139 and 253.
[164] Christopher Butler, *Pleasure and the Arts: Enjoying Literature, Painting, and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 19–20.
[165] Even Hall Caine trailed substantially in terms of sales — see Brian Masters, *Now Barabbas Was a Rotter: The Extraordinary Life of Marie Corelli* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), p. 6. See also Simon J. James, 'Marie Corelli and the Value of Literary Self-Consciousness: *The Sorrows of Satan*, Popular Education, and the *fin-de-siècle* Canon', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18.1 (2013), 134–151 (141), doi:10.1080/13555502.2012.740846, accessed 17 July 2014.

New Woman writer, and yet was an avowedly anti-New Woman writer. Her works are ultimately conservative, and yet they also offer readers a quasi-complicity in the transgressions being portrayed, a kind of tacit criminality.[166] This chapter focuses on this 'impropriety' in the context of what might be called her defiant populism. In a sense, she was anti-canonical in finally rejecting the sanction of critics — from *The Sorrows of Satan* onwards, she did not permit the press any review copies — and yet the strategies she deploys in her works, together with the attitudes expressed in her essays and correspondence, are firmly rooted in canonical tradition.[167]

In her first novel, the late-nineteenth-century craze for spiritualism is exploited in the novel's subject matter, but the allure of bohemianism is equally central; indeed, the text all but consolidates the two. In Corelli's work, if not in life, art and artists are sacred and aloof respectively, which is of course the same stance as that taken by the Aesthetes, despite Corelli's own gradual distancing from them. For the author of *Wormwood* and *The Sorrows of Satan*, as for many others, Aestheticism was a term inextricably entwined with Decadence. Corelli's anti-Aestheticism was a position she was forced into, and her triumphant rejection of it as mere Decadence — most notably in the self-portrait of the artist, Mavis Clare, in *The Sorrows of Satan* — was, certainly as far as her critics were concerned, a Pyrrhic victory.[168] On the other hand, Zara's pronouncements on the shortcomings of the great composers Chopin, Beethoven, and Bach are presented as unique, assuaging readers' guilt for finding certain aspects of their work tedious, suggesting that Corelli is checking herself for (over-)glorifying art.[169] Part of Corelli's popularity inheres in (the inculcation of) this non-committal sensibility, seeking at it

[166] See James, 'Marie Corelli', p. 144.
[167] Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 1.
[168] Corelli, *Sorrows*, pp. 374–91, especially p. 376.
[169] Corelli, *Romance*, pp. 68, 153.

does to be everything to everyone. This is the impression given by Kirsten MacLeod in the following passage:

> in addition to her decidedly non-Decadent zeal for fiction with a purpose, she also credits the masses with the ability to recognize and appreciate high art. In *The Silver Domino*, for example, Corelli insisted that Universal education had developed the literary tastes of the 'masses' and that these tastes were now superior to those of the 'cultured'. Thus, at the same time that she seemingly accepts the principles of high art as defined by the elite, she also brings them within her own framework, thereby asserting her view of the dominant definition of writer.[170]

Her apparent faith in the masses, distancing herself from such important figures as Alfred Lord Tennyson and Edmund Gosse, was probably only posturing (crowd-pleasing); it is certainly undermined by her fiction, where the masses are always a negative force and are rejected in favour of the coterie.[171] A pleasing irony, at least for Corelli, was the fact that her 'coterie' proved to be vast. This challenges Brantlinger's assertion that novelist–reader intimacy was no longer possible after the 1860s; for Corelli, however, it was a relationship that had to be consciously created, and the breadth of her readership, from working-class readers to the reigning monarch.[172] In later years, with the rise of modernism, a new coterie was created, its embracing of inaccessibility a rejection of mass readership.[173]

Within her fiction, she addresses many of the debates of her age, including realism versus romance. However, whereas for Gissing and others, the worth of literature was not limited to generic binaries, for her it was a simple case of romance surpassing realism; because it was the genre she worked in, romance was worthy and respectable, indeed aspirational. In *The Sorrows of Satan*, Tempest describes his first novel to Rimanez as 'a romance dealing with the noblest forms of life and highest ambitions; — I wrote it with the intention of elevating and

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[170] Kirsten MacLeod, *Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing, and the* Fin de Siècle (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 43.
[171] Heliobas praises Socrates, observing that 'society does not love such men', Corelli, *Romance*, p. 72.
[172] Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 13–14. Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 129. Note that Corelli also alienated certain working-class readers, such as V.S. Pritchett — Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 399.
[173] 'The inaccessibility of modernism in effect rendered the common reader illiterate once again, and preserved a body of culture as the exclusive property of a coterie' Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 394.

purifying the thoughts of my readers, and wished if I could, to comfort those who had suffered loss or sorrow —'. Rimanez asserts that it will not do so because 'it doesn't fit the age'.[174] Realist/naturalist writers such as Zola and George Moore are implicitly being referred to here as portraying people as 'cattle who exist merely for breeding purposes', in other words portraying people as they are (cattle, in Rimanez's terms), not as they should aspire to be (Tempest's aim).[175]

The traditional link between romance and aristocracy is, however, subverted in *The Sorrows of Satan*, whereas authors more comfortably associated with realism did not necessarily champion the poor people they depicted. Slavoj Žižek notes Charles Dickens's apparent falsity in his depiction of the poor, and asks, 'from where is the Dickensian gaze peering at the "good common people" so that they appear likeable; from where if not from the point of view of the corrupted world of power and money?'[176] The proletariat's image of itself, its self-consciousness, is irrelevant here; indeed, it is co-opted for the purposes of the dominant class. Žižek unfairly classes Dickens as representative of the aristocracy, which he in fact is not; he, like Corelli, had known poverty as a child.[177] However, *The Sorrows of Satan*'s denunciation of the aristocracy on the one hand subverts hegemonic privileging while, on the other, assuages feelings of guilt for less wealthy (i.e. middle-class) readers. Lucio's ironic pronouncement, 'One of the chief abilities of wealth is the ability it gives us to shut out other people's miseries from our personal consideration', is invective aimed at the other, not the readers of the book.[178] If Gladstone and Queen Victoria read the book with interest, it was more

[174] Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 25. This is explicitly the theme of her earlier novel, *Wormwood*, in which Corelli also explores what she perceives as the inadequacies of literary realism.
[175] Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 25.
[176] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Brooklyn, NY; London: Verso, 2008), p. 119.
[177] This, of course, recalls the opening sentence of *Sorrows of Satan*. See also George Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', in *Essays*, ed. Peter Davison, selected and introduced by John Carey (London: Everyman, 2002), pp. 135–85 (p. 137): 'If you ask any ordinary reader which of Dickens's proletarian characters he can remember, the three he is almost certain to mention are Bill Sikes, Sam Weller and Mrs Gamp. A burglar, a valet and a drunken midwife — not exactly a representative cross-section of the English working class.'
[178] Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 58.

an interest in understanding some of Corelli's readers, namely the newly literate masses, than a purely aesthetic one.[179]

Corelli sets up commercial success and genius as binary oppositions, the romantic trope of the suffering artist, perhaps an example of self-pity in her struggles with critics. Again, in Gissing, such binaries are challenged, with the suggestion that writers of genius succeed purely by supernatural talent. He admits that he is no genius but is nonetheless able to exploit a mass readership and achieve success; Reardon is neither successful nor a genius but aspires to write the kind of fiction associated with geniuses. Corelli blends both of these characters' qualities, with the aspirational qualities of Reardon and the commercially success of Milvain. Rimanez, describing Tempest's approach to literature, articulates an inversely proportionate relationship between money and 'genius' in characteristically religious discourse:

> Generally it is the moneyless man or woman who is endowed with this unpurchaseable power, — this independence of action and indifference to opinion, — the wealthy seldom do anything but spend or hoard. But Tempest means to unite for once in his own person the two most strenuously opposed forces in nature, — genius and cash, — or in other words, God and Mammon.[180]

Corelli's portrayal of Lucifer is ambivalent: he is both exploiter of humanity and unwilling punisher; Tempest notes, for example, that he does not kiss Sybil on the hand as he did with Mavis Clare, who represents the good counterpart to Lucio's fallen angel.[181] The tableaux vivants represent Lucio's satire of the rich, and cause (as intended) uneasiness among the crowd. Corelli's anti-realist stance is somewhat undercut by one of these tableaux, where a science professor is disgusted at worms/snakes amongst human bones, but Lucio assures him that this is only life as it is.[182]

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[179] Queen Victoria was related to the Russian Princess Alix, who, according to Robert K. Massie, quoted Corelli in a love letter to the then-Tsarevich Nicholas: 'For the past is past and will never return, the future we know not, and only the present can be called our own' (Massie, *Nicholas & Alexandra: The Tragic, Compelling Story of the Last Tsar and his Family* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000 reissue), p. 38. I have not been able to locate the source of this quotation.

[180] Corelli, *Sorrows*, pp. 101–2.

[181] *Ibid.*, p. 192.

[182] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

In trying to distinguish her writing from trash, Corelli's 1895 novel serves as a philippic against her critics, a review of her reviewers. Clare/Corelli reveals her ignorance or indifference towards the changes in the public sphere over the course of the nineteenth century.[183] This change is noted by Chesterton in *Charles Dickens* (1906):

> [Dickens] was popular in a sense of which we moderns have not even a notion. In that sense there is no popularity now. There are no popular authors today. We call such authors as Mr Guy Boothby or Mr William Le Queux popular authors. But this is popularity altogether in a weaker sense; not only in quantity, but in quality. The old popularity was positive; the new is negative. There is a great deal of difference between the eager man who wants to read a book, and the tired man who wants a book to read. A man reading a Le Queux mystery wants to get to the end of it. A man reading the Dickens novel wished that it might never end. Men read a Dickens story six times because they knew it so well. If a man can read a Le Queux story six times it is only because he can forget it six times. In short, the Dickens novel was popular not because it was an unreal world, but because it was a real world; a world in which the soul could live.[184]

The fungible quality of money replicated in the literature that Milvain encourages in *New Grub Street* is represented here by Le Queux. As he essentially produced generic fiction, the story read and forgotten six times might as well be a different story each time. Equally, Corelli's novels are superficially diverse. In an age when literary overproduction was an increasing concern, her role as a guide in the plenitude of *fin-de-siècle* book production is undermined by the fact that she was a major contributor to this negative plenitude. Thus, the in-built criticism serves not as a Pindaresque self-canonising device but as a defence mechanism and a distinguishing feature from all the other similar 'trash' in the marketplace.

The real/unreal that Chesterton describes above lends itself to a realism/romance reclassification. Where Corelli does hold the mirror up to nature, she swiftly condemns, as in Lucio's tableaux vivant. The 'Seeds of Corruption' tableau depicts a 'young and beautiful girl in her early teens, lying on a luxurious couch *en deshabille*' reading an unnamed book of a 'sexual' type, evidently a work of realism.[185] This semi-pornographic image is precisely the complicity that Corelli provides for the reader, whose guilt is quickly assuaged in a tacit condemnation of what is signified, uncomfortably at odds with the signifier.

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[183] Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 167.
[184] G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (London: Wordsworth, 2007), p. 51.
[185] Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 201.

Genius as Belonging to the Past

Corelli valorises the past in contradistinction to the present, and genius is almost completely missing from the age of universal education. This is not dissimilar to Gissing's view, who in his travel book, *By the Ionian Sea* (1901), celebrates the past to the detriment of the present. In Corelli, the past is divested of its mediocrity and is used as a critique of the present. The past is a place where only great people and great works exist, as described in *Ziska*:

> We cannot write *Childe Harold*, but we can grumble at both bed and board in every hotel under the sun; we can discover teasing midges in the air and questionable insects in the rooms; and we can discuss each bill presented to us with an industrious persistence which nearly drives landlords frantic and ourselves as well. In these kind of important matters we are indeed "superior" to Byron and other ranting dreamers of his type, but we produce no *Childe Harolds*, and we have come to the strange pass of pretending that Don Juan is improper, while we pore over Zola with avidity! To such a pitch has our culture brought us! And, like the Pharisee in the Testament, we thank God we are not as others are.[186]

Dr Dean tells Gervase: 'History is what man makes it; and the character of man in the early days of civilisation was, I think, more forceful, more earnest, more strong of purpose, more bent on great achievements [than more recent civilisations]'.[187] This version of the past is clearly sacred. The narrator suggests that Egyptian history is underappreciated by the majority of English travellers:

> For the benefit of those among the untravelled English who have not yet broken a soda-water bottle against the Sphinx, or eaten sandwiches to the immortal memory of Cheops, it may be as well to explain that the Mena House Hotel is a long, rambling, roomy building situated within five minutes' walk of the Great Pyramid, and happily possessed of a golfing-ground and a marble swimming-bath. That ubiquitous nuisance, the 'amateur photographer,' can there have his 'dark room' for the development of his more or less imperfect 'plates'; and there is a resident chaplain for the piously inclined. With a chaplain and a 'dark room,' what more can the aspiring soul of the modern tourist desire?[188]

The juxtaposed images of modernity — the soda-water bottle, the golfing-ground, Mena House Hotel — and the monuments of the past (Sphinx, Cheops, Great Pyramid), combined with the Baedeker pastiche and disingenuous tone, enjoin the reader to scorn the present and respect, indeed honour, the past. In *The Mighty Atom*, Corelli again uses the image of the soda-water

[186] Corelli, *Ziska*, p. 10.
[187] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[188] Corelli, *Ziska*, p. 113.

bottle, in this case broken against the ruins of the Coliseum at Rome, a negative symbol of modernity or fashionableness, to deplore the modern and venerate the old-but-permanent.[189]

Scepticism, the Supernatural, and the Threat of Miseducation

Corelli and Gissing had opposite views to each other on the paranormal, yet modern critics should be careful about construing her interest in such matters as obscurantist or anti-education/anti-Enlightenment. Gissing strove to keep any 'melodramatic' elements and coincidences away from his novels, and was highly sceptical of the church. He wanted to portray life accurately, in line with the tenets of literary realism. Writing about Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), he argues that Krook's death by spontaneous combustion — a scene that would not feel out of place in Corelli's work — 'justifies itself by magnificent workmanship'.[190] Dickens was interested in the marginal science of the period. Psychical research is described by Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst as the 'exemplary marginal science of the fin de siècle'. They suggest that 'its attempt to seek material proof of spiritual entities offers a remarkable instance of the authority that secular science exercised over cultural beliefs at the time, producing a fascinatingly scientized rhetoric for sometimes transparently religious yearnings.'[191] Although Corelli appears to be anti-science, her interest in the paranormal — a popular Victorian interest — suggests an interest in the marginal science of her period, which is now dismissed as pseudoscience; therefore, it is wrong to simply say that she was completely anti-science; rather, she was interested in exploring the more popular aspects of science. It is

[189] Marie Corelli, *The Mighty Atom* (London: Hutchinson, 1896), p. 249. Subsequent references are to this edition. For the historical context of tourism in Egypt in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see Andrew Humphreys, *On the Nile: In the Golden Age of Travel* (Cairo; New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2021).
[190] Gissing, *Gissing on Charles Dickens: Volume 2*, p. 54.
[191] Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (eds), 'Psychical Research', in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 269–90 (p. 269).

important not to downplay the strength of the Victorian interest in the paranormal because it helps to explain Corelli's popularity without denigrating her unduly by modern standards.[192]

The Victorian sense of progress was based above all on scientific progress, something that Corelli is clearly aware of, as the characterisation of Dr Maxwell Dean shows. He is the character in *Ziska* who is ahead of everyone else in believing Ziska to be a ghost, although by the end of the narrative — and having failed to protect Gervase — we are told that he has grown reticent and surly, despite the success of his work, *Scientific Theory of Ghosts*.[193] Further, for Corelli, the literary canon helps buttress popular ideas such as paranormal superstition, as Dr Dean's quoting from *Hamlet* demonstrates.[194]

There is a scepticism towards the science of medicine/psychology, however, where the spiritual is privileged above the clinical: 'People always take refuge in thinking that those who tell them uncomfortable truths are lunatics'.[195] According to the narrator of *Wormwood*, '[t]he genius who has grand ideas and imagines he can carry them out is "mad"'.[196] As Nicholas Ruddick notes, 'The fin de siècle saw heightened cultural anxiety stemming from certain consequences of the Darwinian revolution'. One concern was that evolutionism was superseding creationism, science replacing theology as the 'primary means of approaching questions of about human origin, nature and destiny.'[197] Like Mrs Humphry Ward, 'Ouida', Hall Caine, and — conspicuous in this company — Pater, Corelli sought to use scientific discourse to reverse public opinion on religion, namely Christianity. The advice given her by Gladstone was used, though not as he originally envisaged.

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[192] Note the popularity of Georgiana Houghton and Madame Blavatsky at the *fin-de-siècle*. See also Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870–1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[193] Corelli, *Ziska*, p. 159.
[194] *Ibid.*, p. 158.
[195] *Ibid.*
[196] Corelli, *Wormwood*, p. 70.
[197] Nicholas Ruddick, 'The fantastic fiction of the fin de siècle', in *The Cambridge Companion to the fin de siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 reprint), pp. 189–206 (p. 190).

In *Wormwood*, Corelli co-opts Francophobic discourse to turn her readers against the literary realism and religious scepticism of such writers as Gissing.[198] Silvian Guidel explains to Gaston Beauvais that 'poetry is religion. The worship of beauty is as holy a service as the worship of beauty-creating Divinity'.[199] As Gaston represents literary realism, Silvian's later remark, that '[t]he duty of a priest is, to my thinking, to preach of happiness and hope, not sorrow and death', suggests that the latter character is representing romance.[200] For Corelli, as for *inter alia* Henry Rider Haggard and Andrew Lang, realist or naturalist works contained lurid subject matter and seemed to them to be preoccupied with only 'sorrow and death'. *Wormwood* clearly identifies the influence as emanating from France.

Gender Bias in Corelli and Gissing

As argued previously in this chapter, Corelli essentially does what Gissing portrays some of his characters as doing, and this is certainly true in relation to gender: Corelli had to experience what Gissing could only observe. Corelli used this in her performance of canonicity, in her own — and by extension her audience's — aspirations towards respectability. To date, the secondary literature on Corelli has largely explored the popularity of her works as an external phenomenon, namely a result of the publicity surrounding her reputation as an author and the 'puffing' of her books, both by the publisher and by Corelli herself, and where it has examined the texts, it has focused on the sensationalist aspects. Undoubtedly, part of this is a response to the negative criticism that her books originally attracted, exemplified by the remarks in the

[198] See Kirsten MacLeod, 'Marie Corelli and Fin de Siècle Francophobia: "The Absinthe Trail of French Art"', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, *ELT Press*, 43, 1 (2000), 66–82. William LeQueux's *The Great War in England in 1897*, published in 1894, is an example of popular Francophobic invasion literature. The young and naïve Adela in Gissing's *Demos* describes Paris as the 'head-quarters of sin — at all events here on earth', Gissing, *Demos: A Story of English Socialism*, ed. Debbie Harrison (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2011), p. 125.
[199] Corelli, *Wormwood*, p. 104.
[200] *Ibid.*

Westminster Review made by J. M. Stuart-Young (writing as 'Peril'), who thought that Corelli was 'the greatest genius of self-advertisement produced by our century', which, as Kuehn notes, hints at the artificiality of Corelli's value.[201] This chapter rejects the scorn of Stuart-Young but uses his remark to argue that the puffing of her works also exists within the texts themselves, indeed is already evident in her first published novel; this phenomenon is the performance of culture, a strategy which is deployed with a mass readership in mind, one that appeals to their education and, sometimes, their lack thereof. This is not simply an attempt by an author to breed loyalty among her coterie of readers; it also speaks to the late-Victorian period's anxieties around education and, as discussed above, raises questions about how literary value is produced. Despite a resurgence of critical interest from the late-twentieth century, most of Corelli's *oeuvre* has remained out of print. Therefore, her performance of culture was not effective in the long term; as mentioned above, a small handful of her works are only in print in academic editions. Nonetheless, there is much to be learnt from an examination of *A Romance of Two Worlds*, *The Sorrows of Satan*, and *The Mighty Atom* about authorial strategies and about how education influences readers' assessments of fiction.

Part of what makes Corelli fascinating to modern critics is how she presents topics such as feminism in a paradoxical way. Given the barriers she broke through, one would expect her to be a New Woman figure, yet she mocks the New Woman as manly and sexually promiscuous. However, where this figure features in her fiction, it is generally as highly educated, and Corelli herself sought recognition for the female intellect and the aspiration to rise above domestic or servile roles. Gissing essentially wanted better-educated women so that men had better company: for example, in *Demos*, Richard worries about his sister Alice's choice of a husband; he needs her to be sufficiently educated to recognise a gentleman when

[201] Kuehn, 'Public Sphere', 61–80 (71).

she sees one; she has to raise her respectability to that of a gentleman.[202] While Janet Galligani Casey argues that Corelli 'managed to give her readers precisely what they wanted: the illusion of a feminist spirit couched in a fundamentally conventional Victorian ideology', it is rather that Corelli's individualism, tied to her cultural performativity, rejects what she sees as fashionable decadence, actually a liberating force (sexual liberation), but accepts the benefits it brings to her as an individual, as an author.[203] The complexity of her authorial strategies helps explain the continuing scholarly attention that she receives, not least due to its ambiguity.[204]

Constructing her own intellectual and cultural authority by allying herself to established male writers (as described above) was undoubtedly useful in protecting herself against sexist attempts to undermine it. The question of women's intelligence being equal to men's intelligence had been debated throughout the nineteenth century, with the male sense of intellectual superiority tending to prevail. Late-Victorian feminist and/or female arguments therefore had to grapple with the problematical ideas of Buckle, Margaret Fuller, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, Charles Darwin, and such exponents of Darwinian thought as Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer, and Francis Galton (and Cesare Lombroso). In 'The Influence of Women on the Progress of Knowledge' (presented to British Royal Society in 1958, published in *Essays*, 1864), Henry Thomas Buckle argued that women were equal to but different from men and that their education would influence 'philanthropy, culture, arts, affections, aspirations'.[205] Fuller largely concurred, finding women to be gifted in spiritual matters. In *The Descent of Man*, women are described in atavistic terms. In *Hereditary Genius*, from which Darwin's 1871 book drew, Galton's list of geniuses in his pantheon were 'almost exclusively

[202] Gissing, *Demos*, pp. 145–6.
[203] Janet Galligani Casey, 'Marie Corelli and *Fin de Siècle* Feminism', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 35.2 (1992), pp. 163–78 (p. 166).
[204] S. Crozier-De Rosa. 'Marie Corelli's British new woman: A threat to empire?' *The History of the Family*, 14.4 (2009), 416–429. doi:10.1016/j.hisfam.2009.04.003, accessed 12 Apr 2024.
[205] Flavia Alaya, 'Victorian Science and the "Genius" of Woman', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 38.2 (1977), pp. 261–80 (p. 263).

male'.[206] His definition of genius was a nature that 'if hindered or thwarted, will fret and strive until the hindrance is overcome'.[207] Characteristically for the period, he was blind to gender differences:

> Galton's work, inspired and promoted by Darwin, and enjoying all the credit that such support implied, laid the foundations of an immense effort among natural and social scientists throughout Europe and America in the later century to study the nature of 'genius', in its more exclusive and extraordinary sense, and to celebrate 'success' by the standards so defined. In wonderfully circular fashion, moreover, the study of individual achievement took those standards from a male-dominated culture, tested women against them within the same cultural conditions, found them wanting, and concluded (predictably) that the 'genius' of women — collectively — was to be virtually incapable of genius.[208]

The biased nature of the assessment of merit here is similar to that described in the Introduction in relation to Indian men having to demonstrate knowledge of European history, literature, and cultural values, rather than knowledge of Indian history or Sanskrit culture (see p. 16 of this thesis). Similarly, in the classroom, working-class pupils' success was judged according to the extent of their embourgeoisement. Combined, these three phenomena reveal a society wary, or afraid, of any disruption to the traditional roles of women and subalterns/underclass, the former as wives, mothers, and housekeepers, the latter as colonial subjects/servants and manual workers.[209]

Corelli was well placed to challenge these gender-related biases, and she sought to exploit them for her own gain. According to Turner, Corelli had been writing for various periodicals and in several genres between 1874 and 1883.[210] In this early period, Corelli used the male pseudonym Vivian Clifford.

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[206] Alaya, 'Victorian Science', p. 266.
[207] *Ibid.*, p. 267. For a brief but useful contemporary summary of Galton's *Hereditary Genius*, see Alfred Russel Wallace, '*Hereditary Genius*', *Nature*, 1 (1870), 501–3, *https://galton.org/criticism/ar-wallace-1870-nature-review-hg.pdf*, accessed 25 July 2024.
[208] Alaya, 'Victorian Science', p. 267.
[209] *Ibid.*, p. 269.
[210] Turner, 'Making a Name for Herself: Marie Corelli's Self-Guided Literary Apprenticeship via the Periodical Press', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 56.1 (2023), 110–32 (111). doi:10.1353/vpr.2023.a905142, accessed 21 Apr 2024.

> It was not as if she was concerned that her gender would affect her ability to be published; in her letter she is keen to stress that the nom de plume is merely cover for a successful family name. Further answers lie in Corelli's *The Soul of Lilith* (1892), in which her novelist character, Irene Vasillius, declares that 'George Eliot and Georges [*sic*] Sand took men's names in order to shelter themselves a little from the pitiless storm that assails literary work known to emanate from a woman's brain.' It can be deduced from this sentiment, vocalised through one of her fictitious women writers, that Corelli used the protection of a male pseudonym to test the market. However, after seemingly avoiding the anticipated storms of critique, within a year Corelli rethought this strategy and decided to quietly retire Clifford in favour of another name, progressing to the next stage of her development as a writer.[211]

The perception that a woman should be more self-effacing than Corelli is apparent in her fictional replications of her self/herself, although she protested the comparison between herself and Mavis Clare. The criticism of these replications is negative; they are more positively interpreted as performative. They are socio-political and cultural performances, not simply products of personal vanity.

Of all her targets, perhaps New Woman literature receives the most personal scorn from Corelli, whereas Gissing shows sympathy towards the New Woman, especially in *The Odd Women*, and more ambivalently in Alma Frothingham/Rolfe in *The Whirlpool*; however, again, Corelli invites readers to not only join her in condemning but also enjoy the thing she condemns. Many other groups are attacked vociferously in *The Sorrows of Satan*: *inter alia* literary critics, the publishing industry generally, the Aesthetes, Zola and the naturalists, the clergy (as distinct from religion), and scientists (synonymous with atheists). Essentially only Clare avoids criticism, for the simple reason that she is Corelli.[212] Yet the New Women of the *fin-de-siècle* are, for her, synonymous with decadence in late-Victorian discourse, since they are represented by the most humiliated and tortured character in the book (and eternal punishment still awaits her), Sybil Tempest (*née* Elton).[213] New Woman literature, according to Corelli, explicitly produces readers like Sybil, who is unfaithful, lascivious, and — as

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[211] Turner, 'Making a Name for Herself', 116.
[212] '*The Sorrows of Satan* is about corruption: in publishing; in society; in marriage. Everyone has their price, everyone and everything can be bought. Everyone, that is, except the famous novelist Mavis Clare', Ransom, *Mysterious Miss Marie Corelli*, p. 82.
[213] See Federico, *Idol*, p. 76.

implied — diseased ('contaminated').[214] She is likened to a 'drab' (prostitute), and her state is clearly portended in the aforementioned 'Seeds of Corruption' tableau. In her interminable suicide note, which strangely introduces a stream-of-consciousness element, Sybil condemns the poetry of Swinburne, and blames it for her debased state. The novel even reproduces one of his poems, with the 'offensive' passages emphasised.[215] This is clearly an invitation to enjoy and condemn. Sybil dies facing the mirror, having narcissistically praised her own looks beforehand.[216] The New Woman writers hold the mirror up to Caliban; Corelli believes that the mirror creates Caliban, and therefore should reflect an idealised monster, just as photographs of the author were doctored before being released.

> The burden of demonstrating the poisonous nature of modern literature is placed on the beautiful shoulders of the Lady Sibyl who, as her name presumably suggests, is the mouthpiece of fashionable literary prophets. From Ibsen and Zola she has learnt how to be destructively analytical; the poetry of Swinburne has taught her that Christianity is inferior to paganism, and that Christ's sacrifice has enslaved rather than liberated people; most devastating of all, the contemporary novel, especially when written in support of the 'New Woman', has destroyed her belief in the need for women to be pure or chaste.[217]

Mrs Humphry Ward was certainly one of the targets here, particularly for her novel *Robert Elsmere*, where the title hero ultimately renounces his Christian faith.[218] Corelli's message to writers like Ward in *The Sorrows of Satan* is clear: aspire to be more like Clare and Corelli or go to hell.

As Ransom notes, Corelli seeks to invert the binary oppositions of *male* = *value* and *female* = *popular trash*. Canonical authority shores up issues and ideas prevalent at the *fin-de-siècle*, which is obviously the case with Corelli's fiction. However, she diverges from Gissing and Pater, who are compared in the next chapter, by also attacking certain issues and institutions, as for example in *A Wonderful Wife: A Study in Smoke*, where cigarette-smoking

[214] Corelli, *Sorrows*, p. 219.
[215] *Ibid.*, p. 296.
[216] Corelli, *Sorrows*, pp. 286 and 304.
[217] Peter Keating, 'Introduction', in Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan*, ed. with introduction by Keating (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. vii–xx (p. xiii).
[218] Mrs. Humphry Ward, *Robert Elsmere*, ed. Miriam E. Burstein (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2013).

among women is deplored as redolent of a society degenerating into hermaphroditism.[219] In Gissing's *The Whirlpool*, this is inverted: Harvey Rolfe becomes hermaphroditic whereas Alma attempts to masculinise herself are thwarted by her feminine biology. The masculine Sybil is the villain of the piece and her husband defeated and effeminised, ironically wearing the badges of feminine emancipation (smoking and cycling). Gissing is still asserting the male privileging of culture.

Gender and sexual orthodoxies are often only apparently shunned in Corelli. The narrator of 'My Wonderful Wife', who describes himself as a 'small, mild, rather nervous man', inverts heteronormative matrimonial binaries thus: 'I don't know how I came to marry her. I have a hazy idea that *she* married me.' Corelli describes 'the superabundant excess of her immense vitality', and her huge and varied appetite, yet her apparent challenging of the kind of femininity typified by courtly romance is feigned: 'She was so utterly unlike the women in Walter Scott's novels, you know — the women our great-grandfathers used to admire — those gentle, dignified, retiring, blushing personages, who always wanted men to fight for them and protect them — poor, wretched weaklings *they* were, to be sure!'[220]

For criticism today, the resurrection of Corelli, the establishment of Corelli studies, is in part an attempt to rescue the period from the cultural imperialism of canonical writers such as Gissing, Hardy, and others. Corelli sought, *in her own time*, to be part of this cultural imperialism, and her attempts to enshrine a sense of rejection in her fiction only augments that fact. Corelli is a bad prose stylist, and, as well as being an anti-New Woman, conservative thinker, she is obscurantist ('one may just as well be stupid as clever' — from one of Lionel's suicide letters), an anti-Classicist, and a proselytizing Christian.[221] Studying her work nonetheless restores to modern readers the cultural imperialism of the *fin-de-siècle*, providing

[219] Corelli, 'My Wonderful Wife', in *Cameos* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1896), pp. 177–291 (p. 177). This is the later version of the story, as it appears in *Cameos* (1896), without the 'Smoke' subtitle.
[220] Corelli, 'Wonderful Wife', pp. 177–8, 179.
[221] Corelli, *Mighty Atom*, p. 320.

a far more faithful picture of the attitudes of authors and how they spoke for their readers than the practice of simply reading canonical writers would provide. This chapter has shown, too, the often surprising intersections between her work and Gissing's, despite his appeal to minority culture.

2. The Issue of Minority

Is Paterian inwardness a reality that every reader can realistically acquire, or is it a product of a minority culture that mostly alienates the lower classes? The narrator of Somerset Maugham's *Cakes and Ale* (1930) says that Pater was an author he felt forced to admire: 'Because they told me that to admire Walter Pater was to prove myself a cultured young man, I admired Walter Pater, but heavens, how *Marius* bored me!'[222] Is Pater, then, simply a badge of distinction for young men, as he was for Corelli?

The previous chapter showed that Corelli valorises the past, partly as a way of buttressing her own literary distinction in the present; Gissing's Henry Ryecroft in a sense does this too, in relation to the classics and in contradistinction to what he considers the ills of modernity, yet his personal history encompasses painful experiences of youthful poverty and drudgery in London. Ryecroft is saved by a chance inheritance, however, and has the luxury of looking back, haunted by the past but also to some extent free of it. Pater valorises the past too. Corelli was not part of a higher education institution due to her gender and Gissing could have been part of one but personal misfortune prevented it; Pater belonged to Brasenose College, Oxford, but was also a man apart, a position allowing him to appeal both to the literati and the individual reader.

This chapter argues that the bibliophile protagonist of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* is essentially the eponymous hero of Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*, transposed from an idyllic Roman environment of intellectual rigour and contemplation to a somewhat dreary existence at the British *fin-de-siècle*, yet ostensibly one of bland contentment. The truly cultured man in Gissing has no hope in life: art is antagonistic, social dislocation in perpetuity,

[222] Somerset Maugham, *Cakes and Ale*, with an introduction by Nicholas Shakespeare (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 27.

without hope of readjustment, let alone upward social mobility. An education more in line with the state's interests would mean education without exile.

One of the questions this chapter attempts to answer is whether Ryecroft is actually happy. As Gissing told Bertz, the character only writes in his happy moments, and therefore the book should constitute an upbeat/optimistic record of events, but there is an undoubted ambivalence and constant probing of his 'contentment': 'I have been dull to-day […] To run over a list of only my favourite subjects, those to which, all my life long, I have more or less applied myself, studies which hold in my mind the place of hobbies, is to open vistas of intellectual despair.'[223] He summarises his life as 'merely tentative, a broken series of false starts and hopeless new beginnings'.[224] Gissing the implied author shares the pessimism of Giacomo Leopardi and Arthur Schopenhauer, a pessimism which blends realism, despair, and a yearning for a better world, that is a desire for a greater collective appreciation of the existing world. In tone, Ryecroft is akin to *The Tempest* (which is alluded to several times), a tragicomedy. The despair of Edwin in *New Grub Street* is distant and muted but still to some extent present in Ryecroft's darker moments. Ryecroft is optimistic at the end of the novel, evoking or invoking Shakespeare: 'Now, my life is rounded; it began with the natural irreflective [*sic*] happiness of childhood, it will close in the reasoned *tranquillity* of the mature mind'.[225] Although happiness can be attained by a Paterian individual in Gissing's realist world, albeit in a romantic quasi-retirement after the horrors of a life spent in London, it is a tranquilised form of happiness, an anaesthetic before death.

After exploring the blessed educations of Marius and, more problematically, Ryecroft, including discussions of art and the contemplative life (including a discussion of Pater's, and Gissing's, affinity with Wordsworthian inwardness), and culture and class, this chapter then

[223] Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 262. Subsequent references are to this edition.
[224] *Ibid.*, p. 263.
[225] *Ibid.*, p. 292.

examines cursed educations of other *fin-de-siècle* characters. Their miseducation has pushed them away from people and social acceptance, breeding what are here called monsters of individualism: Mr Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Godwin Peak in *Born in Exile*, and Griffin from Wells's *The Invisible Man*. Marius and Ryecroft are close to them in that their education and sense of cultural refinement have set them apart.[226] However, these two have nurtured a Paterian solitude that either elides the masses (Marius) or keeps them at a distance (Ryecroft's rural retreat), whereas for the other three, it is isolation, not Paterian solitude, that has led them on their destructive paths, and absence from other educated people has perhaps warped their imaginations. This chapter also discusses the ideas of Freud and Darwin, the former in terms of defining culture and the latter to show that, despite (or possibly even because of) their high culture, Peak *et al.* are not as distinct from nonhuman animals as they would expect.

Blessed Educations: Creatures of Solitude

The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft presents a man who has sought to distance himself from the undereducated masses and appears to be living a life of largely solitary tranquillity, yet he is haunted by his urban past:

> In celebrating his perfect and ordered bourgeois domesticity, Ryecroft remembers his London years with bitterness and derision. […] At the same time Ryecroft's recollections of struggling and starving authorship, of garret life and coffee stalls, and books found in second-hand stalls around the Tottenham Court Road are charged with a heroic nostalgia that feeds the myth of literary Bohemia and the hero as man of letters. […] The contradiction that compels the work […] lies in the continuing claims of the past that Ryecroft seeks to deny.[227]

Gissing's conception of culture inheres in the following paradox: if culture is a force for good, then it should be good for everyone. Clearly it is not good for everyone, however; culture is

[226] In Chapter 1, we saw that Corelli herself was a woman apart yet commanding a mass coterie of devoted followers, a kind of comic equivalent of Kurtz in the jungle of late-Victorian/Edwardian publishing.
[227] John Sloan, 'Gissing, Literary Bohemia, and the Metropolitan Circle', in *Gissing and the City: Cultural Crisis and the Making of Books in Late Victorian England*, ed. John Spiers (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 75–85 (p. 79).

good precisely because it is *not* for everyone. That is, the value of culture lies in the cultivation of an elitist sensibility, a sensibility which, culture only promises, can potentially be cultivated by everyone.[228] Gissing's attempts to educate his family members, attempts which generally have a tone of great urgency and care, demonstrate the vital importance he grants culture.

It can help people climb above others intellectually and socially, for example. In his letters, Gissing urges his sisters Margaret and Ellen to learn other languages, such as German, French, and Latin, in order to read the 'really great men' in the original language, so that they might elevate themselves above the average woman. In a letter to Ellen, dated September 1885, he recommends the following authors:

> I am more determined to keep to the really great men, otherwise life is too short. Let us think: — Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, among the Greeks; Vergil, Catullus, Horace, among the Latins; in Italian, Dante & Boccaccio; in Spanish, Don Quixote; in German, Goethe, Jean Paul, Heine; in French, Moliere, George Sand, Balzac, De Musset; in English, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare [*sic*], Milton, Keats, Browning, Scott; — these are the indispensables. I rejoice to say that I can read them all in the original, except Cervantes, & I hope to take up Spanish next year, just for that purpose.[229]

This represents astonishing assiduity and dedication on the part of someone not yet thirty years old, and it is clear in his correspondence that he also wants to set an example to his sisters.

However, there was a price to pay for this all-but-unique achievement: a deeply felt aversion to the undereducated masses (in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, they are referred to as the 'host of the half-educated').[230] On 2 June 1893, Gissing told Bertz that his 'own hope is that the world will some day be reconstituted on a basis of intellectual aristocracy.'[231] The massification of literature was for Gissing a negative construal of expanding modes of production.[232] The Education Acts of 1870/1 and the ensuing expansion of published literature precipitated a redefinition of 'culture' among writers, publishers and

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[228] See Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), pp. 84–90 for 'Culture' and its relation to cultivation (husbandry). The link is explicit throughout Hesiod, *The Works and Days*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991).
[229] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 345. See also pp. 331 and 347.
[230] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 48.
[231] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 5, p. 114.
[232] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 reprint), pp. 85–126 (pp. 85–6).

readers, a sharper division of the British literary marketplace. This essentially gave Gissing a larger share of the market than he would have had earlier in the nineteenth century but also a non-institutionalised 'cliquey' reputation.

Gissing's sense of culture seems to anticipate New Criticism, where, as John Guillory puts it, 'the status of literature seemed to correspond exactly to the status of the minority literary culture itself, at once adversarial in relation to mass culture and at the same time institutionally dominant.'[233] For Gissing, minority literary culture was certainly adversarial to mass culture, but its institutional dominance was largely non-existent or at most nascent; even in the Society of Authors, it had not manifested itself fully, not least because the society was set up, and chaired, by the popular author Besant. In his last published novel, Gissing presents a plan for institutional dominance, an unfinished map of utopia.[234]

Ryecroft thus represents a kind of intellectual aristocracy. Early in the novel, Ryecroft quotes Samuel Johnson: 'all the arguments which are brought to represent poverty as no evil, show it to be evidently a great evil. You never find people labouring to convince you that you may live very happily upon a plentiful fortune'.[235] The implied author shows Ryecroft remonstrating with the implied reader in order to convince them that his life has been a success. However, if it had been, there would be no need for remonstration. Ryecroft explicitly links poverty to intellectual aspirations:

> there are title-bearing men and women in England who, had they an assured income of five-and-twenty shillings per week, would have no right to call themselves poor, for their intellectual needs are those of a stable-boy or scullery wench. Give me the same income and I can live, but I am poor indeed.[236]

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[233] John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 140.
[234] Echo of Wilde, 'The Soul of Man' (1891), in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Vol. 4: Criticism: Historical Criticism, Intentions, The Soul of Man*, ed. Josephine M. Guy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 229–68 (p. 247).
[235] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 17.
[236] *Ibid.*

The utopist moments in the book represent Ryecroft's will to power: he is forced to convince his imagined reader/s, or only himself since these are private papers, of the utopia his life is not.

Clearly, culture is an important part of this attempt. However, for Ryecroft as for Gissing, culture is at once elitist and democratic, distinct from the 'mob' but offering sanctuary to the underprivileged intellectual.[237] The discourse domain in which Gissing's 'culture' is embedded is historical, particularly classical, cosmopolitan, classless, and largely gender-inclusive, though not without some concomitant biases of the period. It is also pedagogical, exclusive along class lines ('intellectual *aristocracy*'), distinct from the 'thick-witted multitude', and imbued with a sense of vital urgency.[238]

The life of the mind, in *Ryecroft*, promises both sanctuary and individuation: 'I know, if I know anything, that I am made for the life of tranquillity and meditation. I know that only thus can such virtue as I possess find scope'.[239] However, it is clearly figured along elitist lines: 'How well would the revenues of a country be expended, if, by mere pensioning, one-fifth of its population could be induced to live as I do!'[240] Self-compassion is described by the narrator as a luxury which, he suggests, could descend into querulous self-pity without the requisite level of financial means.[241] He even professes to be anti-democratic, 'I dread to think of what our England may become when Demos rules irresistibly', but there is clearly ambivalence: 'he who should argue […] that I am intolerant of all persons belonging to a lower social rank than my own would go far astray. Nothing is more rooted in my mind than the vast distinction between the individual and the class'.[242]

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[237] See Gissing, *Collected Letters*, Vol 5, p. 113. Orlando Whiffle and Gilbert Gresham are described as 'belonging to the aristocracy of intellect', suggesting some ambivalence on the author's part in his use of the term — Gissing, *Workers*, p. 130.
[238] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 28.
[239] *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.
[240] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[241] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[242] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Ryecroft's ideology is nuanced by sympathy;[243] Marxist readings of Gissing have to be chary of reducing the novels, particularly the later ones, to class binary oppositions:

> Verbal contention is, of course, commoner among the poor and the vulgar than in the class of well-bred people living at their ease, but I doubt whether the lower ranks of society find personal associations much more difficult than the refined minority above them. High cultivation may help to self-command, but it multiplies the chances of irritative contact.[244]

In a letter to Morley Roberts dated 10 February 1895, Gissing is at pains to convince his friend of what is most vital in his work: '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*.'[245] The complexity of culture for Gissing, all it represents in late-Victorian society, with its concomitant truths and frauds, is available in this description. If money becomes the signifier for education and good-breeding, once a person is deprived of it, how can the signified exist at all?

As well as the guilt related to lack of money, society is also excluded from Ryecroft's highly individualised reality, safely contained in the past. Linking aesthetics to the human body, Eagleton asserts that '[t]he story Marxism has to tell is a classically hubristic tale of how the human body, through those extensions of itself we call society and technology, comes to overreach itself and bring itself to nothing, abstracting its own sensuous wealth to a cypher in the act of converting the world into its own bodily organ'.[246] Taking his consciousness as microcosm for society, Ryecroft seeks to turn the tale on its head: he eschews any extensions that would cause him to overreach and instead becomes a society of one. Society is only useful insofar as it is *materia poetica*. No new idea can confront Ryecroft's consciousness, hermetically sealed as it is, without his subsuming it through apperception. Ryecroft has successfully re-imagined the world for himself but at the expense of being part of exterior

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[243] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 219.
[244] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 63.
[245] *Collected Letters*, vol. 5, p. 296.
[246] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 198. The link is not Eagleton's invention; as he points out, it already exists in the respective aesthetics of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud.

reality. Other people therefore have very little or no place in his conception of reality: 'Not that I care about the people [in Topsham]; with barely one or two exceptions, the people are nothing to me, and the less I see of them the better I am pleased. But the *places* grow ever more dear to me'.[247]

It is, then, unsurprising that in *Ryecroft* fear of the loss of individuality runs very deep, as in the eponymous protagonist's recollection of military-style drill in childhood.[248] Social dislocation is thus an important component of Ryecroft's sense of culture. Here, as in Gissing's letters, cultural discourse co-opts class hierarchies in an ironical way, although to say that it is therefore déclassé is untrue, as in Ryecroft's discussion of art: 'Art, in some degree, is within the scope of every human being, were he but the ploughman who utters a few *would-be* melodious notes, the mere outcome of health and strength, in the field at sunrise; he sings, or *tries* to…'[249] If art is an 'expression, satisfying and abiding, of the zest of life', then extreme poverty, which cannot produce a zest for life, cannot produce art. Furthermore, he suggests that an artist is born and not made; therefore, the hierarchy of art, what might be called the degrees of canonicity, must correspond in some degree to class hierarchy.[250]

To define Ryecroft's individualism in terms of canonical writers, it is Wordsworthian with certain Paterian qualities. The influence of Wordsworth on *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* can be observed in the references to the 'Ode' on the *Intimations of Immortality*, the episode of the boy who has lost sixpence, which recalls such character pieces as 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', 'The Idiot Boy', or 'Michael', and the general sense of nostalgia.[251] Moreover, the narrator takes part in 'lower' life only from a privileged position of sympathy. *Ryecroft* provides a deep reading of Wordsworth, who is democratic in spirit only on the

[247] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 73.
[248] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
[249] *Ibid.*, p. 42, emphasis added.
[250] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[251] *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 18, 190n, and 192n; pp. 15–16; for an example of nostalgia, see p. 23.

surface, an all-embracing consciousness of one. There is also a Wordsworthian idealising of the country (as distinct from the city), a *natural* piety ('That was one of the moments of my life when I have tasted exquisite joy').[252]

In Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*, however, art leads quite explicitly to religious ecstasy, in the way that Platonic love leads from appreciation of humanity to appreciation of divinity. Marius, 'the strong young man in all the freshness of thought and feeling', discovers 'a great new poem every spring, with a hundred delightful things he has felt, but which have never been expressed, or at least never so truly, before.' Pater compares him to a priest in his scrupulous idealism, and the 'devotion of his days to the contemplation of what is beautiful' to perpetual religious service.[253] Ryecroft is attempting, in a sense, to recreate Marius' perceptive qualities, yet there is a doubting quality to his faith, a dulled tone to his observations. As Wordsworth and Pater never knew urban struggle, Pater is closer to Wordsworth than either is to Gissing.

Ryecroft transmutes Wordsworthian inwardness since he fears egotism, whereas comparatively, Wordsworth, as the narrating 'I' of the poems, is egotism personified and has no guilt about this. Ryecroft is conscious of the distance between himself and society, and feels guilty as a result:

> The truth is that I have never learnt to regard myself as a 'member of society.' For me, there have always been two entities — myself and the world, and the normal relation between these two has been hostile. Am I not still a lonely man, as far as ever from forming part of the social order?[254]

In the post-Education Act environment, all people are educated, but some are more educated than others.[255] Education is universal but, in a competitive and capitalist society, what is the

[252] William Wordsworth, 'My heart leaps up', l. 9. The last three lines famously serve as an epigraph to the 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality…', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume D: The Romantic Period*, 8th edn, ed. Jack Stillinger and Deidre Shauna Lynch (New York; London: Norton, 2006), p. 306. See also Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 49, in which thanking heaven for the quietude of the countryside is Ryecroft's 'orison'. The quotation in parenthesis can be found on *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[253] Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, ed. Michael Levey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 181–2. Subsequent references are to this edition.
[254] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 21.
[255] Reference to George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*, ed. D. J. Taylor (London: Constable, 2021), p. 93. See pp. 100–1n, in which Taylor draws several parallels between Orwell's political fable and Gissing's *Demos: A Story of English Socialism*.

difference that makes the difference? For Ryecroft, it is the privilege and the burden of the cultured man to be aloof. Theodor Adorno could be describing Ryecroft when he says that '[h]e who stands aloof runs the risk of believing himself better than others and misusing his critique of society as an ideology for his private interest.'[256] The surprisingly dialectical relationship between the ideology of private interest and the critique of society is precisely the dialectic which Ryecroft's intellectualism is rooted in. However, for Ryecroft, there is, compounded with this, a distinct fear of egotism, which pervades *Ryecroft* as it does Gissing's letters.[257] Gissing thus transmutes Wordsworthian inwardness. The past and the countryside are retreats, a sanctuary for the cultured individual of the *fin-de-siècle*: 'through all my battlings and miseries I have always lived more in the past than in the present'.[258]

Ryecroft's education/enculturation, which suffuses his thoughts throughout his lucky escape to the countryside, or perhaps his past experiences of poverty, or perhaps a combination of both, has allowed him to understand the limits of his own privilege, which we do not find in Marius. Ryecroft's utopian moments are tempered by doubt: 'Does the minority of the truly intelligent exercise a vast and profound influence? Does it not in truth lead the way, however slowly and irregularly the multitude may follow?' His answer, 'I should like to believe it', lacks confidence. It is hard to define exactly what he means by the 'truly intelligent'. The things that make for true civilization are 'justice and peace, sweetness of manners, purity of life', but it is, he admits, a fallacy of 'bookish thought' to believe that these virtues exist in intelligent people without admixture of 'moral barbarism' (*Ryecroft*, p. 47). Even as Ryecroft enshrines 'truly' educated people — 'education is a thing of which only the few are capable' — he is keen to undercut certain notions of moral privilege that such education seeks to attain.[259]

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[256] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (New York; London: Verso, 2005), p. 26.
[257] See Gissing, *Ryecroft*, pp. 24 and 194n.
[258] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[259] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Art and the Contemplative Life

The morality being considered in the last paragraph of the previous section is Wordsworthian, and again, this provides a link between Gissing and Pater, although the former ambivalently presents in Ryecroft an individual detached from people, while the latter advocates for the individual who is detached from society, indeed insists on it. In one of the most memorable passages from his essay on Wordsworth, Pater links morality to art and the contemplative life:

> That the end of life is not action but contemplation — *being* as distinct from *doing* — a certain disposition of the mind: is, in some shape or other, the principle of all the higher morality. In poetry, in art, if you enter into their true spirit at all, you touch this principle, in a measure: these, by their very sterility, are a type of beholding for the mere joy of beholding. To treat life in the spirit of art, is to make life a thing in which means and ends are identified: to encourage such treatment, the true moral significance of art and poetry. Wordsworth, and other poets who have been like him in ancient or more recent times, are the masters, the experts, in this art of impassioned contemplation. Their work is, not to teach lessons, or enforce rules, or even to stimulate us to noble ends; but to withdraw the thoughts for a little while from the mere machinery of life, to fix them, with appropriate emotions, on the spectacle of those great facts in man's existence which no machinery affects, 'on the great and universal passions of men, the most general and interesting of their occupations, and the entire world of nature,' — on 'the operations of the elements and the appearances of the visible universe, on storm and sunshine, on the revolutions of the seasons, on cold and heat, on loss of friends and kindred, on injuries and resentments, on gratitude and hope, on fear and sorrow.' To witness this spectacle with appropriate emotions is the aim of all culture; and of these emotions poetry like Wordsworth's is a great nourisher and stimulant. He sees nature full of sentiment and excitement; he sees men and women as parts of nature, passionate, excited, in strange grouping and connexion [*sic*] with the grandeur and beauty of the natural world: — images, in his own words, 'of man suffering, amid awful forms and powers.'[260]

The contemplative life, if it is to have any chance of success, must clearly do away with suffering. Ryecroft's suffering is confined to the past; why, therefore, is the past a refuge? Or, rather, why does he dwell on/in the past? One answer is simpler than the other: the first is that, due to a lack of his own suffering in the present, he has no alternative but to contemplate his past suffering, generally lacking interest in other people, though not always. The other answer is that suffering provides life itself, and, contrary to the opinions in his private papers, art is not adequate. Treating life in the spirit of art tranquillises life. According to Freud, art is not strong enough to 'make us forget real misery' but instead does so temporarily.[261] What Pater means

[260] Walter Pater, 'Wordsworth', in *Selected Writings of Walter Pater*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 125–42 (p. 139). The quotations within Pater's are from Wordsworth, the former from the 'Preface' to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* and the latter from *The Prelude*, as noted by Bloom on p. 142n.

[261] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, in *The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents and Other Works*, vol. 21 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund*

when he says 'appropriate emotions' is difficult to define accurately, but a kind of disinterestedness is being urged on the reader. Culture, then, is clearly not social for Pater.

An account of a young workman, 'Ruskinian and Christian socialist', one of the case studies who feature in Edward Harold Begbie's *Living Water*, is firmly at odds with this stance. For him, individualism must make concessions to the masses: 'See the individual man as a person, recognise the citizen as a brother spirit, and at once it becomes clear to you that the only reasonable life is that which makes provision for every man to work his utmost, conscious that by his work he is helping all and developing his own spiritual life.'[262] Ryecroft is conscious that he is developing his own spiritual life but he does this with very few brotherly compunctions. The anonymous Christian socialist in Begbie had read Carlyle and some Ruskin, perhaps unsurprisingly including *Unto This Last*, and had studied Pater, 'who fed the natural Greek tendencies in his mind, and perhaps corrected some of the doubtful teachings of Carlyle'.[263] There is some ambiguity around 'natural Greek tendencies', which signifies variously, but what is Paterian in his ideology has clearly been transmuted by Christian socialism. Wilde, a more faithful acolyte of Pater's, believes in a stronger sense of individualism: 'The majority of people spoil their lives by an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism — are forced, indeed, so to spoil them.'[264]

Ryecroft finds high culture to be essential for individualism; Marius accepts this as given, and does not even acknowledge low culture. Pater allows for the influence of art on life but describes only tentatively the influence of the book which so deeply affects Marius, namely Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, or *Metamorphoses*, the sub-title by which it is referred to in *Marius*

Freud, ed. and trans. James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud and assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 57–145 (p. 81). See Chapter 5 of this thesis for a critique of the full passage from which this quotation is excerpted.

[262] Edward Harold Begbie, *Living Water: Being Chapters from the Romance of the Poor Student* (London: Headley Bros, 1918), pp. 67–8.

[263] Begbie, *Living Water*, p. 76.

[264] Wilde, 'Soul of Man', p. 231.

the Epicurean: 'a book which awakened the poetic or romantic capacity as perhaps some other book might have done, but was peculiar in giving it a direction emphatically sensuous.'[265]

This raises the issue of whether taste is innate in Pater's novel. It is implied in the novel that correctness of taste is an inherent quality, though there is some ambiguity in the wording: Marius 'might seem' to have inherited this quality from his father.[266] Flavian is an early exemplar for Marius of someone who has cultivated that 'foppery of words, of choice diction, which was common among the elite spirits of that day'.[267] That choice diction exists among other classes is not acknowledged by either Pater or Ryecroft, but it is the 'delicacy' and 'foppery' of language that is being praised.[268]

Privileged reading is predicated on class but Pater (implied author) is not conscious of this. If some other book would have awakened the poetic or romantic capacity just as effectively as Apuleius's, albeit without the sensuous direction, why is it necessary, as Gissing maintains, to read only, or mainly, canonical literature? A book 'is lucky or unlucky in the precise moment of its falling in our way, and often by some happy accident counts with us for something more than its independent value'; for Marius, the book contains something 'far more than was really there for any other reader'.[269] Although there is ambivalence about the *positive* influence of literature here, Pater curiously avoids any discussion of the right way to read a book, although this is not to say that he offers an inclusive view of reading and readers. He was never an advocate of populist literature — the closest he came was his positive review of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* — but, as Wilde's novel espouses his own doctrine, with some minor deviations, it was essentially an exercise in self-congratulation; rather, 'trashy' literature simply

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[265] Pater, *Marius*, pp. 88 and 65.
[266] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[267] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[268] 'It is very good to be mealy-mouthed with respect to everything that reminds us of the animal in man. Verbal delicacy in itself will not prove an advanced civilization, but civilization, as it advances, assuredly tends that way' Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 171.
[269] Pater, *Marius*, p. 88.

does not exist for Pater; his Rome consists purely of imperishable literary monuments.[270] The privileged reader is his only concern, and, for Marius, Apuleius's book is merely stimulation of a literary ambition already existing within him. Pater's privileged reader of literature is always-already highly literate.

Ryecroft dislikes the commercialisation of literature, or low culture, but is he a victim of it? He believes that education can only be utilised effectively by the few: 'Your average mortal will be your average mortal still: and if he grow conscious of power, if he becomes vocal and self-assertive, if he gets into his hands all the material resources of the country, why, you have a state of things such as at present looms menacingly before every Englishman blessed — or cursed — with an unpopular spirit.'[271] Like Edwin in *New Grub Street*, Ryecroft is second rate. His reading is impressively varied, encompassing not just English writers but Latin and German writers too, but, as indicated by his lack of a successful academic or literary career, he is not capable of applying this reading, of synthesising it and putting it to use. Has his life been spent in meditation, as Marius's has, or has he been too preoccupied with the sensations aroused by the book-as-object? Although he outwardly rails against it, he is in a sense a victim of the commercialisation of literature. He is not interested in bestsellers but he has an unhealthy addiction to books rather than reading. He views great literature as vitality, which is a coenaesthesis he envies. What he has actually experienced is anaesthesia.

For Pater (as for Wilde), art makes life, albeit for the privileged few; while this is true to an extent for Gissing, he presents the frustrations that art also produces in individuals. His visit to the real-life equivalent of Egdon Heath, a setting in *The Return of the Native*, sparked

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[270] For the review, see Pater, 'A Novel by Mr. Oscar Wilde (The Picture of Dorian Gray)', in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Selected Writings of Walter Pater* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 263–6. It is interesting to note that Pater does not particularly care for the aspects of lower life which form such an important part of Wilde's novel. Tellingly, he maintains that Dorian is 'certainly a quite unsuccessful experiment in Epicureanism, in life as a fine art' (*Ibid.*, p. 265), missing some of the nuances of the novel. See notes 84:11 and 86:7 in Pater, *Gaston de Latour: The Revised Text*, ed. Gerald Monsman (Greensboro, NC: ELT, 1995), pp. 188–9.

[271] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, pp. 70–1.

indifference.[272] For Ryecroft, it is 'better to re-visit *only in imagination* the places which have greatly charmed us'.[273] Art in *Ryecroft* becomes perpetual aspiration: utopia as utopia always out of reach. Individualism in Ryecroft is not always hermetic, and even occasionally points towards social improvement. However, his sense of culture is by no means expansive; indeed, art is never universal; it is there as a tool for the minority.

The lack of consciousness of popular literature is what Ryecroft's utopia lacks. If '[i]t is Proust's courtesy to spare the reader the embarrassment of believing himself cleverer than the author', the reader of Pater is granted a similar 'courtesy': the Greek and Latin inscriptions which adorn the narrative are rarely translated within the text, the literary, historical and cultural references are often esoteric, plot details are few, and the sentences have a length and intricacy which demand careful attention and close reading.[274] These represent a strategy that seeks to refine the readership, but in Pater it is unconscious. *Ryecroft* has no fully realised characters other than the eponymous protagonist; a series of memories and brief essayistic chapters replace any traditional notion of plot; and the main character is prohibitive (these are, after all, private papers). However, Gissing is aware of the novelistic tradition that directly precedes him. Dickens, who, more than any other novelist of the nineteenth century, helped popularise the form, is written *against* in Gissing's novels — *David Copperfield* and *New Grub Street* have the single common fact that they are both novels about writers. Even *Hard Times* — which is the least effusive, the least nebulous, of Dickens' novels — feels overpopulated compared to *Ryecroft*. Nonetheless, there is an awareness of the loss of populousness, inscribed most clearly in *New Grub Street*, particularly in Edwin, but more subtly in *Ryecroft*. The guilt of minority exists in Gissing but not in Pater.

[272] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 5, p. 138.
[273] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 69, emphasis added.
[274] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 49.

Overall, however, Ryecroft is content with Paterian precariousness — living from one moment to the next — prepared to sacrifice the life of the body to nurture the life of the mind. Without his inheritance, he might have died from starvation in a garret. Simon J. James argues for an anti-utopian aspect to Ryecroft's apparent success.[275] In his earlier, poverty-stricken years, Ryecroft procures culture in exchange for his own malnutrition: here, essence takes precedence over existence.[276] Who will be taught without first having the desire to learn?[277] Ryecroft must first imagine a life worthy of living before the living can begin. Art's promise, Pater tells us, is nothing more than to enrich our moments as they pass, and only for the sake of those moments.[278] In Ryecroft, the protagonist reaches a similar sense of Paterian precariousness: 'I cannot preserve more than a few fragments of what I read, yet read I shall, persistently, rejoicingly. Would I gather erudition for a future life? Indeed, it no longer troubles me that I forget. I have the happiness of the passing moment, and what more can mortal ask?'[279]

The issue of minority is for Ryecroft both positive and negative, yet despite his ability to consider it objectively, he cannot see how universal education might have benefited him personally. The emphases on mortality, on the present moment, and on enhancing one's solitude (rather at the expense, or at least in ignorance of, one's social self) are all Paterian modes of perception. The concept of the masses — the social duties conferred by the state on the individual — would harm or undermine Paterian privilege. Such utopist aims of late-Victorian society are dismissed by Ryecroft: 'I am told that their semi-education [that is, the masses] will be integrated. We are in a transition stage, between the bad old time when only a few had academic privileges, and that happy future which will see all men liberally instructed.' He

[275] Simon J. James, *Unsettled Accounts: Money and Narrative in the Novels of George Gissing* (London: Anthem Press, 2003), pp. 145–8.
[276] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 29.
[277] Echo of Sir Philip Sidney's 'For who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught?' Sidney, 'The Defence of Poesy', in *'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 1–54 (p. 22).
[278] Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 121. The uncompromising, even suicidal, aspect of this aestheticism is captured in Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson* (1911).
[279] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, pp. 38–9.

concludes that the 'average mortal' will remain as such. Ryecroft's awareness of the ambivalence of his position is crucial to a fair understanding of the paradox of culture and education as they existed at the *fin-de-siècle*, yet he cannot see how people like him might benefit from universal education.

Culture and Class: High and Low

The valorisation of authors past and present is often a shoring up against the anxieties mentioned above. Gissing celebrates the unpopular spirit that he finds in the works of Meredith and Browning. Indeed, as Meredith's popularity increased, Gissing's esteem for him as a writer declined somewhat.[280] Tennyson belonged to a past generation, not simply in spirit, but in the late production of inferior poetry.[281] The popular success of Sir Walter Scott, which contributed to the massification of literature at the *fin-de-siècle* and ultimately helped validate the novel as a canonical form, is explained away by Gissing: 'Those books were never *popular*, as the word is now understood; price alone proves that.'[282] The 'mushroom reputations' of some of his peers — Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson, J. M. Barrie — were to Gissing unmerited.[283] Was it a new kind of popularity that he was reacting against? Certainly Dickens' significance in the massification of literature is undeniable; and yet, Dickens' popularity was acceptable to Gissing. Like most novelists at the *fin-de-siècle*, Gissing used Dickens as a yardstick. Gissing was bolder than most, however, in creating a space for themselves: the Esther Summerson chapters in *Bleak House* lacked all verisimilitude, which is judging Dickens on Gissing's own terms.[284]

[280] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 5, pp. 76–7. See, in particular, footnote 4 on p. 77. With some qualification, he admits that Meredith has done good work, although his favourite novel by him is one of his oldest, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: A History of Father and Son* (*Collected Letters*, vol. 5, pp. 139, 140n, and 169).
[281] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[282] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[283] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[284] Gissing, *Collected Works of George Gissing on Charles Dickens*, *Volume 3: Forster's Life of Dickens: abridged and revised by George Gissing*, ed. Christine DeVine (Grayswood: Grayswood Press, 2008), p. 18.

In a similar way to Gissing, the past, sometimes the remote past (as in *Marius the Epicurean*), was Pater's preferred setting for his fiction, allowing him to easily separate his characters from the bustle of modern society and place them in a world of contemplative quietude. For Ryecroft, as shown above, his *personal* past threatens to pierce his present quietude.

What might be described as Ryecroft's 'Sunday of the soul' links Gissing to Pater since all the reader/pupil/acolyte's energies must be devoted to education/culture, and therefore, the demands of working life and social distractions preclude the masses. Sunday has become sacred for Ryecroft because it promises solitude and quietude, and hence a congenial environment for literary pleasure. The temporal must be fought against. His childhood Sundays became inextricably linked to reading fine volumes of books in the 'higher rank of literature' — 'so there came to be established in my mind an association between the day of rest and names which are the greatest in verse and prose.' He adds that these 'great ones, *crowned with immortality*, do not respond to him who approaches them as though hurried by temporal care'.[285] The requisite environment conducive to literary study cannot be available to all, however. Thus, culture is a privilege to the few who can afford it, where 'afford' signifies beyond the monetary connotation.

Gissing himself managed to defy such inevitabilities:

> Since 1886 I have managed to *live* by literature — or, let us say, by writing; & the fact seems to me rather wonderful, for never have I tried to please the public, & I have, in fact, pleased only the minutest fraction of it. You are perfectly right in insisting upon an author's duty to his fellows — as against rapacious men of business. But on that point my withers are unwrung. If — as may well happen — my books cease to pay for publishing, necessity will drive me into new methods; but as yet I keep up a certain hope.[286]

Comparing Gissing to Dickens, James notes that '[t]here are to be no easy escapes through coincidence or even benevolence in Gissing's own fiction, for he rarely saw such things in his own life, and used what he perceived as the actual contingencies of life to thwart the insincere

[285] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 61, emphasis added. See p. 199n regarding Gissing's distaste for public holidays.
[286] *Collected Letters of Gissing*, vol. 5, pp. 183–4.

conventions of art.'[287] However, Ryecroft is an example of escape through benevolence (a life annuity bequeathed by a friend), offering one of the rare exceptions in Gissing's fiction.[288] In 'The Place of Realism in Fiction', Gissing maintains the following: 'Sincerity I regard as of chief importance. I am speaking of an art, and, therefore, take for granted that the worker has art at his command; but art, in the sense of craftsman's skill, without sincerity of vision will not suffice. This is applicable to both branches of fiction, to romance and to the novel.'[289] He concludes that realism 'signifies nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life' and goes on to compare positively the novelist's freedom in 1895 to the 'bondage' of a decade or so previous.[290] Ryecroft's sense of culture, however, relies on art thwarting certain conventions of life: the poet is restored to their original role as maker; their conception of life is 'unfettered' and their own, hermetic, in other words a utopia of the mind designed to keep the hordes out.[291] This suggests a romantic understanding of culture.

Gissing's sense of culture promises to elevate the lower classes but demands such resources as are typically the privilege of the more leisured classes. Thomas Hardy's Jude Fawley is perhaps the ultimate tragic example of this promise not being kept; Jude romanticises learning and culture but fails to obtain a classical education due to overstrain and the distractions of romance: 'So fatigued was he sometimes after his day's work that he could not maintain the critical attention necessary for thorough application.'[292] There are other examples: Virginia Madden in *The Odd Women* is similarly thwarted in her intellectual ambitions.[293] E. M. Forster's Leonard Bast is a descendant of Jude: one of the Schlegel sisters notes that Bast would be better off devoting his energies to fewer works of literature so as to understand a

[287] James, *Unsettled Accounts*, p. 47.
[288] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 6.
[289] Gissing, 'The Place of Realism in Fiction', in *Collected Essays*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Grayswood: Grayswood Press, 2015), pp. 141–5 (pp. 143–4).
[290] *Ibid.*, pp. 144–5.
[291] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, pp. 82–3.
[292] Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 3rd edn, ed. Ralph Pite (New York; London: Norton, 2016), p. 95.
[293] George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, ed. Patricia Ingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 17–18.

handful of classics rather than attempt, and fail, to understand a large proportion, as they are able to do. All three lower-class characters, the texts imply, are victims of their working-class status: if they had the resources to pursue their intellectual desires, they would achieve the educational fulfilment associated with upper-class students, yet if they belonged to the upper class, it is highly likely they would have the necessary leisure to pursue such study with all their energy.

Gissing's late novel also shares similarities with Wells's work. Ryecroft imagines the academic life for himself: 'I had in me the making of a scholar. With leisure and tranquillity of mind, I should have amassed learning. Within the walls of a college, I should have lived so happily, so harmlessly, my imagination ever busy with the old world.'[294] This is Jude risen to a tragicomic mode, as Wells's Kipps is Ryecroft in a predominantly comic mode. Like Kipps, Ryecroft has been saved from poverty, a kind of suffering which tends to put a strain on the performance of culture. The awkward scene in Ryecroft involving a working-class man on holiday, trying and failing to eat in a London restaurant, is remarkably similar to a scene in *Kipps*.[295]

Just as Corelli is like a Gissing character (see Chapter 1 of this thesis), certain characters in Gissing seem like Pater or at least Paterian disciples. In *The Odd Women*, for example, the Eton-educated Everard sounds like he has been reading Pater:

> Isn't the spectacle of existence quite enough to occupy one through a lifetime? If a man merely travelled, could he possibly exhaust all the beauties and magnificences that are offered to him in every country? For ten years and more I worked as hard as any man; I shall never regret it, for it has given me a feeling of liberty and opportunity such as I should not have known if I had always lived at my ease. It taught me a great deal, too; supplemented my so-called education as nothing else could have done. But to work for ever is to lose half of life. I can't understand those people who reconcile themselves to quitting the world without having seen a millionth part of it.

He later encapsulates this vision as 'an infinite series of modes of living'.[296] On the one hand, he belittles his public school education; on the other, his dismissive attitude towards those who

[294] Gissing, *Ryecroft*, p. 38.
[295] *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80. Wells, *Kipps*, pp. 240–1.
[296] *Ibid.*, pp. 93–4.

need to work for their whole lives betrays the ignorance of his class. This is not a critique of Pater by Gissing, however; rather, it is a critique of those incapable of truly appreciating Pater's works.

For Gissing, the enemy of minority culture, in particular, was the popular conscience; Pater's experience supports this: the conclusion to *The Renaissance* caused such controversy that it had to be removed from subsequent editions of the book. Though desiring commercial success, Gissing feared it was not possible in his age arguably because he had not personally experienced it. He is not prevaricating when he says that 'the more I read of Goncourt, the more I dislike the man. He seems to me radically ignoble. He talks with incessant complaining about his lack of success with the crowd — a matter for lamentation to no serious man who (like Goncourt) has the means of livelihood.'[297] According to Gissing, the means of livelihood should enable the writer to dispense with any need for popular approval. On the question of the next poet laureate, Gissing championed Swinburne: 'We are told that Mr Swinburne, in part, offends against the popular conscience; but the popular conscience has nothing to do with literary merit.'[298] The moral relativism that today is recognised as one of many contingencies of value is excluded by Gissing as a way of shoring up against literary massification. Earlier in the letter, solicited by *The Idler* as part of public debate, Gissing talks about 'the twentieth (or fortieth) part of the population which thinks or cares about poetry at all'. This enhances the clique to which he must belong. Money is required from the masses only if you do not have the means to live; otherwise, the public and what they think can safely be ignored. This is minority culture.

This culture must be earned. Attain true culture, Pater tells us in *Marius the Epicurean*, or perish as one of the vulgar masses. Pater's prose is often self-conscious, and in the following

[297] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 5, p. 271; see also vol. 6, p. 12: 'I dislike [*The Goncourt Journal*], but it is very readable'.
[298] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 5, p. 281. For an account of the full debate, see Karl Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (New York; London: Norton, 1992), pp. 95–109.

passage, in an almost anomalous nod to the present day, he shows awareness of the difficulties facing students living, or trying to live more fully, in noisy cities:

> Life in modern London even, in the heavy glow of summer, is stuff sufficient for the fresh imagination of a youth to build its "palace of art" of; and the very sense and enjoyment of an experience in which all is new, are but enhanced, like that glow of summer itself, by the thought of its brevity, giving him something of a gambler's zest, in the apprehension, by dexterous act or diligently appreciative thought, of the highly coloured moments which are to pass away so quickly.[299]

Hermotimus, one of the interlocutors in the Lucian dialogue that provides the basis for Chapter 24, maintains that happiness is achieved by attaining true philosophy, whereas missing both means perishing 'as one of the vulgar herd'.[300] The masses are to be avoided both literally (in London) and spiritually. 'The service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit, is to rouse, to startle it into sharp and eager observation.' Pater demands the impossible of anyone but the most luxuriating of readers: success in life is 'to burn always with this hard, gemlike flame' and 'maintain this ecstasy'.[301] The 'always' of the Heraclitean fire, as the perpetual religious service in Pater, is a striving consonant with the impossible mode of perception foisted on Pater's ideal reader.

As elsewhere in Pater's work, in the imaginary portrait, 'Duke Carl of Rosenmold', art aspires to the condition of life equally as much as life aspires to the condition of art:

> He was thrown the more upon such outward and sensuous products of mind — architecture, pottery, presently on music — because for him, with so large intellectual capacity, there was, to speak properly, no literature in his mother-tongue. Books there were, German books, but of a dullness, a distance from the actual interests of the warm, various, coloured life around and within him, to us hardly conceivable. There was more entertainment in the natural train of his own solitary thought, humoured and rightly attuned by pleasant visible objects, than in all the books he had hunted through so carefully for that all-searching intellectual light, of which a passing gleam of interest gave fallacious promise here or there. And still, generously, he held to the belief, urging him to fresh endeavour, that the literature which might set heart and mind free must exist somewhere, though court librarians could not say where. […] Oh! for a literature set free, conterminous with the interests of life itself.[302]

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[299] Pater, *Marius*, p. 183. Interestingly, Jacob Korg titles the second chapter of *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* 'The Palace of Art', which is of course a double reference, to Tennyson's poem of the same name too.
[300] Pater, *Marius*, p. 254.
[301] Pater, *Selected Writings*, p. 60.
[302] Walter Pater, 'Duke Carl of Rosenmold', *Imaginary Portraits*, MHRA Jewelled Tortoise Volume 1, ed. with notes and introduction by Lene Østermark-Johansen (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2014), pp. 189–213 (p. 199). Subsequent references are to this edition.

The need for literature to match his intellectual magnitude, and thus to be 'conterminous' with life itself, suggests that culture is something a person is entitled to only if they have the requisite intellect.

Marius is the privileged reader, the reader upon whom nothing is lost, whose intellect is as large and varied as Duke Carl's. As Dennis Denisoff notes, there is a positive element in the ephemeral nature of utopic fantasies like aestheticism: 'It may be true that aestheticism cannot result in in a society of aesthetic idealists, but even to imagine perfect beauty is better than acquiescing in the mundane reality of an industrial society'.[303] For others who are not privileged like Marius, Pater's gemlike glow with which readers must always be burning is a disaster, an expenditure of energy that could otherwise have been put to more profitable use. Here lies the paradox: art enriches life to the point where it can be lived; art enhances consciousness of a life which can only be lived in art; if that mind is mediocre, literature can only lend consciousness of a life that cannot be lived for long, and is only potential without gratification.

When we think of this aestheticist approach to life, it tends to be tied to the upper class; in Pater, this is true, whereas Gissing aspired to an intellectual aristocracy. Pater's most noble characters are culturally free of class, their education having prepared them for 'higher things' and their imaginations insisting upon deserving such things. Though very low in number, Pater's novel found ideal readers — 'men of a finer thread' — in Wilde, W. B. Yeats, and Virginia Woolf, aristocratic in sensibility and proto-Modernists/Modernists.[304] The 'romance of the soul' was not plausible for a working-class sensibility.[305]

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[303] Dennis Denisoff, 'Decadence and aestheticism', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 reprint), p. 32.
[304] Quoted in Josephine Guy, 'Aesthetics, Economics and Commodity Culture: Theorizing Value in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 42.2 (1999), pp. 143–71 (p. 163). Wilde is clearly pre-Modern.
[305] Pater, *Marius*, p. 198.

The notion that canonical works are tools of social mobility is ideologically underpinned by the idea that class is made and not inherited: founded on the contradistinction between that which money bestows/confers and money itself.[306] In Pater, the superstructure is celebrated and the base is ignored. In Gissing's novels, as in Wilde's works, the base and superstructure are at least acknowledged as sharing an uncomfortable interdependence. To read Gissing's letters and novels along normative class lines, however, is to ignore the origin of his elitism, which is intellectual (unless intellectualism is an ideological mask to hide basic snobbery).

Although education and class are largely interlinked culturally at the *fin-de-siècle*, there are attempts to inscribe a new relationship in fiction. In a letter to Algernon of 14 March 1885, Gissing writes, '[y]ou have seen the review of Meredith's new novel in the *Athenaeum*. Is it not an amazing [thing] that the man is so little known & read? He is great, there is no doubt of it, but too difficult for the British public. What good thing is not?'[307] The British public incorporates many classes and is not restricted to the working class. It seems that Gissing never actually read *Marius the Epicurean*, at least in its entirety, even though parallels exist between the title protagonist and Ryecroft.[308] In a letter to Algernon dated 7 October 1885 he quotes the following from *Marius*:

> He was acquiring what it is ever the true function of all higher education to teach — a system, or art, namely, of so relieving the ideal or poetic traits, the elements of distinction, in our every-day life — of so exclusively living in them — that the unadorned remainder of it, the mere drift & *debris* of life, becomes as though it were not.

Gissing concurs: 'That, no doubt, is the true aim. To gain it is to gain culture.'[309] Here, culture is elitist but not necessarily tied to class, a mixed blessing to be sure.

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[306] See Raymond Williams, 'Class', in *Keywords*, pp. 57–66.
[307] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 294–5.
[308] 28 Feb 1885 (to Algernon): 'This new book of Pater's seems to be extremely interesting; I wish I had means of reading it', Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 294.
[309] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 352. Although he quotes him here, in a letter from March 1886 Gissing admits to having read nothing by Pater first-hand (Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 16). He may therefore have procured the quotation from a newspaper article. In October 1878, he recommended Pater's essay on Charles Lamb to Algernon, and in 1880, he copied a passage from the 'La Giaconda' chapter of *The*

Cursed Educations: Monsters of Individualism

In this section, the attention shifts to the catastrophic results of education, showing that Gissing was capable of being more explicit in his presentation of the dangers of an education that stresses individualism above social utility. He is closer in this regard to Conrad and Wells than Pater, even as Pater is an essential component of all three works discussed here. In Marius, Pater presents an intellectual in a world of romance, whereas the other authors present extraordinary intellectuals as a danger to others and themselves. Comparing these monstrous characters to Ryecroft, the latter perhaps avoids a similar fate due to the deus ex machina/romance element of a will and his mediocrity.

The previous sections have shown how the Paterian ideal is transmogrified and transvalued by Gissing's realism, although there is much of value for a select few in Pater's aesthetics. Those sections demonstrate the conflict and resistance met with when encountering fictionalised or autobiographical 'blessed' educations. This section, by contrast, shows how the Paterian writer Conrad; Gissing, who, as shown above, was ambivalent towards Paterian aesthetics; and Wells, who was ultimately antithetical to Pater, nonetheless create Paterian characters in, respectively, *Heart of Darkness*, *Born in Exile*, and *The Invisible Man*, and in doing so present 'cursed' educations. All three characters — Godwin Peak, Kurtz, and Griffin — are enigmatic, even insoluble problems.[310] The characters pursue what might have been called a 'blessed' education, had their separate fates unfolded differently, but the results are disastrous. As Patrick Brantlinger says of Victor Frankenstein, who takes his learning so far as to play God, '[r]eading — and therefore knowledge — is not intrinsically progressive, and even

Renaissance into his *Commonplace Book*, Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, p. 109; *George Gissing's Commonplace Book: A Manuscript in the Berg Collection of The New York Public Library*, ed. Jacob Korg (New York: New York Public Library, 1962), p. 21.

[310] Marlow describes Kurtz as an 'insoluble problem', Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, ed. Cedric Watts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, reissued 2008), p. 161.

the best educations can backfire'.[311] In Kurtz and others, an excellent education has backfired spectacularly.[312]

The fruits of these extraordinary intellects are essentially nil. For example, comparing Kurtz with Griffin, Linda Dryden suggests that they 'share a status as crazed outsiders; but they are both extraordinary intellectuals who have "run amok"'.[313] She notes that Kurtz has achieved total autonomy in the Congo, yet the products of his intellectual autonomy are questionable (the report), commercial (ivory), and deeply immoral (heads on poles), and he dies whispering 'The horror! The horror!'[314] Griffin's documents are essentially lost together with his life.

Their educations have marked them out for great deeds but something has gone wrong. If a lack of education creates a criminal underclass, a socially maladjusted *group*, then miseducation or overeducation produces monstrous *individuals*. More than any other novel of the early nineteenth century, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) prefigures the popular *fin-de-siècle* theme of miseducation. Indeed, with its narrative procedures, Shelley's novel resembles *Heart of Darkness*, as well as *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. For Rose, *Frankenstein* is a novel about *inter alia* two miseducations: he suggests that despite the Enlightenment principles underpinning his schooling, Victor Frankenstein, who is in some respects an autodidact (as is the Monster), is led by his reading 'obsessively, regressively backward to Gothic superstition'. An aristocratic Enlightenment figure such as Victor, 'the ultimate monster' in *Frankenstein*, should be the best of us, as should

[311] Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, p. 60.
[312] On Wells, James observes, 'when Wells's fiction shows scientific research being carried out by individuals rather than the state, the results are often calamitous'; indeed, '[f]or new knowledge to be applied most usefully, Wells's social and political writing recommends, science should be governed by the State, ideally a World State, and not by lone eccentric geniuses inattentive to the possible consequences of their experiments'. Simon J. James (ed.), 'Introduction', in H. G. Wells, *The First Men in the Moon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. ix–xxvi (p. x).
[313] Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells: The Fin-de-Siècle Literary Scene* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 28.
[314] Dryden, *Conrad and Wells*, p. 29.

Peak, Kurtz, and Jekyll, yet something has gone awry.[315] Miseducation rather than lack of education is the root cause of the characters' evil.

One way to approach this problem is by considering who Kurtz would have been without the horrors of colonial rule. His betrothed's description of him and that of the man who claims to be one of his cousins offer the reader clues. The 'hard gem-like flame' of Pater is echoed in the Russian's devotion to Kurtz.[316] This is the 'be-patched youth', whose 'need was to exist […] If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it ruled this be-patched youth. I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame'.[317] The youth is Kurtz's ideal reader; he stays up all night listening to his idol talk. Marlow offers a shallow misreading of their relationship, but given the vague and generalising nature of the youth's language, the reader has very little to add to Marlow by way of clarification.[318] He would have commanded an audience, we suspect, wherever he went, but the violence of colonial rule has amplified his selfish tendencies, and thus he comes to represent the coloniser.

These monstrous characters resemble humans mainly due to their powerful intellects, while their bodily development and social habits have dissipated, devolved even. In their presentation of these characters, Gissing, Conrad, and Wells are conveying a Darwinian understanding of the human animal. In the chapter entitled 'On the Manner of Development of Man from some Lower Form' in *The Descent of Man* (1871), Charles Darwin makes the following observations, hierarchizing the various species of nonhuman animals and placing human animals at the top:

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[315] Brantlinger, *Reading Lesson*, p. 68; crime statistics in the mid-Victorian period suggested that increasingly universal education had increased crime — p. 74.

[316] Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 120. This excellent edition is used throughout; it replaces Adam Phillips's previous edition and in some ways rivals, in some ways surpasses, Donald L. Hill's scholarly edition.

[317] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p. 161.

[318] *Ibid.*, p. 162.

> Man in the rudest state in which he now exists is the most dominant animal that has ever appeared on this earth. He has spread more widely than any other highly organised form: and all others have yielded before him. He manifestly owes this immense superiority to his intellectual faculties, to his social habits, which lead him to aid and defend his fellows, and to his corporeal structure. The supreme importance of these characters has been proved by the final arbitrament of the battle for life. Through his powers of intellect, articulate language has been evolved; and on this his wonderful advancement has mainly depended. As Mr Chauncey Wright remarks: 'a psychological analysis of the faculty of language shews, that even the smallest proficiency in it might require more brain power than the greatest proficiency in any other direction.' He has invented and is able to use various weapons, tools, traps, etc., with which he defends himself, kills or catches prey, and otherwise obtains food. He has made rafts or canoes for fishing or crossing over to neighbouring fertile islands. He has discovered the art of making fire, by which hard and stringy roots can be rendered digestible, and poisonous roots or herbs innocuous. This discovery of fire, probably the greatest ever made by man, excepting language, dates from before the dawn of history. These several inventions, by which man in the rudest state has become so pre-eminent, are the direct results of the development of his powers of observation, memory, curiosity, imagination, and reason. I cannot, therefore, understand how it is that Mr Wallace maintains, that 'natural selection could only have endowed the savage with a brain a little superior to that of an ape'.[319]

A useful signifier of progress among humans, or badge of distinction, at the *fin-de-siècle* was the degree of culture or civilization that a person was able to demonstrate along socio-economic lines.[320] As is the case for Sigmund Freud in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), culture and civilization are largely synonymous (and are so for the purposes of this thesis).

One of the ways that human civilization distinguishes itself from the animal kingdom is through culture.[321] Especially in Gissing but in many other novels at the *fin-de-siècle*, culture is directly linked to education: for Bernard Kingcote in *Isabel Clarendon*, 'the most ordinary transaction with *uneducated and (as he held) presumably uncivilised* persons at all times made him uncomfortable'.[322]

In the long quotation above, Darwin provides a tripartite justification for human superiority over other animals: the intellect, social skills, and bodily development. In the three novels examined in this section, the superiority being assumed is not by humans over animals but by humans in contradistinction to other humans or groups of people. Further, it is chiefly a

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[319] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 67–8.
[320] See Ledger and Luckhurst (eds), 'Anthropology and Racial Science', in *Fin de Siècle: A Reader*, pp. 315–41.
[321] Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, in *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, pp. 1–56 (pp. 5–6). See also Raymond Williams's discussion of culture in *The Long Revolution* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2013 reprint) — in particular, see pp. 61–2 for his discussion of the three types of culture and three related methods of analysing them. See also Williams, *Keywords*, pp. 84–90.
[322] George Gissing, *Isabel Clarendon*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Grayswood: Grayswood Press, 2010), p. 6. Emphasis added.

kind of intellectual superiority, whereas social habits and corporeal structure are presented as weaknesses that undermine the characters' intellectual development. Griffin largely attempts to forsake corporeality and his behaviour is unequivocally *anti*social; Marlow finally encounters Kurtz as a bed-ridden corpse-like figure consumed by hatred and horror of the people around him; Godwin Peak dies from malaria, a social outcast. The extraordinary human accomplishments listed by Darwin potentially produce such offshoots and by-products as Peak, Griffin, and Kurtz; for these characters, ultimately, intellectual autonomy proves impossible. However, there is the suggestion that the progress of civilization necessarily brings with it over-reachers whose efforts undermine, and may be seen as usefully critiquing, that progress.

To understand these characters as mediating high culture, it is first necessary to analyse the cultural values that they represent. In his letters, Gissing gives pride of place to the great male writers, the manliness of culture. However, he also admires Charlotte Brontë, placing her in some respects above all novelists, and gives advice to his sisters in an attempt to 'improve' them.[323] Early in 1896, Gissing told Bertz, 'The so-called civilized world is of course full of rampant barbarians — most of them reckless of everything in the furious chase after wealth & power.'[324] This was sent while Gissing was writing *The Whirlpool*, a novel which among other things shows how thin the veneer of civilization is and how a rampant barbarism is poised to break through at any moment, particularly in the case of Hugh Carnaby, ostensibly a domesticated man, who kills a man with one punch. This proximity to barbarism is nonetheless similarly evident in Godwin Peak, who essentially strives, like so many real-life close counterparts catalogued in Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, to improve his social situation, although, unlike Rose's examples, he fails. Peak is 'intellectually arrogant, vehemently anti-popular'; like classical heroes or anti-heroes of Ancient Athenian

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[323] To Ellen: 'I am right joyful that you now read French. No woman can escape the taint of provincialism until she has attained that.' Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 57. For Gissing's opinion of Charlotte Brontë, see p. 101.
[324] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 6, p. 84.

tragedy, his hubris proves to be his downfall but, unlike classical tragic heroes, he is aware early on of his failings.[325] What, then, is the end of culture for Gissing? Peak's culture serves only to undermine and ultimately destroy him; by contrast, Earwaker, the working-class character, is able to use culture to his benefit. Where is Peak going wrong?

In Gissing, education/culture offers to help the underprivileged, yet high culture can also be a relic of traditions that undervalue are prejudiced against the lower classes. Pater represents high culture/aestheticism, which is elitist and set up against the ordinary man, a figure which Freud refers to in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) while acknowledging him as an Everyman too — *gemeine Mann* means society man, of the common stock. For Gissing, the literary canon at once promises to relieve underprivileged people of their lack of social agency and represents a gold standard of sorts, and therefore its authority is ultimately insuperable. John Sloan argues along similar lines: 'Though Gissing's work is undoubtedly reactionary in its attachment to refined culture, that very adherence is also the basis of a Utopianism that points beyond the inadequacies of both the past and the present to a world that has yet to come into being; that is, in a sense, forever waiting to be born.'[326]

Among other things, *Born in Exile* shows how unorthodox pedagogy (Whitelaw College) helps and hinders characters who would otherwise struggle to attain an institutional education beyond secondary school. At the outset, there is a strong determination shadowing the characters: popular opinion. Indeed, the statue of Sir Job Whitelaw, an act of canonisation in itself (an attempt to immortalise someone of repute), has been commissioned based on his popularity rather than his own posthumous desire or scheming to have it built. At the awards ceremony, physical appearance undermines or supports public opinion of the students' achievements: Peak is ungainly and shy, whereas Chilvers is graceful and popular with women.

[325] Gissing, *Born in Exile*, ed. David Grylls (London: Everyman, 1992), p. 165. This edition is used hereafter.
[326] John Sloan, *George Gissing: The Cultural Challenge* (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 151.

In describing some of Peak's father's qualities, Gissing suggests an inescapable atavism; success in life is thus predetermined.[327] Peak's main failing, then, is genealogical, as Mrs Warricombe's observation 'He seems to have no breeding whatever' implies.[328] In George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, a very different novel to *Born in Exile*, yet one which contains characters who possess Gissing-like qualities, there is a statement which Peak would wish to apply to himself, as Dorothea Brooke tells Will Ladislaw: 'When we were in Rome, I thought you only cared for poetry and art, and the things that adorn life for us who are well off. But now I know you think about the rest of the world.'[329] Here is an analogous passage in *Born in Exile*: 'Books and that kind of thing are all very well in their way, but one must live; he had wasted too much of his youth in solitude. *O mihi praeteritos referat si Jupiter annos!*'[330] Of course, in Gissing's version, there is irony conveyed in the Classical quotation (from Virgil)[331]. (The novel famously presents a challenge to biographical criticism, but it is a *roman a clef* with considerable irony, as in the previous quotation, in the mediation of its central antagonist/protagonist.)

However, despite Peak's love of the cultural benefits of society, or the superstructure, he is not well off, and clearly class is presented as a contributing factor to his failure. The tension is created by his belief in the superstructure as something other than a by-product of the base, as somehow a force in itself. This is evident in his advice to his brother: 'spend more of your time in a rational way, and learn to despise the things that shopkeepers admire. Read! Force yourself to stick hard at solid books for two or three hours every day. If you don't, it's all up with you. I am speaking for your own good. Read, read, read!'[332] The Utopianism that Sloan refers to above is in evidence in Peak's ideas, but he is a solipsist, and so they only refract

[327] Gissing, *Born in Exile*, p. 21.
[328] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[329] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin, 2003 reprint), p. 542.
[330] Gissing, *Born in Exile*, p. 45.
[331] See *Ibid.*, p. 218, where a great ancient author (Plutarch) is used to buttress Peak's own (wayward) opinions.
[332] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

his own misguidedness: 'They [Godwin and Warricombe] moved to the shelves where Greek and Latin books stood in serried order, and only the warning dinner-bell put an end to their sympathetic discussion of the place such authors should hold in modern educational systems'.[333]

The classics, although also seen by Peak as a better alternative to newspapers, are essentially cultural capital that cannot be spent, having no practical use and the learning of Greek and Latin presenting too great an intellectual obstacle to many people.[334] Thus, his utopian designs are a projection, albeit unconscious, of his own personality: 'To flatter the proletariat is to fight against all the good that still characterises educated England — against reverence for the beautiful, against magnanimity, against enthusiasm of mind, heart, and soul'.[335] Peak desires the respectable life, values the place of literary culture in society, wants to teach family and friends how to achieve happiness and be respectable, although it is always in contrast to the vulgar or 'brainless' multitude. Superficially he emblematises Gissing's own desires; however, unlike Gissing, he refuses to accept the existence of anything outside his beliefs and utopist projections. It is in this refusal where Peak begins to echo Griffin and even Kurtz:

> I am not charging them [the multitude] with what are commonly held vices and crimes, but with the consistent love of everything that is ignoble, with utter deadness to generous impulse, with the fatal habit of low mockery. And these are the people who really direct the democratic movement. They set the tone in politics; they are debasing art and literature; even the homes of wealthy people begin to show the effects of their influence. One hears men and women of gentle birth using phrases which originate with shopboys; one sees them reading print which is addressed to the coarsest million. They crowd to entertainments which are deliberately adapted to the lowest order of mind. When commercial interest is supreme, how can the tastes of the majority fail to lead and control?[336]

Peak's family is not wealthy enough to afford a traditional upper-class education but through the help of Whitelaw College and his own efforts is able to obtain something like it, crucially missing the sense of belonging to a class or any social group. His own experience has been one

[333] Gissing, *Born in Exile*, p. 136.
[334] *Ibid.*, p. 221.
[335] *Ibid.*, p. 220.
[336] *Ibid.*, p. 221.

of traversing borders, yet he supports strongly demarcated spaces and indeed demands a reification of socio-political barriers. He is similar to Gilbert Gresham in *Workers in the Dawn*, who believes that those who live in slums should be classed as subhuman, 'with the brutes' and that it is their personal vices that have determined their impoverished circumstances: 'you might as well endeavour to teach a pig to understand Euclid as to teach one of these gaol-birds to know and feel what is meant by honesty, virtue, kindness, intellectuality'.[337] This double strands of his opinion, that is classics as purveyors of civilisation and the Burkean equating of the multitude with swine, elides the agency of the poor.[338] In his description of a 'utopian' remedy for this problem — temporarily exiling poor children to North America, letting the old generation die out, and razing the slums — he sounds somewhat like Kurtz, although embourgeoisement is Gresham's ultimate aim.

Peak, Griffin, and Kurtz, who might be ordered in this way from least to most evil, all have utopist leanings; however, it is isolation, not Paterian solitude, that has led them on their destructive paths, and perhaps absence from other educated people has warped their imaginations. According to Wells, his later novel *The World Set Free* (1913) was a 'dream of highly educated and highly favoured leading and ruling men, voluntarily setting themselves to the task of reshaping the world'.[339] This is how Peak would describe his utopia. In *The Invisible Man*, however, which is closer to Peak's reality, Griffin's dream, which has become a grotesque or nightmare, is to reshape the world to fit his own malign purpose. It is significant that civility — alongside necessities such as food, clothes, and sleep, Griffin indulges in luxuries such as smoking a cigar and drinking alcohol — only enters *The Invisible Man* once Griffin encounters Dr Kemp, an old friend and, like himself, a highly educated man. Equally significant is the fact

[337] Gissing, *Workers*, p. 258.
[338] Brantlinger, *Reading Lesson*, p. 54.
[339] H. G. Wells, *The World Set Free* (London; Glasgow: Collins, 1956), p. 24.

that it is Kemp to whom he professes his ordinariness.[340] Griffin has an extraordinary facet, yet has little chance to revel in it, and like Peak finds crowds detestable, although in the former case it is not largely figurative.[341] Again, like Peak's education, the advantage over his fellow men is also a terrible disadvantage. Finally, his planned Reign of Terror moves him beyond Peak and closer to Kurtz.[342]

[340] H. G. Wells, *The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 71. Further references are to this edition.
[341] Wells, *Invisible Man*, pp. 92–5.
[342] *Ibid.*, pp. 110–11.

3. The Limits of a Classical Education: Pater, Wilde, Gissing

‘Oh yes, he talks well, but what has he *done*?’
Helena Modjeska, on Oscar Wilde, 1880[343]

‘I hate to read about low-class heroes and their down-to-earth concerns, the sort of thing the real world’s full of.’
Emma Bovary, *Madame Bovary*[344]

‘[T]here is little in daily active life that is other than wretched.’
George Gissing, in a letter to Margaret Emily Gissing, 7 October 1885[345]

‘I often find it hard to reconcile myself to anything in life that is not still and calm and beautiful.’
Osmond Waymark, *The Unclassed*[346]

‘The defects of [Richard Mutimer’s] early education could not of course be repaired, but it is never too late for a man to go to school to the virtues which civilise.’
Demos[347]

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Ryecroft is not entirely happy: he achieves Paterian individualism to an extent, but only after he has been rescued by money. His solitude has not quite isolated him from humanity — as is the case with Kurtz *et al.* — but he is no Marius. This chapter addresses the awkward, even painful, question of whether one can be a Paterian aesthete in Gissing, always burning with a gem-like flame, without belonging to the upper class. It examines Gissing’s earlier works, *Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed*, and *Demos*, where we find poor characters with a similar striving for a multiplied consciousness and a love of beauty learned from the Classics yet an inability to achieve it due to their reduced circumstances. For a comparison with upper-class characters, Wilde is introduced, his life and works, particularly his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, along with Gissing’s telling response to the scandal arising from his trials and subsequent imprisonment. In Gissing, one cannot succeed as a Paterian aesthete without being financially well off, but as the aristocratic Redgrave in *The Whirlpool* shows, it may not be a prize worth having. In Wilde’s life, class

[343] Quoted in Matthew Sturgis, *Oscar: A Life* (London: Apollo, 2019), p. 157.
[344] Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans. Francis Steegmuller (New York: Vintage, 1992), p. 100.
[345] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 352.
[346] Gissing, *The Unclassed: The 1884 Text*, ed. Paul Delany and Colette Colligan (Victoria: ELS Editions, 2010), p. 362. Subsequent references are to this edition.
[347] Gissing, *Demos*, p. 59.

prejudice contributed to his downfall, preventing him from achieving a Paterian existence, whereas in his work, it is possible to achieve a Paterian life, as shown by Dorian, albeit with obvious caveats. In this discussion, it is necessary to refer to Pater, but here, in contrast to Chapter 2, *The Renaissance* and *Imaginary Portraits* are used, rather than *Marius the Epicurean*. The core difference between the emphasis on Pater in the last chapter and that here is his classicism or 'Greekness'.

The tenets of literary realism initially prevented Gissing from being able to show fully the positive aspects and implications of Paterian aesthetics, in addition to the negative aspects. This chapter diverges from Maltz's contention that it is only in later novels such as *The Whirlpool* and *Our Friend the Charlatan* (1901) that Gissing vilifies aesthetes by arguing that his attitude towards Paterian aesthetics is largely consistent throughout his works.[348]

Wells saw a classical education as a problem in Gissing, who was 'essentially a specially posed mentality, a personal response, and his effect upon me was an extraordinary blend of a damaged joy-loving human being hampered by inherited gentility and a classical education'.[349] Crucially, Wells thought that Gissing 'never turned and fought. He always hid or fled'.[350] The younger writer interpreted Gissing's classicism as a retreat from the modern world, outwardly a self-imposed exile, a rejection, but inwardly a defeat, a failure to assimilate to the late-Victorian/Edwardian world. The next section of this chapter examines the life of pleasure according to Pater, Wilde, and Gissing. This encompasses the contemplative life, a Platonic ideal, where usefulness takes on a deeper, less obvious resonance. The following section narrows its focus on the cloistered life, which cannot be reproduced in London's slums, and the explicit sexual elements that distinguished Wilde and, to a lesser extent, Pater. Gissing's

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[348] Maltz, *British Aestheticism*, p. 16.
[349] H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866)*, 2 vols (London; Boston, MA: Faber and Faber, 1984 reissue [1934]), vol. 2, p. 569. See also pp. 570 *et seq*.
[350] Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 575.

'Greekness' coupled with his literary realism should have enabled him to portray homosexuality more frankly yet he seems to evade it. This section finds that Gissing is not successful in portraying camp sensibilities, including Reuben Elgar in the later novel *The Emancipated* (1890), whereas Wilde (and indeed Corelli) is. Part of the reason for this is found in the subsequent section, where the value of suffering is understood by some of Gissing's characters (such as Waymark) and never revealed to dandies and dilettantes, such as Redgrave in *The Whirlpool* or Dorian Gray, whose lives end abruptly, sans suffering. The main difference between Gissing and Wilde is that the former's literary realism, where the serious is represented seriously, portrays dilettantes negatively, whereas Wilde's successfully camp sensibility marries the serious and the trivial, and shows both the allure and the threat of decadence.

The Life of Pleasure: The Classicism of Pater, Wilde, and Gissing

A life of pleasure is promoted in Pater's *oeuvre*, though it is not a life of decadence, and Wilde and Gissing were interested in the intersections of aestheticism and decadence. In 1880, Wilde, knowing nothing of the magnitude of the fame, defamation, and degradation that lay ahead of him, wondered what shape his life would take:

> I'll be a poet, a writer, a dramatist. Somehow or other I'll be famous, and if not famous, I'll be notorious. Or perhaps I'll lead the [life of pleasure] for a time, and then — who knows — rest and do nothing. What does Plato say is [the] highest end that man can attain to here below?... to sit down and contemplate the good. Perhaps that will be the end of me too.[351]

Undoubtedly, this is in part youthful bragging borne out of a middle-class Oxonian's desire to appear aristocratic to his peers. However, it also shows, particularly in Wilde's second projected life path, the influence of Pater on an impressionable, albeit formidable, young mind. Leading a life of pleasure followed by rest and indolence seems like lassitude, yet Wilde clearly envisioned something beyond this, as the reference to Plato indicates. Already for Wilde,

[351] Sturgis, *Oscar*, p. 95.

‘languor was the mask of industry’.[352] When he refers, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, to the ‘great aristocratic art of doing absolutely nothing’, his tone is *serio*comic.[353] Gissing — whose industry was rarely concealed in his fiction, letters, and diary, yet whose interest in decadence was authentic, finding plenty to admire in Thomas Couture’s painting, *Les Romains de la decadence* — was concerned in his early novels with showing the dangers or even impossibility as much as, if not more than, the appeal of the contemplative life.[354] Its appeal, instead, chiefly manifests as an idealistic yearning in the characters that populate these novels and in characters that try to avoid it in favour of dutiful philanthropic behaviour.

In *Workers in the Dawn*, for example, the most important aspect of Mr Norman’s homeschooling of his daughter is teaching duty above pleasure, but for Dorian Gray the life of pleasure is the aim. Gissing’s novel is set in the run-up to the Education Act and in the years around it. Curiously, the two parts of the novel provide a dyad: from a young age, both Arthur and Helen are educated by a father/surrogate father. Mr Norman concentrates on the poets: ‘To know the poets, those who are unquestionably great in all ages, to read them with facility in the tongue they wrote in, this was the great end of his educational scheme’.[355] This is later referred to by the narrator as the ‘foundations of culture’ and parallels Gissing’s advice to his sisters in his letters.[356] Maud Gresham’s education at a London ladies’ school is weak by

[352] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p. 290.

[353] Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 30. In Gissing’s *Workers in the Dawn*, Gilbert Gresham looks like an aristocrat: ‘In his talk he mostly affected extremely aristocratic sentiments, the cause of this doubtless lying in an exquisitely refined taste which could not tolerate anything savouring of coarseness. And yet the listener could not help suspecting that these sentiments were only affected, an impression aided by the somewhat theatrical air and gesture with which he was fond of delivering them’, Gissing, *Workers*, pp. 138–9. Gilbert represents the performativity of class and culture, though not quite the mondain, as the performance is open to suspicion of being mere affectation. He is thus too much of a performer to perform adequately or inconspicuously. See also Gissing, *A Life’s Morning* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984), p. 205: the Baxendales live in a fashionable area but are considered to have no taste.

[354] See Diana Maltz, ‘Practical Aesthetics and Decadent Rationale in George Gissing’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28.1 (2000), pp. 55–71. See also Isobel Hurst, ‘Nineteenth-Century Literary and Artistic Responses to Roman Decadence’, in *Decadence and Literature*, ed. Jane Desmarais and David Weir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 47–65 (pp. 50–2); for a brief discussion of Gissing’s reaction to Couture’s painting, see Gareth Reeves, ‘Ruin Lust in George Gissing’s *Veranilda*’, *Literature Compass* (Wiley), 6 March 2022, https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12656, last accessed 10 July 2022.

[355] Gissing, *Workers*, p. 128.

[356] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

comparison with Helen's home-schooling, and the former sounds like Whiffle in her harsh dismissal of the poor, or even like Dorian in his disgust at poverty and suffering.

The policing of class/cultural boundaries and the promotion of embourgeoisement sit uncomfortably together in the characters of the Greshams, and their education is a training in taste, aestheticism being useful as a tool for social distinction. Maud Gresham believes that the working classes should not aspire to become bourgeois through education since it increases their class consciousness and instils hopes that cannot be fulfilled. Her subsequent reference to '*sans culottes*' is telling for two reasons: first, her use of Latinate phrases demonstrates an aspiration towards high culture and social distinction, which is highly redolent of the bourgeois; secondly, the reference to the French Revolution reveals an unconscious fear of proletarian uprising.[357] When her father, Gilbert, tells Arthur that in order to become an artist, that is a commercially successful artist like him, he must devote all of his time to training his taste, he encourages embourgeoisement, first, because he assumes that Arthur's taste must match his own, otherwise it is 'wrong', and secondly, because being able to devote all of one's time to creative work is usually the domain of the privileged.[358]

Although, to quote Bourdieu, 'the representation of artistic production as a "creation" devoid of any determination or any social function, though asserted from a very early date, achieves its fullest expression in the theories in "art for art's sake"', Arthur's 'teacher', Mr Tollady, advises him to balance these elements by producing art for the purposes of social reform, taking the art away from artists, typically bourgeois, and instead producing art for the proletariat.[359] (It is worth bearing in mind that Tollady is careful to ensure that Arthur is not inculcated with pure ideology, as his Radical friends suggest, and regrets the classical education he received at a day-school.)[360] However, Arthur's conviction in the redemptive power of

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[357] Gissing, *Workers*, pp. 237–8. The phrase quoted here is, literally speaking, French, of course.
[358] *Ibid.*, p. 240.
[359] Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production', p. 36. Gissing, *Workers*, p. 169.
[360] Gissing, *Workers*, pp. 118 and 338.

education for the working classes, that is the *upper*-working classes over generations all working towards the same end, is not borne out by the events of the novel. Indeed, he achieves nothing in artistic or political spheres.[361]

Wilde complicates the notion of art for art's sake: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* seems at once to be anti-Decadence and pro-Aestheticism, Aestheticism adopting a disinterested stance towards life and Decadence an uninterested one, deadened by *ennui*. The social critic Max Nordau believed that society should be an organism composed of productive cells; for him, decadence meant too many individuals unfit for the labours of common life, and unable to adapt. Wilde featured in Nordau's *Degeneration* as the supreme example of the English aesthete, 'a man whose ideal of life is inactivity'.[362] For Wilde, however, as suggested above, '[l]anguor was the mask of industry'.[363] In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Lady Narborough reproaches Dorian Gray: 'don't tell me that you have exhausted Life. When a man says that one knows that Life has exhausted him'.[364] This grand pronouncement could have been uttered by Wilde himself.

The aesthete's education is, however, incompatible with the philanthropist's, namely the socially valuable education. *Workers in the Dawn* presents art for art's sake and social utility as incompatible aspects of the character of Arthur Golding, whose bipartite education as a boy and young adult has created in him the 'stirrings of a double life': on the one hand, there is the artistic life and the worship of beauty; on the other hand, there is the life of philanthropic duty.[365] Arthur worries about the incompatibility of these elements and therefore feels compelled to choose one. For Wilde and for Pater, art and social utility are the same: '[a]ll art is quite useless' is close in spirit to the conclusion of Pater's *Renaissance*: 'for art comes to you

[361] James, *Unsettled Accounts*, p. 64.
[362] Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 95.
[363] Ellmann, *Wilde*, p. 290.
[364] Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 149.
[365] Gissing, *Workers*, p. 158.

professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake'.[366] Art is useless only in the most limited sense of being opposite to useful; in a more profound sense, art produces life, as argued in 'Critic as Artist': 'The longer one studies life and literature, the more strongly one feels that behind everything that is wonderful stands the individual, and that it is not the moment that makes the man, but the man who creates the age.'[367]

Dorian's death, rather than serving as a warning to aesthetes, only brings to an end a life of pleasure that in a sense has been full, as Lord Henry observes: 'What an exquisite life you have had! You have drunk deeply of everything. You have crushed the grapes against your palate.'[368] Lord Henry is both correct and wrong, since Dorian has experienced a great deal of pleasure for himself, and procured individualism, while causing a great deal of suffering in others. The novel is less a morality tale and more an inverted *Bildungsroman*.

Gissing, by contrast, wrote anti-*Bildungsromanen*. When asked in 1893, he listed his favourite novels as George Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: A History of Father and Son* (1859), Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878), and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853). Martin Ryle asserts that these novels, like several of Gissing's own, 'reject the ideal–typical form and ideology of the *Bildungsroman*: growth leads not to integration but to alienation'.[369] Gissing continues a tradition in the English *Bildungsroman* that is still relevant to post-Education Act and largely urban readers, as did Hardy in a largely rural context, especially in *Jude the Obscure* (1895).[370]

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[366] Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 4; Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 121.
[367] Wilde, 'Critic as Artist — Part I', p. 254.
[368] Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 298.
[369] Martin Ryle, '"To show a man of letters": Gissing, Cultural Authority and Literary Modernism', in *George Gissing: Voices of the Unclassed*, ed. Martin Ryle and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 119–32 (p. 122).
[370] 'How can the tendency towards *individuality*, which is the necessary fruit of a culture of self-determination, be made to coexist with the opposing tendency to *normality*, the offspring, equally inevitable, of the mechanism of socialization? This is the first aspect of the problem, complicated and made more fascinating still by another characteristic of our civilization, which, having always been pervaded by the doctrines of natural rights, cannot concede that socialization is based on a mere compliance with authority. It is not enough that the social order is

One of the paths open to Arthur is the contemplative life, Pater's extolling of which is Platonic, reflecting his classical education, his Greekness; he refers to it in his autobiographical portrait 'Emerald Uthwart' (1892) and essay 'Lacedæmon' (1892). He found in a classical education 'a *seeming* indirectness or lack of purpose' in contrast to 'forms of education more obviously useful or practical'.[371] Later, when he first read Théophile Gautier's novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), he rediscovered what he learnt in adolescence in a more forceful guise: 'The only things that are really beautiful are those which have no use; everything that is useful is ugly, for it is the expression of some need, and the needs of men are ignoble and disgusting, like his poor and infirm nature. The most useful place in the house is the lavatory.'[372] This confident, stylish, and effective renovation of Plato helped Pater sharpen his own discourse and, with the publication of *The Renaissance* in 1873, become equally controversial.

However, encountering this work today, the controversy over the conclusion and its subsequent omission from the second edition are surprising.[373] The 'fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness' is ultimately what Pater encourages his readers to seek and obtain, in order to expand their consciousness and thereby enrich 'this interval', i.e. life.[374] Most of the book's negative critics overreacted based on 'an obtuse misreading of Pater's intention […] or on the inability to provide a judgment of the work untainted by personal crotchets or *ad hominem* diatribes'. The latter, according to Franklin E. Court, fixed Pater's reputation for

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'legal'; it must also appear *symbolically legitimate*. It must draw its inspiration from values recognized by society as fundamental, reflect them and encourage them. Or it must at least seem to do so', Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 16.

[371] Pater, 'Emerald Uthwart', in *Imaginary Portraits*, pp. 239–69 (p. 247). Emphasis added.

[372] Gautier, quoted in Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 179n. Lord Henry in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* occasionally sounds like Gautier, rather fittingly giving Dorian a copy of *Émaux et Camées*. See also Michael Levey, *The Case of Walter Pater* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), pp. 92–8.

[373] Pater's life was otherwise uneventful. Henry James described him as 'the mask without the face, and there isn't in his total superficies a tiny point of vantage for the newspaper to flap its wings on.' Quoted in Jennifer Uglow's introduction to Pater, *Essays on Literature and Art*, ed. Uglow (London: Everyman's Library, 1990), p. vii. See also Kate Hext, *Walter Pater: Individualism and Aesthetic Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 2.

[374] Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 121.

years afterwards as that of a 'spasmodic academic dilettante writing florid, outrageously ornamental prose', despite praise from Edmund Gosse and John Morley.[375]

Most of these negative reviews do not warrant serious consideration; however, part of a review by the popular Victorian Scottish novelist 'Mrs Oliphant' is useful in understanding the negative implications of Paterian passion. For her, it was a specimen of a 'class removed from ordinary mankind by that ultra-culture and academical contemplation of the world as a place chiefly occupied by other beings equally cultured and refined'. What particularly annoyed her were the claims for 'self-culture', which treats 'all the great art and artists of the past, and all the centuries of men, as chiefly important and attractive in their relations to that Me who is the centre of the *dilettante*'s world'. She ends her review by attacking the 'Greekness' that Pater's work contains.[376]

A Cloistered Dream

In terms of Paterian discipleship, 'Mrs Oliphant' is right: Pater offers an approach to life that cannot realistically be replicated by anyone not belonging to the upper class or outside of a university, a cloistered dream of the kind mocked in William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*.[377] A life of 'constant and eager observation' is appealing — especially if it is transposed to an earlier, historical period with a gentler pace of life, as seen in *Marius the Epicurean* in Chapter 2 — unless that life is spent in the slums; if experience is the end, rather than the fruits of experience, long hours spent working in factories become paralyzingly difficult.[378]

[375] Court, *Pater and His Early Critics*, pp. 13–14.
[376] *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.
[377] Samuel Vogt Gapp mentions the existence of Gissing's own marked copy of *Love's Labour's Lost*, which Gissing may have acted in for a Christmas production in 1873. Gapp, *George Gissing: Classicist* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936), p. 20.
[378] Pater, *Renaissance*, p. 152. For a discussion of Marius in relation to Henry Ryecroft, see Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Gissing was a candidate for such a cloistered life; Morley Roberts considered *By the Ionian Sea* to be 'sufficient proof that [its author] was by nature a scholar, an inhabitant of the very old world, a discoverer of the time of the Renaissance, a Humanist, a pure man of letters'. Although Patrick Bridgwater uses this quotation to show how much Gissing had in common with Goethe, it equally shows a kinship with Pater.[379]

In *By the Ionian Sea*, Gissing's zest for classical culture takes him to desperately poor parts of rural southern Italy, yet he seems largely uninterested in the people he meets; they help him in various ways but he is never eager to ask them about their social background, their education, their hopes for the future, and so on. He avowedly enjoys solitude and silence, as if being completely alone with the cultural artifacts of Italy's past, without human interference, is possible.[380] This is Gissing at his most callous, yet it raises the issue of whether his Paterian characters, yearning for silence and solitude above all else, are nonetheless forced to lead hectic urban lives that impede them, eventually thwarting their true desire for solitude and reflection.

Dorian Gray is Paterian but his social milieu is very different to that of Gissing's characters, especially in the early novels, and the greater explicitness of the homosexual component distinguishes Wilde from Pater and, less surprisingly, Gissing. However, dandies and dilettantes, whether homosexual or bi-/heterosexual, practised dissimulation, sham, and so on, and Gissing's 'Greekness' coupled with his literary realism should have enabled him to portray sexuality frankly.

Yet Gissing is scarcely comparable to Wilde in this regard. Is it because he fails to achieve 'camp'? Most of Gissing's fiction is too serious to be called camp; Heliodora and Vivian in *Veranilda* have a somewhat camp quality, while *The Town Traveller* (1898) is comic

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[379] Patrick Bridgwater, *Gissing and Germany* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1981), p. 29.

[380] See, for example, Gissing, *By the Ionian Sea*, p. 6. Travelling by boat to Paola, he notes that he could 'discern no human form […] as though I voyaged quite alone in the silence of this magic sea […] To-day seemed an unreality, an idle impertinence; the real was that long-buried past which gave its meaning to all about me, touching the night with infinite pathos'.

and trivial without being camp. Corelli has a more persuasive claim to this sensibility than Gissing, not least because of the influence of Gothic novels on some of her own fiction.[381] We might want, quoting Sontag, to say of Gissing that '[t]he man who insists on high and serious pleasures is depriving himself of pleasure; he continually restricts what he can enjoy'.[382]

All three writers discussed in this chapter had experience with the threat of ruin from homosexuality or perceived homosexuality, as was the case for Gissing, whose second wife Edith spread rumours that she refused to live with him because he was a disciple of Wilde, much to his shock.[383] Although sexual scandal had threatened to ruin Pater's career, unlike Wilde he managed to avoid disaster.[384] After his death, Pater's surviving relatives were keen to distance him from any links to Wilde, whose public shaming had occurred very shortly after. *The Renaissance*, like Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* (1866), was one of Wilde's golden books. Dorian Gray suggests that Lord Henry has influenced him, but the latter insists that he has only awakened something that was already lying dormant in Dorian's mind. Dorian is introduced to the reader as leafing through Schumann's *Waldszcenen*, a collection of nine piano pieces, calling them 'perfectly charming'.[385] It is noteworthy that, although he is sat at the piano, he is not actually playing the pieces; instead, he is producing the music in his head. Since Pater says that 'all art constantly aspires to the condition of music' and Dorian has 'charming' music in his head (albeit not yet fully learned), Dorian is already Paterian, eager to learn and

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[381] Susan Sontag, *Notes on 'Camp'* (London: Penguin, 2018), p. 10.
[382] Sontag, *Notes on 'Camp'*, p. 32.
[383] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 7, p. 290. E. M. Forster, *Maurice* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), p. 142. To provide a few famous examples of others' experience of this scandal, in 1896, A. C. Bruce-Pryce claimed that his son knew that Winston Churchill had committed 'acts of gross immorality of the Oscar Wilde type' at Sandhurst — Rose, *Literary Churchill*, p. 15. Vera Brittain, who was born in 1893, said of her relatives that if they had any response to Wilde, it was 'not admiration of his works, but disapproval of his morals', Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900–1925*, introduction by Mark Bostridge and preface by Shirley Williams (London: Virago Press, 2018), p. 4.
[384] Sturgis, *Oscar*, p. 83n.
[385] Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 16. Schumann is a suitable choice of composer because many of his works have a literary basis. Robert Schumann, *Waldszcenen* (Woodland Scenes), Op. 82, ed. Howard Ferguson (London: ABRSM, n.d.), p. 4.

receptive, or susceptible, to the influence of vivid sensations.[386] The essay or imaginary portrait, 'Diaphaneitè', contains the following description which is applicable to Dorian: 'The artist and he who has treated life in the spirit of art desires only to be shown to the world as he really is; as he comes nearer and nearer to perfection, the veil of an outer life not simply expressive of the inward becomes thinner and thinner'.[387] However, in Dorian's case, his soul is kept hidden from the world.

Another approach to concealment in public is to be effortlessly elegant, which is to be beautiful, to be accepted, indeed welcomed, socially. Dorian's personal beauty attracts admirers of all kinds and is effortlessly maintained, whereas Waymark in *The Unclassed* and Reuben Elgar in *The Emancipated*, in order to find romantic partners, must mask their industry. Elgar, however, fails to do the necessary work. By his own admission, he is 'Devilish bad at languages! […] I can't endure the sense of inferiority one has in beginning to smatter with foreigners. I read four or five, but avoid speaking as much as possible'.[388] Does he avoid speaking them because in private he knows he is inept at reading them? He is at once bragging that he can read these languages, presumably for personal pleasure only, and shirking the usefulness that speaking the languages would bring. Pride prevents him for acquiring cultural competence, yet there is a suggestion of a broader struggle for existence.

According to Darwinian evolutionary theory, the artfulness of the performance is essential, whereas the display of effort is off-putting, as Richard O. Prum suggests:

> There is no reason to believe that the love of ballet, or of any other human art form, is based on how much pain and effort they cost to the performers. Likewise, there is no reason to believe that the female of the Great Argus or any other species chooses a mate because of how much he endures in the course of his courting performance. It is always the artfulness of the performance that matters; the physiological demands of producing it are secondary. […] atonal twentieth-century concert music, from Berg to Boulez, is incredibly difficult for performers to play well, but that doesn't make audiences like it.[389]

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[386] Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', *The Renaissance*, p. 124.
[387] Pater, *Imaginary Portraits*, p. 79.
[388] Gissing, *The Emancipated*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Brighton: Harvester, 1977), p. 102.
[389] Richard O' Prum, *The Evolution of Beauty: How Darwin's Forgotten Theory of Mate Choice Shapes the Animal World — and Us* (New York: Anchor Books, 2018), p. 83.

This echoes Pierre Bourdieu's description of the opposition between the scholastic (pedantic) and the mondain (the effortlessly elegant), which is 'at the heart of debates about taste and culture in every age'.[390] Wilde was highly industrious, producing his masterpieces across a variety of genres (essay/dialogue, fairy tale, novel, drama, epistolary prose, poetry), and Gissing was, if anything, more so, although he confined his main efforts to the novel. However, Wilde was also a socialite and conveyed the aristocratic sensibility (first encountered at Oxford) of never needing to work, whereas Gissing believed in an aristocracy of culture, yet was rarely able to hide the pains he took to produce his work.

Gissing was not trying to conceal or dissemble, as Wilde or Pater had to do, yet he shares with them his appropriation of classical ideas as a defence against modernity. Linda Dowling argues that Pater and Benjamin Jowett, among others, were eager to establish a New Hellenism as 'a ground of transcendent value alternative to Christianity', ultimately leading to 'a homosexual counterdiscourse able to justify male love in ideal or transcendental terms'.[391] Classicism similarly informs Gissing's work and his understanding of the world. This is despite the fact that the classical allusions in his fiction are not quite as numerous as one might expect from such a fervent admirer of ancient Greece and Rome, and even his only historical novel, *Veranilda*, is set after the fall of the Roman Empire, long after the classical period.

Nonetheless, Gissing's understanding of Wilde's homosexuality and imprisonment, as expressed in a letter to Morley Roberts, only makes sense in light of his classicism:

> The Wilde business is frightfully depressing. I have a theory that he has got into this, not through natural tendency, but simply in deliberate imitation of the old Greek vice. He probably said: go to, let us try the pæderastic [*sic*] pleasures, & come to understand them. No doubt whatever he justified himself, both to himself & to others, by classic precedent. But the catastrophe is awful, & one tries not to think of it overmuch.[392]

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[390] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice with a new introduction by Tony Bennett (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 62.
[391] Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. xii.
[392] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 5, p. 339.

Although Wilde did use ancient Greek customs to explain and even justify his homosexuality to himself and others, the most striking, indeed shocking, part of Gissing's response today is the idea that Wilde was *deliberately* imitating an aspect of Greek culture.[393] Gissing may have thought this based on his own sense of classical culture.

In trying to account for Wilde's behaviour, Gissing was thinking along similar lines. One of several striking aspects of Gissing's stance is that he arrived at it without having been an Oxford scholar. Joseph Bristow, in his magisterial *Oscar Wilde on Trial*, argues that the young Wilde's evolving interest in homosexual culture was influenced by, among other people and works including Pater's *Renaissance*, his tutor John Pentland Mahaffey. Wilde contributed to, and was acknowledged for his contribution to, Mahaffey's *Social Life in Ancient Greece from Homer to Menander* (1874). With reference to his discussion of love between young men and older men in Plato's *Charmides*, Mahaffey offers a quasi-apology to indelicate readers, suggesting that such matters are 'repugnant and disgusting', yet goes on to explain that, for the Ancient Greeks, so-called unnatural behaviour was natural because they considered that all of civilisation was unnatural, 'that its very existence presupposed the creation of new instincts, the suppression of old, and that many of the best features in all gentle life were best because they were unnatural'.[394] By acknowledging that Greek culture is worthy of study, indeed veneration, in his own time, and by defending their homosexual culture using their own terms, Mahaffey tacitly affirms the right of cultured men to practise homosexuality in Victorian Britain. The Ancient Greeks should be respected in their time and place; those who study Ancient Greece in the modern world deserve respect.

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[393] See, for example, Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 23–4.
[394] Bristow, *Oscar Wilde on Trial*, pp. 48–9.

The Value of Suffering

Dorian’s education (or cultural development) is tripartite, resulting from the influence of Basil, Lord Henry, and the poisonous yellow book, but the vital component missing from this is an understanding of the value of suffering: ‘I can sympathize with everything, except suffering […] I cannot sympathize with that. It is too ugly, too horrible, too distressing. There is something terribly morbid in modern sympathy with pain. One should sympathize with the colour, the beauty, the joy of life. The less said about life’s sores the better.’[395] These words are spoken by Lord Henry, who rarely means what he says, but they could easily be mistaken for Dorian’s sentiments, so faithful an acolyte is he, though not always attuned to his master’s ironies.

Whereas Dorian is disgusted by suffering, Helen in *Workers in the Dawn* is disgusted but also empathetic, a quality apparently conferred by her non-Paterian education. Her learning is directed towards social utility; in impugning the upper classes for the lateness of British universal education while finding the masses repulsive, she strikes the reader as similar to Gissing himself, yet the author’s education was steeped in the Classics, whereas hers involves modern works in English and German.[396] The works that impress her most from her continental education in Tübingen — David Strauss’s *Das Leben Jesu*, which criticised the so-called miracles presented in parts of the New Testament, and Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (in German), which provided an alternative theory to intelligent design (i.e. natural selection) — signal what Gissing meant in choosing the novel’s title.[397] The dawn of a new understanding is essentially that of atheism.[398] She is interested in Schopenhauer and Comte

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[395] Bristow, *Oscar Wilde on Trial*, p. 37.
[396] Gissing, *Workers*, p. 259.
[397] *Ibid.*, p. 211.
[398] *Ibid.*, p. 139 (vol. II). Augustus Whiffle confesses to preaching against the ‘godless policy of our School Boards’. Beatrice Webb suggested that a ‘major impetus behind the late Victorian socialist revival was “the flight of emotion away from the service of God to the service of man”. In the same generation there was a parallel shift among Nonconformist readers, a transference of reverence from the Good Book to the Great Books’. Quoted in Brantlinger, *Reading Lesson*, p. 34.

among the philosophers, her taste matching Gissing's; of the poets, she is drawn to Shelley, an atheist, but also in contradistinction to Keats, who represents art for art's sake, whereas Shelley was a radically political poet.

Whereas Wilde only came later to appreciate the value of suffering, as evidenced by the Christ-like figure of 'De Profundis' who claims to have learned lessons from his torturous prison experiences, the young Gissing saw beyond the frustrations of striving for the life of pleasure to the value of suffering, and knew the limitations of Paterian religiosity. Gissing was not steeped in Pater but had read enough to present its implications for the working (and lower-middle) classes realistically, though not comprehensively, ignoring examples of working-class success as portrayed in, for example, Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*. Richard Mutimer's description of working-class life in *Demos* shows that would-be aesthetes from this class do not possess the requisite leisure time for such pursuits. Richard is in fact discussing religion but the same applies to Paterian aesthetics, which have a numinous quality:

> The man who lives on wages is never free; he sells himself body and soul to his employer. What sort of freedom does a man enjoy who may any day find himself and his family on the point of starvation just because he has lost his work? All his life long he has before his mind the fear of want — not only of straitened means, mind you, but of destitution and the workhouse. How can such a man put aside his common cares? Religion is a luxury; the working man has no luxuries. Now, you speak of the free evenings; people always do, when they're asking why the working classes don't educate themselves. Do you understand what that free evening means? He gets home, say, at six o'clock, tired out; he has to be up again perhaps at five next morning. What can he do but just lie about half asleep? Why, that's the whole principle of the capitalist system of employment; it's calculated exactly how long a man can be made to work in a day without making him incapable of beginning again on the day following — just as it's calculated exactly how little a man can live upon, in the regulation of wages. If the workman returned home with strength to spare, employers would soon find it out, and workshop legislation would be revised — because of course it's the capitalists that make the laws. The principle is that a man shall have no strength left for himself; it's all paid for, every scrap of it, bought with the wages at each week end. What religion can such men have? Religion, I suppose, means thankfulness for life and its pleasures — at all events, that's a great part of it — and what has a wage-earner to be thankful for?[399]

Gilbert Grail in *Thyrza* provides another example of how the energy-draining effect of long working days can undermine intellectual studies: 'Had he then been given means and leisure,

[399] Gissing, *Demos*, pp. 120–1.

he would have become at the least a man of noteworthy learning. No such good fortune awaited him. Daily his thirteen hours went to the manufacture of candles, and the evening leisure, with one free day in the week, was all he could ever hope for.'[400] The pulsing life that Pater feels is a superstructural phenomenon, a happy by-product of the wage-earning activities of the base.

Paterian aesthetics cannot teach the value of suffering, and Gissing shows us the results of this in *The Whirlpool* through Redgrave. Contrasting his own life and Alma Rolfe's with Hugh Carnaby's, Redgrave tells Alma that '[w]e live in imagination quite as much as in everyday existence. You, I am sure, are in sympathy with infinite forms of life'.[401] Patrick Parrinder argues that 'Redgrave's combination of suave aestheticism and sexual unscrupulousness may reflect the discredit into which the Paterian rhetoric had fallen by the time of the Oscar Wilde trial in 1895'.[402] However, several years prior to the trial(s), Gissing had presented similar Paterian figures, such as Reuben Elgar in *The Emancipated* and Everard Barfoot in *The Odd Women*. In the latter, Everard mirrors Redgrave's discourse when he tells his cousin that his idea of enjoyment is 'an infinite series of modes of living. A ceaseless exercise of all one's faculties of pleasure.' He asks her 'Why is the man who toils more meritorious than he who enjoys? What is the sanction for this judgment?'[403] He feels himself above social usefulness or the troubles and concerns of the masses, a version of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. The tension between social utility and individualism recurs throughout Gissing's work, yet Redgrave does not appear to experience this, having become purely interested in the latter. He is the archetypal Paterian dilettante taken to one extreme, that of wealth and a strong sense of moral impunity. Paterian aesthetics has no capacity for teaching the value of suffering, and Redgrave never suffers; even his death is momentary. His death, indeed, is interesting,

[400] Gissing, *Thyrza*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2013), p. 90. See David Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), p. 101.
[401] Gissing, *The Whirlpool*, ed. D. J. Taylor (London: Penguin, 2015), p. 257.
[402] *Ibid.*, p. 478n.
[403] Gissing, *The Odd Women*, p. 94.

since his killer is someone whom he considers to live only in ‘everyday existence’, representing a curious literalisation of Paterian aesthetics, while Hugh’s physicality, his brute strength, means that Regrave’s multiplied consciousness, his hard gem-like flame, can be extinguished in an instant. Alma’s music offers her social distinction but, *contra* Pater, is not an end in itself.[404] For her, the Paterian ideal is in the hands of men more powerful than she is (represented by Redgrave).

Since he has not learnt the value of suffering, Redgrave is a cypher. What of the value of art, its function, as presented in Gissing and Wilde? Can treating life as artistic material assuage suffering? In *The Unclassed*, Waymark’s pronouncements (addressed to Julian Casti) on the function of art blend Paterian aesthetics with Schopenhauerian pessimism: ‘Art now-a-days must be the mouthpiece of misery; for misery is the key-note of modern life. […] Let us aid each other to live in the mind alone, heedless of external annoyances. […] What are we here for, but to make perfect pictures out of the horrors about us, and to modulate our groans till they become melody?’[405] The purely intellectual life, the Aesthetic life, and the aspiration of art (in this case poetry) to the condition of music — clearly a Paterian one — are useful in imbuing suffering with meaning and thereby ameliorating it. For Lord Henry in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, suffering is inartistic.[406] Waymark’s opinions echo those of the characters of Lord Henry and Basil:

> only as artistic material has human life any significance. Yes, that is the conclusion I am working round to. The artist is the only sane man. Life for its own sake? — no; I would drink a pint of laudanum to-night. But life as the source of splendid pictures, inexhaustible material for effects — that can reconcile me to existence, and that only. It is a delight followed by no bitter after-taste, and the only such delight I know.[407]

Waymark’s use of life as raw material for art is literal, whereas for Dorian Gray life is, not raw material, but art itself. As Lord Henry tells the latter: ‘I am so glad that you have never done anything, never carved a statue, or painted a picture, or produced anything outside of yourself!

[404] Gissing, *Whirlpool*, p. 256.
[405] Gissing, *Unclassed*, p. 202.
[406] Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 85.
[407] Gissing, *Unclassed*, p. 139.

Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets.'[408] Lord Henry appears to condone languor but the essential point is that he feels Dorian has not produced anything *outside of* himself. Pater's multiplied consciousness is the expansion of self, and this is what culture offers. Wilde's concluding maxim in the second-edition preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* — 'All art is quite useless' — is false; as Richard Ellmann suggests, the preface 'flaunted the aestheticism that the book would indict'.[409]

Waymark and Casti in *The Unclassed* are Paterian figures, yet something beyond that too. Cultural capital is meaningless without money, according to Waymark, based on his past experience, yet he also tells Casti that 'Mere dwelling on beauty in the imagination seems to suffice to keep me cheerful'. Casti's observation that Waymark appears to enjoy dwelling on the negative side of his (namely Waymark's) character indicates that Waymark is more than simply a Paterian ideologue.[410] When he observes that 'We have not been content to live in the simple happiness of our senses', this is clearly Paterian (and Wildean).[411] However, when he says that 'If [people] were wise, they would die at that moment — if it ever comes — when joy seems supreme and stable. Life can give nothing further, and it has no more hellish misery than disillusion following upon delight',[412] he conflates Pater and Schopenhauer: we must live for the sake of moments, but disillusion inevitably follows delight so it is better to reject life, which is a similar reflection to Schopenhauer when he compares life to 'a circular path of red-hot coals having a few cool places […] the man who recognizes the true nature of things-in-themselves steps off the path altogether'.[413] Furthermore, the presence of Carlylean ideology in the novel usefully highlights the allure, and perhaps danger, of a figure *like* Pater. So devoted

[408] Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 180.
[409] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 297.
[410] Gissing, *The Unclassed*, pp. 57, 59.
[411] *Ibid.*, p. 115.
[412] *Ibid.*, p. 156.
[413] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1966), section 68, p. 406.

is Julian Casti to Waymark that he wants to learn from him by osmosis; his admiration of his new teacher companion is indeed described as hero worship: 'He listened to every word with eager attention, and entirely lost himself in the charm of Waymark's individuality'.[414] Waymark, like Pater and Lord Henry, has attracted a disciple.

Transpose Waymark to the upper classes: is he more or less Dorian Gray? Is Casti therefore comparable to one of Dorian's disciples? Samuel Vogt Gapp is broadly correct but oversimplifies when he suggests that in this novel Gissing has 'divided himself into two people, Waymark representing Gissing the realistic novelist, and Casti, Gissing the classicist.'[415] Waymark does not entirely exemplify the ideology he espouses, however, given his job of collecting rent from exploited destitute people, serving the ruling classes. Casti's disastrous choice of a life partner (Harriet Smales) leads to prison for Ida Starr and his own misery. Waymark's life is corrupted on the one hand by rent collecting, but presumably consoled by his friendship with Casti. Waymark's class and work mean that his Lord Henry-like aphorisms about using his surroundings as art are not only callous (like Dorian's) but also escapist, since they can be construed as breaking down the horrors of life into something manageable. Unlike with Dorian, this is a defensive strategy for daily survival in an ugly setting; Waymark uses his ego to make it work.

The artistic appreciation of suffering in Waymark and Dorian is similar to Ancient Greek katharsis, purging the feelings of suffering and allowing them to take pleasure in it. A comparison between Waymark's and Dorian's pronouncements shows some obvious parallels:

> In the work of the Devil I find my own delight and inspiration. I have only to go out into the streets all night to come across half a hundred scenes of awful suffering or degradation, every one of which fills me with absolute joy. There is nothing of malice in this; it is simply that every human situation is interesting to me in proportion as it exhibits artistic possibilities, and my temperament is especially sensitive to the picturesque in what is usually called vileness.[416]

> I am glad you don't think I am heartless. I am nothing of the kind. I know I am not. And yet I must admit that this thing that has happened does not affect me as it should. It seems to me to be simply

[414] Gissing, *The Unclassed*, pp. 53 and 56.
[415] Gapp, *Gissing: Classicist*, p. 48.
[416] Gissing, *The Unclassed*, p. 260.

> like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I have not been wounded.[417]

In both cases, suffering is useful to an artistic temperament that is characterised by aristocratic egotism rooted in a classical education. This callous or impervious temperament is precisely what Pater's aestheticism produces. They both see themselves as belonging to an elect group not recognised by society, yet distinction is warned against in Wilde's novel; as Basil Hallward says, 'There is a fatality about all physical and intellectual distinction, the sort of fatality that seems to dog through history the faltering steps of kings. It is better not to be different from one's fellows.'[418]

Ultimately, in Gissing and Wilde, people with very sensitive natures have a natural inclination to contemplation but it only leads to learning callousness. The study of the classics at the *fin-de-siècle* seems to nurture this, with its class privilege and link to decadence. In the character of Helen in *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing suggests that a more modern European education might be the way to temper such callousness. The next chapter explores a similarly cosmopolitan education in an imperialist context.

[417] Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 84.
[418] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

4. New Imperialism, the State, and Education into Adulthood

'How thinkest thou that I rule this people? I have but a regiment of guards to do my bidding, therefore it is not by force. It is by terror. My empire is of the imagination.'[419]

'What am I going to be? A soldier, of course!'[420]

Education in Gissing's fiction broadly produces two types of civilian: those who are happy to comply with and become part of the State, thereby implicitly condoning expansionism, exploited labour, etc. with its systemic benefits and social hypocrisies; and those who are exiled — socially, psychologically, etc. — because they reject such hypocrisy, a rejection paradoxically springing from education, specifically reading. In literature, the former is represented by imperialist writers, from Henty to Kipling (the latter especially in his poetry but less so in the school stories collected in *Stalky & Co.*), to Robert Baden-Powell's hugely influential manual, *Scouting for Boys* (1908), whereas the latter is represented by Gissing and Hardy, among others.

Imperial romance writers have a role in prescribing adventurous, dominant, masculine boyhoods at the *fin-de-siècle*. Henty's *The Dash for Khartoum: A Tale of the Nile Expedition* (1891) and *With Kitchener in the Soudan: A Story of Atbara and Omdurman* (1902) and Corelli's *Boy: A Sketch* (1900) are utilised in this chapter because these novels about youth more explicitly perform a critique that one would expect Gissing to do: examining boys' reading options and assimilation into their competitive worlds, rather than (as Gissing does) looking at a broad culture of imperialism that adults live in and are complicit in. Gissing's adult men (Piers Otway, Harvey Rolfe, Hugh Carnaby) live out certain lives consequent of educations that Gissing does not really give extensive space to. Gissing, rarely for the period,

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[419] Ayesha, from H. Rider Haggard, *She: A History of Adventure*, ed. Daniel Karlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 reissue), p. 161.

[420] Edgar Stratton in George Gissing, *Isabel Clarendon*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Grayswood: Grayswood Press, 2010), p. 114. All subsequent references are to this edition.

is interested in where the jingoism and pluck youth may end up: sexual impotence, neglect of individualism in favour of state service, hope of pacifism in younger generations. Piers benefits from an anomalous education that stands apart from colonialist models and rhetoric, while Hugh lives in the shadow of his soldier brother, a permanently boyish fantasist, haunted by dreams of significant deeds abroad.

Given the thematic centrality of anti-imperialism in *The Crown of Life*, part of this chapter aims to fill the gap in the research by exploring how education/culture and imperialism are related, and to determine whether, as Gissing shows in Piers, a certain kind of cosmopolitan education might allow one to disengage from the inevitability of state servitude. When one considers the other characters, including Arnold Jacks and Irene, it is clear that education is both a problem and a solution, one kind preparing people for colonialism and the other nurturing pacifism and anti-imperialism, although, as Gissing was aware, other influencing factors are at play.

This chapter measures education/culture (and cultured-ness) in *The Crown of Life*'s characters, from Irene to Arnold to Olga. It shows who among them likes poetry, how Irene recoils at cheap literature, the benefits of Piers's studying of languages on the continent as a contrast to the colonial imperatives his half-brothers have imbibed through their traditional schooling at home. It shows how Gissing's presentation of education and culture in the imperial climate of late-Victorian Britain is divided between men of thought and men of action, with Irene as a woman who also in part represents the country itself in having to decide between them. Irene's educational journey involves her having to learn to value Piers's pure 'culture' and devalue Arnold's 'civilized barbarism' borne of imperial conquest.

Another of Gissing's novels that is central to any discussion of imperialism and boyhood/manhood is *The Whirlpool*, not simply in Harvey and his son Hughie, but in the latter's namesake, Hugh. Like Peter Pan (and like Dorian Gray), Hugh in *The Whirlpool* will

never grow up. There is a similarity between how Sybil talks about her husband and how Harvey talks about Hughie:

> 'Travelling suits Hugh; it has done him a great deal of good. I believe he would have liked to stay in Tasmania; but he saw it wouldn't do for me, and the good fellow could think of nothing else but my comfort. I have a great admiration for Hugh,' she added, with a smile, not exactly of superiority or condescension, but of approval distinct from tenderness. 'Of course, I always had, and it has increased since I've travelled with him. He shows to far more advantage on a ship than in a drawing-room. On this last voyage we had some very bad weather, and then he was at his best. I admired him immensely!' (*Whirlpool*, p. 185)

What we find here is a cold maternal admiration for a son on the cusp of adulthood, rather than an adult husband, as we would expect. Harvey claims to want his son to become a militaristic type, indeed may subconsciously have named him after Hugh for this reason, yet his friend represents failure to become a man of action, his nature having been stifled by London domestication.

Harvey's thoughts about his son are better characterised by anguished foreboding than hope:

> Hugh, aged sixteen months, began to have a vocabulary of his own, and to claim a share in conversation; he had a large head, well formed, and slight but shapely limbs; the sweet air of sea and mountain gave a healthful, though very delicate, colouring to his cheeks; his eyes were Alma's, dark and gleaming, but with promise of a keener intelligence. Harvey liked to gaze long at the little face, puzzled by its frequent gravity, delighted by its flashes of mirth. Syllables of baby-talk set him musing and philosophising. How fresh and young, yet how wondrously old! Babble such as this fell from a child's lips thousands of years ago, in the morning of the world; it sounded on through the ages, infinitely reproduced; eternally a new beginning; the same music of earliest human speech, the same ripple of innocent laughter, renewed from generation to generation. But he, listening, had not the merry, fearless pride of fathers in an earlier day. Upon him lay the burden of all time; he must needs ponder anxiously on his child's heritage, use his weary knowledge to cast the horoscope of this dawning life.[421]

Harvey seeks to distance his son from Alma ('promise of keener intelligence') and connect his experience of fatherhood with all (hu)mankind, both forms of escape from the modern world. As Colin Partridge argues, Harvey's interest in 'Mrs. Buncombe's children, left to the care of servants and "growing up as vicious little savages", hint at the preoccupation with the nature of education which is later to haunt Harvey Rolfe'.[422]

[421] Gissing, *Whirlpool*, p. 152.
[422] Colin Partridge, 'The Humane Centre: George Gissing's *The Whirlpool*', *The Gissing Newsletter*, 9.3 (1973), pp. 1–10 (p. 4).

The link between colonialism and parenthood allows us to see England as civil servants raising 'savages' abroad, with Hugh not allowed to travel and see the 'children' in his care (with the suggestion of impotence). Evelyn Baring, the first Earl of Cromer, broadly characterised all of Britain's subject races as '*in statu pupillari* — that is, having the status of pupils under guardianship', which is, as Deane points out, one of the most potent metaphors in the discourse of nineteenth-century liberal imperialism.[423]

As shown in *The Whirlpool*, the anxieties of the British imperialist elite over the independent spirit of their colonial subjects found a reflection in upper-class worries about independent-minded domestic servants at home, with part of the blame being levelled at rising career expectations fuelled by a Board School education, even as most observers 'acknowledged that prospective servants had legitimate reasons to dislike the low status, degrading labour and lack of freedom involved in domestic service'.[424] In *The Whirlpool*, a servant's imperfect knowledge is ultimately responsible for setting in motion the events that conclude with Hugh killing Redgrave.

It is worth highlighting the contradiction between Gissing's anti-imperialism and his inveterate anti-democratic feeling. Piers sees the social costs of colonialism (its bullying its arrogance, its xenophobia, its exploitation) while nevertheless internalizing English classism; hence, his distrust of the crowd and desire for distinction. Gissing affirms both of these traits in Piers, who is another 'born in exile' protagonist. His decision to live in Russia and to live/think in global terms may somewhat ameliorate this for him.

To help understand the texts discussed here more profoundly, this chapter first theorises the imperialist aspects of the period, including Althusser's designation of state apparatuses.

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[423] Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*, p. 116. Earlier, Mill had used the education of children as a metaphor for the 'civilization of savage subjects' (p. 117).

[424] Rosemary Jann, 'Domesticity and Discipline in Gissing's Short Fiction', in *George Gissing and the Woman Question*, pp. 85–99 (p. 89). In *New Grub Street*, the only personal detail of the Reardons' servant that we are given is that she is Board School educated.

Thomas Richards's work on the imperial archives and how knowledge is withheld or used by the state and Seeley's argument for the random nature of England's expansionism help lay the ground for understanding the dissonance and fragmentation felt by the characters in Gissing and Corelli as well as the oppressive atmosphere in which imperialist works were written. Then, the chapter turns its attention to the world as playground in Henty's fiction and in some of Gissing's, where boys should be athletic and their education useful for future colonial careers. However, we find that this approach to education leads to a death drive instilled in certain boys, as demonstrated by Corelli's *Boy*. This chapter then transitions to the world of adults, yet finds boys who cannot grow up in *The Whirlpool* and later in *The Crown of Life*, with Piers emerging as a successfully educated pacificist who rejects state assimilation. The chapter closes on the death of the Paterian dilettante Redgrave and what it suggests about so-called civil society.

Theorising Imperialism

This section attempts to provide a theoretical basis for thinking about the texts explored in this chapter. It examines the extent to which the New Imperialism of the late nineteenth century was produced, buttressed, and proliferated by the imaginations of its exponents and the value of information-gathering and recordkeeping by the state.

Althusser's reclassification of school and family as state apparatuses, despite reflecting his own time and country, is useful in understanding British imperial education:

> It takes children from every class at infant-school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most 'vulnerable', squeezed between the Family State Apparatus and the Educational State Apparatus, it drums into them, whether it uses new or old methods, a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology (French, arithmetic, natural history, the sciences, literature) or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state (ethics, civic instruction, philosophy). Somewhere around the age of sixteen, a huge mass of children are ejected 'into production': these are the workers or small peasants. Another portion of scholastically adapted youth carries on: and, for better or worse, it goes somewhat further, until it falls by the wayside and fills the posts of small and middle technicians, white-collar workers, small and middle executives, petty bourgeois of all kinds. A last portion reaches the summit, either to fall into intellectual semi-employment, or to provide, as well as the 'intellectuals of the collective labourer', the agents of exploitation (capitalists, managers), the agents of repression (soldiers, policemen, politicians, administrators, etc.) and the professional ideologists (priests of all sorts, most of whom are convinced 'laymen').[425]

[425] Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', p. 155.

Many of the young male characters in imperialist romance are agents of repression in embryo. The narrative represents the process by which an agent of repression is created. In this kind of novel, schools are important for testing resilience to bullying, teaching sporting prowess, and disseminating imperialist ideology.[426] As John Springhall observes, the mid-nineteenth-century Arnoldian (Thomas Arnold) vision of boys' education, which was centred on morality and religion, had given way to a focus on athleticism and patriotism. Henty's fiction, in particular, thrived in this environment, although, as Springhall notes, it 'reflected many of the prejudices of a middle-class, late Victorian "strong old-fashioned Tory" and at least a quarter of his output contained as a hero a manly public schoolboy who wins his spurs fighting in some far-off British colonial war.'[427]

Brantlinger, discussing adventure writers more broadly, suggests that adventure narratives were inscribed with a desire to revitalize heroism *and* the aristocracy. Since romance often privileges the aristocracy, Brantlinger's literary history, as set out below, can be reframed as a turning away from the interests of the working classes to those of the bourgeois and aristocracy:

> The history of fiction between the 1830s and 1900 […] is characterized by a general movement from domestic realism and concern with social reform, through the craze of the 1860s for sensation novels, to the various forms of romance writing of the eighties and nineties which include imperialist adventure stories for adolescents and adults alike.[428]

Rose's accounts of working-class reading between 1870 and 1939 show that the reputations of earlier romances, such as Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) and Charles Kingsley's *Westward*

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[426] See, for example, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *Eric, or Little by Little*, *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's*, etc. See also Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', p. 150: 'Not only does the State apparatus contribute generously to its own reproduction (the capitalist State contains political dynasties, military dynasties, etc.), but also and above all, the State apparatus secures by repression (from the most brutal physical force, via mere administrative commands and interdictions, to open and tacit censorship) the political conditions for the action of the Ideological State Apparatuses.'

[427] John Springhall, 'Building Character in the British Boy: The Attempt to Extend Christian Manliness to Working-class Adolescents, 1880–1914', *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800–1940*, ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 52-74 (62).

[428] Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 35. See Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986 reprint), pp. 59–77.

Ho! (1855), were reinvigorated too. However, this brief history, as Brantlinger himself acknowledges, is highly selective, ignoring Gissing's 1880s novels about the working classes and Arthur Morrison's popular *A Child of the Jago* (1896). Yet, under the New Imperialism, Britain sought to buttress its fading aristocracy. In a sense, by asserting its right to rule in other countries, particularly in the case of the Indian Raj, the aristocracy was losing its right to rule its own land. Working-class education, therefore, was largely an exercise in subordination.[429]

During the nineteenth century, the dissemination of information increasingly became a state-proliferated commodity, as Thomas Richards's *The Imperial Archive* demonstrates.[430] A natural corollary, education became increasingly state-controlled too. Thus, information was largely mediated by imperialist ideologues. Problematically, art, literature, and culture generally constitute neither pure information nor education, and yet clearly imperialist ideology pervaded English culture, especially in the capital: 'The public art and architecture of London together reflected and reinforced an impression, an atmosphere, celebrating British heroism on the battlefield, British sovereignty over foreign lands, British wealth and power, in short, British imperialism.'[431]

J. R. Seeley's bestselling *The Expansion of England* (1883), argued that the British Empire's hypertrophic expansion had so far been unconscious and non-systematic. Seeley invited readers to consider the function and form of the empire, considerations apparently hitherto neglected.[432] Britain had accrued territories, responsibility, and wealth; now it sought to reify the implicit ideology to perpetuate and reinvigorate this legacy. For writers like Henty,

[429] For upper-class education, see J. A. Mangan, 'Social Darwinism and Upper-Class Education in Late Victorian and Edwardian England', in Mangan and James Wolvin (eds), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 135–59.
[430] See Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London; New York: Verso, 1993), p. 74.
[431] Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 19. For an opposite point of view, see Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[432] E. H. H. Green, 'The Political Economy of Empire, 1880–1914', in *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter, vol. 3 of *The Oxford History of the British Empire,* gen. ed. Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 346.

the incitement to deeds of empire was delivered in adventure stories centred on important imperial figures, such as General Gordon and Robert Clive, or narratives that celebrated 'Englishness'. He presents quasi-mythological romances, and the education (by-product) is historical/imperialist and heavily biased.

The World as Playground: Henty and Gissing

Many boys' books and journals encouraged physical strength/agility, patriotism, an interest in travel/exploration, manliness/masculinity, and pride in Empire (and the natural accompaniment, contempt for other nations). As John M. MacKenzie suggests, '[t]he world became a vast adventure playground in which Anglo-Saxon superiority could be repeatedly demonstrated *vis-a-vis* all other races, most of whom were depicted as treacherous and evil.'[433] The mass popularity of writers like Henty are more easily rationalised in this political context.

In his work, there is a quasi-cosmopolitanism ostensibly at odds with this brutality, yet the hierarchy of useful school subjects is based on imperial utility. The ability to subjugate those weaker than oneself is also highly valued, and thus bullies generally prosper. Languages are stressed as an important part of a boy's education, although French conspicuously less so: 'Nobody cares about their French lessons. They make no difference in your place in the school, and so no one takes the trouble to grind at them.'[434] In *With Kitchener in the Soudan* (1902), the young Gregory Hilliard's 'ability to speak Arabic amounts to a classical education.'[435] In Gissing's *The Whirlpool*, Rolfe similarly believes that '[t]he future of England is beyond seas. I would have children taught all about the Colonies before bothering them with histories of

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[433] John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 204. See also, p. 205: 'It has been said that the boys' papers of the Amalgamated Press have done more to provide recruits for our Navy and Army and to keep up the esteem of the sister services than anything else'.
[434] G. A. Henty, *The Dash for Khartoum: A Tale of the Nile Expedition* (London; Glasgow; Bombay: Blackie and Son, n.d.), p. 28. All subsequent references are to this edition.
[435] Bristow, *Empire Boys*, p. 149.

Greece and Rome'.[436] In terms of bullying or hazing, in the 1850s, it is presented, for example, in Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's School Days* and Frederic W. Farrar's *Eric, or Little by Little*, as an important rite of passage. Whereas Rudyard Kipling's school stories challenge such notions, Henty adheres to the old ideology while removing the Christian discourse of Farrar and Hughes.

Beyond the value of sports and the importance of physicality in their education, the boys in *The Dash for Khartoum* are fully aware of the imperial inculcation taking place, aiming at admittance to Sandhurst and even envisaging how they might fare in the British colonies.[437] Easton's comic description of 'football' (actually a form of rugby) as 'a relic of our original savage nature, when men did not mind dirt, and lived by hunting and fighting and that sort of thing' (Henty, *Dash for Khartoum*, p. 35) reveals a sense of superior civilization, as if sports were a collective id, perhaps necessary to remind 'civilized' races that their savagery is only sport and therefore not real. Savagery for 'advanced' races is here confined to the remote past or the modern playing fields.[438]

In *Isabel Clarendon*, there is some apparent convergence in the presentation of empire boys by Gissing and Henty. Mrs Stratton's four 'lads' are 'Admirable British youths!',[439] whereas the so-called twins Edgar and Rupert in Henty's *The Dash for Khartoum* are 'lads any father might be proud of, straight, well-built, handsome English lads' with 'pleasant, open faces', and 'popular among their school-fellows'.[440] The tone in Gissing is disingenuous, however, and the Strattons are marginal characters in the novel. Edgar Stratton is also comically described as 'a fat, bullet-headed boy, generally red as a boiled lobster, supple as an eel.' His education is a pre-Scouting one of athleticism and military history, contrasting sharply with

[436] Gissing, *Whirlpool*, p. 110.
[437] Henty, *Dash for Khartoum*, pp. 37–8.
[438] There is also Ryecroft's aversion to military drill, mentioned on p. 29 of this thesis.
[439] Gissing, *Isabel Clarendon*, p. 110.
[440] Henty, *Dash for Khartoum*, p. 28; see Gissing, *Isabel Clarendon*, pp. 110–17.

Percy's peaceful reading and introspection (*Isabel Clarendon*, p. 111). Percy represents a minority: in 1885, Henry Salt observed of Etonians, 'They know little; they hate books.' As Richard D. Altick points out, 'The same might have been said, though less sweepingly, of the boys at most of the other schools.'[441] Edgar describes his killing of a bird, which Ada believes is murder, as 'good' and 'fair sport' considering his desire to be a soldier.[442] (Later, the boys adventure writer Marryat is disingenuously described by the narrator as a 'refined and penetrating author'.)[443] The novel presents Edgar as innocent in his bloodlust because he has grown up in an environment that rewards it: to the Strattons and their circle, England is a civilizing power in the world, and this position has only been secured through 'good, hard fighting' (*Isabel Clarendon*, p. 171).

Corelli's Death-Driven *Boy*

In Corelli's *Boy: A Sketch*, one of the by-products of sudden youth population growth and a bolstered sense of nationalism was a Freudian death instinct instilled in boys.[444] Robert D'Arcy-Muir, the eponymous protagonist, can be moulded into a soldier or a navy officer before the age of seven, according to Major Dick Desmond, but it is likely difficult or impossible after that age.[445] Despite the neglect of his parents (there is a discussion of parental influence on education), the Major and Letty attempt to provide a literary education for him, letting him choose from the Major's deluxe editions of Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes, and Tennyson, from which he chooses Dante for the illustrations of angels (*Boy*, pp. 85 and 59). Whereas the Major is masculinist in his pedagogical proclivities, Robert is markedly different

[441] Altick, *Common Reader*, p. 187.
[442] Gissing, *Isabel Clarendon*, pp. 113–14.
[443] *Ibid.*, p. 175.
[444] See Appendix 4 of John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883–1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).
[445] Corelli, *Boy: A Sketch*, 12th edn (London: Methuen, 1911), p. 90. Subsequent references to *Boy* are to this edition and appear parenthetically within the text.

from his peers: budding masculinity, tests of character, and national pride are better embodied by his friend Alister McDonald: 'Let me hear any one abusing England, and I'll run them straight through with my sword in no time!' (*Boy*, p. 73).[446] Alister tells Robert about the necessary steps to becoming a soldier, focusing mainly on physical fitness and examinations — essentially 'cramming' (*Boy*, p. 144).[447]

At an English school, Robert would have been taught that 'death is preferable to dishonour' (*Boy*, p. 181) but he is sent away to a school in Brittany, which Corelli's Francophobia construes as a catastrophe; indeed, he becomes immoral and cowardly in this environment, although he is only there for a year. Here, as in *Wormwood*, France is synonymous with immorality, although a sense of England's superiority to other nations was widely encouraged among British boys (*Boy*, p. 188).[448] Letty believes that 'all English boys are brought up to be frank and true, and to stand upon their honour', in contrast to French boys (*Boy*, p. 150). Indeed, her impossibly angelic nature and practical Francophobia makes her a suitable candidate for Corelli's surrogate in this novel. However, she sees Robert's military education as an infringement on his individuality: 'Ground down into the same educational pattern — crammed with the same assorted and classified facts — trained by the same martinet rules of discipline, without any thought taken as to diversity of character or varying quality of temperament' (*Boy*, p. 236). To her, he is being shaped into a 'military automaton' (*Boy*, p. 237) and his soul has been destroyed but risen to heaven (*Boy*, pp. 245–6). Her wish for him is death, and she also wishes to meet her dead lover in heaven too (*Boy*, p. 256). She thus presents a Christian version of Freud's death instinct and would push it onto Robert (their deaths later

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[446] The Major thinks that 'Woman and Art spells ruin like theatrical speculation!' Corelli, *Boy*, p. 73; p. 142; see also pp. 127–8.
[447] See also *Ibid.*, pp. 289 and 304. On cramming, see Sheila Cordner, *Education in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Exclusion as Innovation* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016).
[448] Geoffrey Best, 'Militarism and the Victorian Public School', in *The Victorian Public School: Studies in the Development of an Educational Institution*, ed. Brian Simon and Ian Bradley (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), pp. 129–46.

coincide with each other), who, as the Major fears, has become an atheist — as suggested in *Wormwood* and *The Sorrows of Satan*, this is a French influence (*Boy*, p. 251). As Violet points out, Letty idealises Robert (*Boy*, p. 270). His childhood friend Rattling Jack's last words to him were: 'I'll just think o' ye as if ye were dead' (*Boy*, p. 307).

The Major gives Robert a book called *Our Country's Heroes*, a characteristic book for boys of the period, 'in which there were some very thrilling pictures of young men, almost boys, fighting, escaping from prison, struggling with wild beasts, climbing Alpine heights, swimming tempestuous seas, and generally distinguishing themselves' (*Boy*, p. 169).[449] This shows that MacKenzie's 'vast playground' is a paradigmatic metaphor. These ludicrous feats are nonetheless enticing and are as idealistic as Letty's view of Robert. Since she influences his heroic actions in the Boer War, idealism is ultimately portrayed as generating militaristic distinction and contributing to empire. The book advocates a wresting away of individual will, as the narrator makes clear:

> it is a dangerous fallacy to aver that every man has the making of his destiny in his own hands: to a certain extent he has, no doubt, and with education and firm resolve, he can do much to keep down the Beast and develop the Angel, — but a terrific responsibility rests upon those often voluntarily reckless beings, his parents, who, without taking thought, use the God's privilege of giving life, while utterly failing to perceive the means offered to them for developing and preserving that life under the wisest and most harmonious conditions. (*Boy*, pp. 17–18)

Christian ideology is here linked to school education, as it is in *The Mighty Atom* (1896), which pleads for a combination of pedagogy and religion. However, there is more emphasis in *Boy* on familial responsibility, and, later in the book, it is presented as an additional part of state apparatus for imperial indoctrination. Although Robert is born into an upper-middle-class family, his ex-military father has become a violent alcoholic and his mother is negligent. Robert nonetheless becomes a 'hero' despite how his mother directs his education. The sense of inevitability about the act suggests that heroism is mostly innate and education is largely immaterial. Characteristically, Corelli ostensibly subverts that which she covertly condones.

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[449] See Craig Barclay, 'Our Heroes of To-day', in *Books for Boys: Literacy, Nation and the First World War*, ed. Simon J. James (Durham: The Institute of Advanced Study, 2014), pp. 26–31.

Freud's first published reference to the death instinct/s is in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he defines it/them as cognate with the ego and in contradistinction to the libido, those forces 'which seek to lead what is living to death, and others, the sexual instincts, which are perpetually attempting and achieving a renewal of life.'[450] Robert is undead throughout the novel, a passive victim unable to affect or meaningful determine the events of his life. The act that confirms his life as having value is one which results in his own death. The state demands that a boy does not experience life as Paterian inwardness but that he instead relinquishes individuality in favour of a narrow sense of purpose beneficial to the state. Thus, the state here seeks to adopt the role of the death instinct for a certain proportion of its male citizens, who ultimately will become part of the state apparatus — in the army, for example, another Repressive State Apparatus.[451]

Repressed Sexuality/Pluck in *The Whirlpool*

In adventure and romance, for example in *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894) and *The Lost World*, staying at home is failure for a young man; there is nothing of worldly significance to do there. It is explored, and problematized, by Gissing in *The Whirlpool*, where Hugh Carnaby's strength finds no suitable object, and his wife is masculinised, their gender roles inverted.

The oppression at home and the promise of (sexual) adventure and discovery abroad tempted many men away from Britain. In *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*, Ronald Hyam argues that:

> [i]t would […] be nonsense to suggest that more than a minority of men initially went overseas in order to find sexual satisfaction. The minority included explorers, perhaps, though even with them it was not a primary consideration. For most of the nineteenth century there was no shortage of

[450] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, vol. 18 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, trans. James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 1–64 (pp. 44, 44n, and 46).
[451] Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', p. 96.

> sexual opportunity in the British home base, and most of those who went overseas went for the adventure and the possibility of making money.[452]

The aphrodisiacal properties of adventure and money aside, Hyam here ignores something he later discusses in detail: the increasing sexual oppression of Victorian society, ranging from expelling schoolboys for masturbating to obscenity laws against literature, and the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, which recriminalized male homosexuality and suppressed brothels.[453] In this atmosphere, certain men would perhaps look to imperial adventure more as an escape from sexual oppression rather than an opportunity for sexual experimentation. Hugh has missed out on something by not following his brother abroad; it is also apparent that he and Sibyl have no children. The implication is thus that his sexuality has dissipated at home, although ultimately it is in abeyance, finding final release in an 'orgasmic', mortal punch.

To understand Hugh in more detail, it is necessary to consider the socio-political upheaval of the late nineteenth century that to some extent conditioned such men. The institution of marriage, for example, underwent a series of legislative and cultural revisions throughout the century, transforming the perception of heteronormative gender functions, notions of patriarchy, and domestic ideology. This also meant a change in the fictional representation of courtship and marriage. The Married Women's Property Act of 1882, for example, allowed women who owned property to retain control of it in marriage and enabled them to make a will without their husbands' consent. In 1895, the Married Women Act provided a ground on which abused wives could obtain a legal separation after they had left their husbands.[454] This naturally questioned certain ideas of masculinity, something a lot of men evidently noticed, since the late-Victorian period saw the publication of a large number of self-

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[452] Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 1–2.

[453] Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, pp. 56–87.

[454] Christina Sjöholm, *'The Vice of Wedlock': The Theme of Marriage in George Gissing's Novels* (Stockholm: Uppsala University, 1994), p. 21. It is worth noting that the latter was still dependent on cruelty or neglect on the husband's part.

help books on gentlemanly conduct, books which proved enormously popular and shaped the way 'Englishness' was perceived in world terms.[455] Chauvinism and imperialism were two traits of such masculinist ideologues. The emergence of the 'New Woman' and the legislative marriage reforms which sought to benefit women were seen in some quarters as posing a threat to traditional masculine identities. In the 1880s and 1890s, '[t]he merits of living in domesticity were no longer so clear to this generation of middle-class men, and […] increasing numbers either postponed marriage or else carved out a larger sphere for all-male society within marriage.' The Victorian culture of domesticity that had previously dominated thus entered a new and uncertain phase in the last few decades of the nineteenth century.[456]

Educated at a grammar school, and thus possessing some classical education, Hugh appears to be almost like the 'best type of conquering, civilizing Briton'; nonetheless, he is not Miles (Latin for 'soldier'), who is fighting in India and 'seeing life', in Hugh's own words (*Whirlpool*, pp. 13 and 18). His silver pistols and ibex-hoof paperweight have been stolen by a housekeeper and marriage has essentially placated him. Thus, he will not be defeated on any battlefield; his battle is at home. Since he believes it is too late to see life, the death instinct has taken over his ego, as it does for Robert in Corelli's *Boy*. Miles represents Hugh's super-ego, and Hugh is little more than a domesticated animal or a restrained id.

Michel Foucault's discussion of Platonic regulation of sexual conduct is useful in understanding Hugh and his marriage. 'Glory' is the type of regulation that could best be ascribed to him: 'Plato cites the example of athletes who, in their desire to win a victory in the games, place themselves under a strict regimen, not going near a woman […] the whole time

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[455] Karen Volland Waters, *The Perfect Gentleman: Masculine Control in Victorian Men's Fiction, 1870–1901* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1997), p. 20. Waters cites Smythe Palmer's *The Perfect Gentleman* as an example, a book which went through thirteen editions.
[456] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 146.

of their training.'[457] Hugh is this athlete, only one deprived of his games and thereby any hope of victory. Also, abstinence or impotence is an ostensible characteristic of his sexual relationship with Sibyl because, as mentioned above, they have no children. Following Hugh's act of manslaughter against Redgrave, Sibyl becomes the dominant, strong 'male' figure, and Hugh fades completely. Her objection to a cigarette in the woman of her mouth could be a veiled objection to fellatio; however, smoking was also one of the most visible badges of emancipated womanhood.[458] After his incarceration, Hugh tries to smoke a cigar but discards it as it makes him feel sick (*Whirlpool*, p. 450). Since Hugh has been effeminised, his attempt to smoke is a failure to be taken seriously as a man. The other most visible badge of emancipated womanhood, according to Tosh, is cycling, which of course recalls Hugh's business venture. Ironically, Sibyl comes to symbolise emancipated womanhood because Hugh is effeminised: he unconsciously wears the badges while his wife wears the trousers.

Perhaps in response to his friend's emasculation, Harvey initially wants Hugh's namesake to have the fighting spirit. In *The Crown of Life*, Edward suggests that 'there's no harm in a little fighting […]. Nations are just like schoolboys, you know; there has to be a round now and then; it settles things, and is good for the blood' (*CL*, p. 308). Of course, Gissing was anti-imperialist, as Morley Roberts's review of *The Crown of Life* makes clear:

> Roberts, an enthusiastic imperialist much concerned with the virtues of manliness, regarded Gissing's very different values as knock-down examples of moral weakness, and insisted on detecting such faults in his work. Reviewing *The Crown of Life* in 1899, he sneers at Gissing's 'curious dislike of the British Empire,' based, he alleges, on nothing more than a feeling that it was not 'quiet, reasonable, and gentlemanly'.[459]

Thus, rigid gender binaries formed part of the discourse domain of imperialists; Gissing is more amenable to modern political views due to his somewhat liberal gender politics and because of his literary realism — as seen above, he presents imperialist viewpoints accurately.

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[457] Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality: Volume 2*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 168.
[458] Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p. 152.
[459] David Grylls, 'The Teller Not the Tale: George Gissing and Biographical Criticism', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 32.4 (1989), 454–70 (p. 456), accessed 30 Mar 2016.

The Whirlpool marks the fine line between individual civility and state barbarism. Mrs Abbott worries about the children whom her cousin has been forced to raise alone: 'From seeing so little of their father, they have even come to talk with a vulgar pronunciation, like children out of the streets — almost. It's dreadful!' (*The Whirlpool*, pp. 33-4). Bourdieu's sense of class distinction is evident here. Harvey suggests that, because they are young (five and seven years old), they can be trained out of such behaviour. If the children are being educated ultimately for state-assisting employment, then they are expected to perform a kind of civility complicit in the barbarism of empire-building. Thus, Mrs Abbott is ultimately lamenting the fact that they will not become directly complicit in social hypocrisy as their peers might. The lack of any father figure severs their ties with imperial patriarchy so relished by the middle classes Gissing portrays.

Education offers escape from the precarity of life in upper-middle-class London society, which threatens to send people into the eponymous whirlpool, through assimilation or through distinction. The various dangers include financial ruin, ignominy, severe gender disparities, loveless marriages, suicide and other kinds of death, and misspent lives, and self-exile initially appears to be the only means of escape, whether it is achieved by gold-mining in Queensland, Australia, by living a colonial life in India or South Africa, or by escaping civilisation to Honolulu. Escape leads to disappointment for the Carnabys since Sibyl, and not Hugh, is unable to cope, and thus Hugh's colonialist capacity remains untapped. Education offers two different kinds of escape: escape, paradoxically, through assimilation or escape through distinction. The novel offers its characters the *potential* for both kinds, for example in Hughie and Alma, respectively, yet no fulfilment of either. This is interesting because Gissing's views on education as expressed in his letters and diary do not suggest a pessimist, whereas his fiction

nearly always does (exceptions are include short stories such as 'Miss Rodney's Leisure' and novels such as *The Town Traveller*).[460]

Marriage into the demi-monde, with its attendant social duties, undermines Hugh's desire to hunt big game and indulge in the kind of colonial exploits that Miles enjoys in India. A grammar school education, which not only Harvey and Hugh but also Basil Morton have received, is reflective of middle-class status.[461] James Elwick indicates that a grammar school education was not necessarily a guarantee of success: 'By the early 1860s some [grammar schools] prepared students for commerce; others for university or military academies; a tiny number were technical and scientific. Students at middle-class schools tended to leave around age sixteen, usually going into the workforce, with a few headed to university.' Harvey and Hugh are university educated, so they have been prepared from the beginning for this life, yet the question that haunts the text is what it has got them.

Into Manhood: Imperialism in *The Crown of Life*

The Crown of Life is useful for this research in being both interested in the figures of imperial romance and anti-imperialist; as shown throughout this thesis, Gissing's literary realism almost make him appear part of a group, movement, etc. but his personal views pull him back from the brink, so to speak. The twelfth edition of Corelli's *Boy* (the one used here) was published as part of Methuen's Colonial Library, which also published Robert S. Hitchens, Anthony Hope, William Le Queux, and — somewhat unusual among such company — *The Crown of Life*. Gissing's novel was somewhat derided in the press for its anti-imperialism. An unsigned

[460] Rebecca Hutcheon, discussing ideological inflection in Gissing's fiction in relation to Fyodor Dostoyevsky's, argues that 'views of ideologies of [Gissing's] novels contradict the performatively monologic ones stated in his correspondence', '*Born in Exile*, Bakhtin, and the Double-Voiced Discourse of the Epistolary Form', *The Gissing Journal*, 51.2 (2017), pp. 8–18 (p. 9).

[461] James Elwick, *Making a Grade: Victorian Examinations and the Rise of Standardized Testing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), p. 29. Hugh, Harvey, and Basil all attended grammar school at roughly the same time, i.e. in the 1860s.

review in *Literature* accused the novel of 'a good deal of unpatriotic sentiment' and 'much petulant protest against the expansion of England', concluding that the novel 'cannot be reckoned among Mr Gissing's successes'.[462] In a more sympathetic review, Henry Hyde Champion describes it as, first, a novel that raises questions about imperialism and, second, 'an indictment of the militarism of the age'.[463]

The novel does indeed represent these attitudes and illustrates a division between its characters in relation to imperialism, but more specifically, in relation to types of knowledge. The character who most represents Gissing's anti-imperialist sentiment is Arnold, who works for a British colonial company and enjoys the sense of power that it gives him; his passion is for knowledge of *practical* things, 'things alive in the world of to-day'; the British Empire is described as 'his religion' (CL, pp. 10–11). A more extremist and absurd character, Lee Hannaford, Arnold's friend, suggests that Ireland should be made into a military and naval depot, although he does not propose to 'exterminate the natives', suggesting that he is not quite in the same league as Joseph Conrad's Kurtz (*CL*, p. 12).[464] His knowledge of other countries is contaminated by a feverish imperialist imagination. By contrast, Piers enjoys study for its own sake, intellectual effort as its own reward, and quotes from Tennyson's 'Ulysses' (1842): 'To follow Knowledge like a sinking star/Beyond the utmost bound of human thought' (*CL*, pp. 33 and 35). Of his older brothers, Daniel is an idler and hypocrite and Alexander is a drifter who breaks into noisy patriotism when drunk: 'England means civilisation; the other nations don't count' (*CL*, p. 51). In Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, a revisionist pre-war

[462] Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (eds). *Gissing: The Critical Heritage* (London; Boston, MA: Routledge, 1972), p. 358.
[463] *Ibid.*, p. 360.
[464] See also Lord John Roxton's comment in *The Lost World*, 'I have a score to settle with these monkey-folk, and if it ends by wiping them off the face of the earth, I don't see that the earth need fret about it', Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Lost World*, ed. Ian Duncan (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008 reissue), p. 156.

adventure novel, the protagonist–narrator, Ed Malone, includes knowledge as one of things that 'goes to make a man'.[465]

The young Piers appears initially to be damned to the same fate as Alexander and Daniel, who are drifters, exiles somewhat in the vein of Hugh in *The Whirlpool* in going to seed. The narration is free indirect discourse, and the narrator reflects Piers's anxiety when suggesting that to pursue a steadfast course in life (that is, stick to one career) is manly, implying that the opposite, namely drifting, is unmanly (*CL*, p. 53). The term unmanly can imply feminine or boyish, of course, with the latter more appropriate in the context of the novel. Thus, the boyish adventurers so redolent of the British Empire are, in the opinion of Piers (a sensitive young intellectual) immature or not fully developed, yet they are in many cases pursuing careers steadfastly. Piers, as he himself tends to forget, has only just come of age (at the start of the novel) and is entitled to be boyish: 'Was he not an educated man, by birth a gentleman? If he had no position, why, who had at one-and-twenty? How needlessly he had been humiliating and discouraging himself!' (*CL*, p. 56). Overwork has harmed his self-confidence and affected his personal appearance (*CL*, pp. 48 and 54). His chief desire, however, is to become a man of distinction.

This is naturally difficult to achieve and requires help. Standing in the rain outside the Derwents' home, Piers observes 'no distinction between himself and the ragged, muddy crossing-sweeper; alike, they were lost in the huge welter of common London' (*CL*, p. 55); the crowds or masses of London are threatening: 'The streets of London are terrible to one who is both lonely and unhappy; the indifference of their hard egotism becomes fierce hostility; instead of merely disregarding, they crush' (*CL*, p. 57). The masses threaten to consume the individual who lacks distinction; by 'winning' the love of the ideal woman, Irene Derwent, 'a pearl of women, the prize of wealth, distinction, and high manliness', Piers may be able to

[465] Conan Doyle, *Lost World*, p. 123.

secure his own distinction (*CL*, p. 55). This may explain his willingness to lend his half-brothers money, despite knowing that they will probably not repay him, distinguishing himself from them, rising above their mediocrity and looser morals.[466]

Although they belong to the same family, Piers's education is distinct from that of his half-brothers, and it is useful to compare them to understand what makes Piers uniquely placed to defy the state's designs on him. Jerome, who considers Daniel and Alexander to be failed projects, has taken a different approach to educating his youngest son. The first two were educated according to the 'approved English model' to turn them into 'gentlemen', whereas Piers, in addition to his training in languages, having been educated in Geneva, is designed for commerce, but, as Jerome believes, if he 'were marked out for better things, this discipline could do him no harm' (*CL*, p. 69). Turning boys into gentleman is an upper-class approach to education, a holdover from earlier in the nineteenth century, as is Jerome's belief that genius will find its way, yet different kinds of education produce different concepts of 'nation', and Jerome's has affected his view of British imperialism. A narrow imperialist education, such as that found at private schools in late-Victorian England, would have given Piers a more Anglocentric world view, with other nations being perceived as inferior and therefore requiring assimilation of British cultural standards. In relation to India, Bradley Deane suggests that 'civilization meant the progress toward universal truths of science, philosophy, and ethics, and as those truths happened to be understood far better by the English, it was the moral duty of the Empire to break the shackles of backward superstition and to remake India's culture and

[466] Jerome labels them 'Alexander the Little' and 'Daniel the Purblind', damning with Classical (Alexander the Great) and Biblical (Daniel the prophet) puns, respectively, despite having named his first two sons after political figures (*CL*, pp. 56 and 67). Piers's name, by contrast, has an English literary bearing; Jerome named him after Piers Plowman, the eponymous hero of the allegorical poem by William Langland, who stood for social justice (*CL*, p. 68).

institutions on the model of England's own'.[467] Enlightenment values are used to suborn other nations.

Gissing, in reading and rereading Edward Gibbon's multivolume history of the fall of the Roman Empire (and beyond, to the fall of Constantinople), would have found much to reflect on in comparing the old empire to the current British Empire, not least the absurdities of an imperial state:

> There is nothing perhaps more adverse to nature and reason than to hold in obedience remote countries and foreign nations, in opposition to their inclination and interest. A torrent of barbarians may pass over the earth, but an extensive empire must be supported by a refined system of policy and oppression: in the centre, an absolute power, prompt in action and rich in resources: a swift and easy communication with the extreme parts: fortifications to check the first effort of rebellion: a regular administration to protect and punish; and a well-disciplined army to inspire fear, without provoking discontent and despair.[468]

This is a subject he explored in several novels (*Isabel Clarendon*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *The Whirlpool*) but most prominently in *The Crown of Life*, originally published in October 1899, about six months after the serial publication in *Blackwood's Magazine* of Joseph Conrad's own fictional critique of empire, *Heart of Darkness*.

This section provides an in-depth examination of this novel that deliberately avoids biographical criticism, which would reduce the novel's central romance between Piers Otway and Irene Derwent to the author's personal feelings towards Gabrielle Fleury. Instead, this chapter argues that Gissing's novel invests its central characters with symbolic value and, in doing so, thematises the issue of state capitalism and imperialist greed, presenting the right kind of education — a complex phenomenon — as a not universally practical alternative.[469] In Piers, Gissing creates a character who exchanges bookish pedantry for commerce, in contrast

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[467] Bradley Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 116.

[468] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 3, ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 142.

[469] The British state was essentially the English state, since it was dominated by England, as G. R. Searle notes in *A New England? Peace and War 1886–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), p. 8. As is evident throughout *The Crown of Life*, Gissing was aware of this.

to Arnold, who is 'the born man of business'; in doing so, he offers an alternative vision of the progress of England's commercial imperialism (*CL*, p. 236).

Flora T. Higgins in 'Make Love, Not War: George Gissing's *The Crown of Life*' offers a passionate response to the novel, but her critique lacks rigour, being overly synoptic and insufficiently analytical.[470] There is otherwise no sustained examination of *The Crown of Life* in the recent literature, despite several original insights offered by Hutcheon's *Writing Place*, published in 2018, including a comparison of its presentation of Cheshire and Yorkshire with that of London in relation to nationalism.[471] Possibly because Piers's desire to become a clerk is purely aspirational, there is no mention of the novel in Wild's monograph on clerks. Alexander Millen, in an article from 2023, despite arguing that Gissing's narrative style is best understood in terms of an ascendant popular culture and the expansion of the imperial regime, cites the novel just once, using the same passage previously quoted by James Joyce.[472]

As *The Crown of Life* is not a *Bildungsroman*, despite possessing elements of this genre, a certain amount of inference is required of the reader for them to understand how Piers has become the man he is, i.e. not an imperialist, including in his view of femininity. An aspiring government clerk who is initially reading for the Civil Service examination, he is a portrait of a well-educated, promising part of the Repressive State Apparatus. He is introduced as something of an outsider as he does not have the 'City countenance' (*CL*, p. 1).[473] The urban gaze on him gives way to his gaze on engravings of beautiful women: a great woman in opulent

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[470] Flora T. Higgins, 'Make Love, Not War: George Gissing's *The Crown of Life*', *The Gissing Journal*, 53.2 (2019), pp. 10–22.

[471] Hutcheon notes Irene's and Piers's family connections to Cheshire and Yorkshire, respectively, and contrasts the kinds of nationalism Gissing ascribes to the north of England with that he links to London: Cheshire's 'innate practicality and distance from London […] can provide a version of place-based nationalism at odds with affected drawing-room cosmopolitanism, Imperialism and Little Englandism', Hutcheon, *Writing Place*, p. 26. See also pp. 190, 206–7.

[472] Alexander Millen, 'George Gissing Goes Out in Style: The Syntax of Class after 1890', in *Modern Language Quarterly*, 84.3 (2023), 323–46 (334), https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-10574864, accessed 1 Aug 2024. Joyce considered Gissing a poor prose writer based on this passage.

[473] At the beginning of the novel, he is living in the rural village of Ewell, Surrey; he lives with/rents a room from the Hannafords, although he has lived in London before — *CL*, pp. 3, 4, 13.

surroundings whom he feels smiles just for him, a maiden of Hellas with a translucent robe clinging to her perfect body, and a peasant girl with 'eyes revealing the heart at one with nature' (*CL*, p. 2).[474] In looking at these pictures, his boyish imagination creates a threefold paradigm of the ideal woman: a luxuriant lady without detachment or superciliousness; a maiden redolent of epic and idyll who will transform his worship into desire; and a strong and graceful girl with chastened pride.[475] This scene provides us with insight into his education, which is obviously classical, and the immaturity of his imagination, due to the broad differentiation and lack of realism (we later learn that his education began at a private school in London, after which he was moved to a school in Geneva, where he completed his education). Art dictates the tenets of his ideal of womanhood. Daniel describes Piers's late mother as 'a most charming and admirable woman' based on her portrait, so a Freudian love of his mother is displaced by her death until he can find a wife (*CL*, p. 5).[476] The novel introduces women as picturesque, unrealistic, and beyond the reach of the protagonist. Moreover, Mrs Jacks is described as the ideal of a late-Victorian wife: 'a brilliant complexion, a perfect profile', 'immutable sweetness', 'impeccable self-control'; her breeding is '[b]eyond criticism' and her education is 'excellent' (*CL*, p 8). The novel introduces femininity as picturesque, unrealistic, beyond the reach of the protagonist. David Grylls argues that '[b]lurrily idealized portraits of women crop up in all Gissing's early books, and a few of his later ones'; moreover, in reference to the pictures in the shop window, he suggests that '[e]ach one of these icons held a permanent place in Gissing's imagination. While the maiden transparently epitomizes the sensuous appeal of the classics, the other pictures neatly suggest a revealing class bifurcation: for some years Gissing could not

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474 Later, the details of Irene's face are '*engraved* on his memory, once and for ever' — *CL*, p. 30, emphasis added.

475 Although Piers is tempted by prostitutes, he is drawn to them for companionship rather than sexual desire and resists the temptation. David Grylls, 'Gissing and Prostitution', in *George Gissing and the Woman Question: Convention and Dissent*, ed. Christine Huguet and Simon J. James (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2019 reprint [2013]), pp. 13–27 (p. 17).

476 The 'portrait' is later described as a framed photograph (*CL*, p. 111).

decide between two contrasting ideals of woman — modestly draped refinement or franker earthiness.'[477] This is not peculiar to *The Crown of Life*, however, since two such icons of classics and class are already present in Gissing's first published work, in Helen Norman and Carrie Mitchell, respectively.

In terms of class, Gissing is attentive to the social codes that govern his characters' behaviour and appearance, the education and breeding that are evident in their deportment.[478] Daniel, Piers's half-brother, is more compliant with social codes, dressing and acting respectably, whereas Piers 'still betrayed something of the boy in tone and gesture, something, too, of the student accustomed to seclusion' (*CL*, p. 3).[479] Their accents are also noticeably different, with Daniel's conferring on himself social distinction and Piers's being 'less markedly refined' yet 'with much more of individuality' (*CL*, p. 3). In recommending that Piers should have worn a frock coat for his meeting with John Jacks — 'you'll find it indispensable if you are going into that world', Daniel betrays an interest in sartorial customs above anything else, socially significant yet trivial to Piers (*CL*, pp. 5–6). As described in the anonymously published *The Gentleman's Art of Dressing with Economy* (1876), appearance and class status are closely linked, yet the book's author also suggests that knowing how to dress well is an innate quality derived from class; one cannot simply wear expensive clothes to become upper class, as Daniel believes.[480]

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[477] David Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2016 [1986]), p. 142.
[478] This is not dissimilar to the performance of culture/respectability. For a fuller discussion of this, see Chapter 1 of this thesis.
[479] Daniel's face is partially likened to an actor's, offering a clue to the performative nature of his social abilities — *CL*, p. 2.
[480] Quoted in Martin Danahay, 'Dr. Jekyll's Two Bodies', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 35.1 (2013), 23–40 (26), https://doi.org/10.1080/08905495.2013.770616, accessed 3 Aug 2024. Furthermore, the social gap between the Derwents, Jacks, and others, on the one hand, and the Otways, on the other, is stressed by Alexander's improper (though also drunken) conduct outside Mr Jacks's house as other guests are arriving; he tells Piers 'You'll want a whisky-and-soda after this job' (*CL*, p. 60). It is a comic scene, yet in causing Irene, who overhears Alexander's remarks, to postpone a meeting between Piers and her father, his behaviour highlights the fact that social codes can be trivial or important based on class distinctions.

While Daniel is strict in his adherence to social codes, Piers, being '[a]t best a learned pedant', has rejected serving the British state but is on the path to becoming a capitalist, though not in Britain (*CL*, p. 152). He thus appears to initially reject the state apparatus in favour of the ideology that underpins it. He develops his own performative potential, but only after he has become a successful merchant abroad (in Odessa): he notices that the 'uneducated'/servant class respect him as 'one sensibly above them, with a solid right to rule', which may be explained by his 'quiet air of authority' (*CL*, p. 144). Gissing presents in Piers a mind that changes with time: he did not possess this air of authority as a younger man, when his bookish proclivities took up his energies; several years later, with his old career aspirations behind him and new, more lucrative prospects ahead of him, this has altered. Amid all the personal complexities of the character (inherited traits, unusual education, especially compared to his brothers, etc.), he is out of place in England simply because England appears only to offer him a career as an agent of imperial capitalism.

The main reason for his change of heart is his love of Irene, whom he later synonymises with England (*CL*, p. 162). However, his understanding of capitalism is subversive: 'our man of business is a creation of our century, and as bad a thing as it has produced. Commerce must be humanised once more. We invented machinery, and it has enslaved us — a rule of iron, the servile belief that money-making is an end in itself, to be attained by hard selfishness' (*CL*, p. 156).

What is at stake for Piers, then, is whether the country he loves (England/Irene) will accept his version of capitalism or reject him in favour of Arnold, who represents the late-Victorian standard of capitalism, that is efficient imperialist greed. Irene's rebuttal indicates that she has blindly accepted the ideology of the state ('what would have been the history of England these last fifty years, but for our men of iron selfishness? Isn't it a fact that only in this way could we have built up an Empire which ensures the civilisation of the world?') (*CL*, p.

157). She has evidently never questioned the nature of this 'civilising' of the world; indeed, in her assessment of the two men, she considers Piers boyish and full of 'vague idealisms' with 'nothing ripe', whereas Arnold is 'a mature and vigorous man, English to the core, stable in his tested views of life, already an active participant in the affairs of the nation and certain to move victoriously onward; a sure patriot, a sturdy politician' (*CL*, p. 160). For Irene, Arnold represents science and strong-mindedness, whereas Piers represents the arts and weak-mindedness, yet even in the midst of her engagement to the former, she thinks of Piers' verses, showing that she is not convinced by the former (*CL*, p. 197). It is the Russian influence — her friend, Helen Borisoff — that helps her to balance these two disciplines in her mind: 'In Helen [...] she knew for the first time a woman who cared supremely for music, poetry, pictures, and who combined with this a vigorous practical intelligence. Helen could burn with enthusiasm, yet never exposed herself to suspicion of weak-mindedness' (*CL*, p. 197).

This disengagement from the love of science above all, the belief in technological progress alongside moral improvement, is essential to Irene's acceptance of Piers's ideas:

> There's the pity — the failure of science as a civilising force. I know [...] that there are men whose spirit, whose work, doesn't share in that failure; they are the men — the very few — who are above self-interest. But science on the whole, has come to mean money-making and weapon-making. It leads the international struggle; it is judged by its value to the capitalist and the soldier. (*CL*, p. 289)

In Piers's dialogue with Irene, both are in agreement that peace must be adopted as a religion to fight the easily exploited products of scientific progress. Irene's education respects both science and the humanities; in having Irene being forced to choose between the two representatives, Arnold and Piers, Gissing hints that a person's education will imbue them with more sympathy for one branch of knowledge than the other.

Piers's education has made him patriotic in a peaceful and non-blustering way. He does not reject patriotism but only *a particular kind* of patriotism, that is, the 'loud narrowness' of 'shouted politics' (or bluster) (*CL*, p. 163). When walking the streets of London, he considers the individual versus the state; the buildings serve as edifices or monuments to a commercial state: 'The brute force of money; the negation of the individual — these, the evils of our time,

found their supreme expression in the City of London'. He also notes the ruthlessness of competition: 'the din of highway and byway was a voice of blustering conquest, bidding the weaker to stand aside or be crushed'. (*CL*, p. 164)[481] This observation contains the triple threat of urban modernity ('the din of highway and byway'), imperialism ('blustering conquest'), and Spencerian survival of the fittest ('bidding the weaker to stand aside or be crushed'). Irene's name inevitably reminds Piers of the Greek goddess of peace, Eirene; thus, if she chooses Arnold over him, peace is lost to modernity (*CL*, p. 166).

Miseducating the Literate

The masses were taught to read so they could be manipulated by the state for its commercial interests and expansionist enterprises. The jingoism and propaganda pushed by the British press seem to start where boys' imperialist educations leave off. Gissing's novel explicitly links national degeneration to the British Empire, as explained by John Jacks:

> I'm afraid the national character is degenerating. We were always too fond of liquor, and Heaven knows our responsibility for drunkenness all over the world; but worse than that is our gambling. You may drink and be a fine fellow; but every gambler is a sneak, and possibly a criminal. We're beginning, now, to gamble for slices of the world. We're getting base, too, in our grovelling before the millionaire—who as often as not has got his money vilely. This sort of thing won't do for 'the lords of human kind.' Our pride, if we don't look out, will turn to bluffing and bullying. I'm afraid we govern selfishly where we've conquered. We hear dark things of India, and worse of Africa. And hear the roaring of the Jingoes! Johnson defined Patriotism you know, as the last refuge of a scoundrel; it looks as if it might presently be the last refuge of a fool. (*CL*, p. 180)

Around the time of the publication of *The Crown of Life*, Conrad was hinting at the darkest secrets of the Belgian Congo in *Heart of Darkness*.[482] Here, dark things are at a remove, only reported as hearsay (the British newspapers, as Piers knows, being in their own way as censored as the Russian newspapers), yet foolish jingoism serves as a sudden blinding flash to prevent

[481] Cf. the wall of adverts on the underground station wall in Gissing, *Jubilee*, p. 259.
[482] For Conrad's possible real-life sources for his novella, see Alan Simmons, '[Conrad, Casement, and the Congo Atrocities]', reprinted in Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 4th edn, ed. Paul B. Armstrong (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 181–92.

people from seeing through the darkness.[483] By the end of the novel, Alexander has become a dramatic and musical agent, writing and promoting jingoistic ditties in the music halls, as well as being a confirmed liar and scoundrel; thus, he is well suited to being part of the propagandist machine.

For Piers, newspapers are extensions of the aims of commercial imperialism and enemies of peace. He has experienced the censorship of Russian media, yet is well aware that there are 'newspaper proprietors in every country, who would slaughter half mankind for the pennies of the half who were left, without caring a fraction of a penny whether they had preached war for a truth or a lie'. He sees newspapers as a potential cause of the 'next great war' and manufacturers of opinion, rather than reflecting what the public think: 'The business of newspapers, in general, is to give a show of importance to what has no real importance at all — to prevent the world from living quietly — to arouse bitterness when the natural man would be quite different' (*CL*, p. 158).

While newspapers are meant to keep the literate population informed, novels can be considered 'rot' if they appeal to a lower-middle/upper-working-class readership. In Irene's reading of a novel, we see the degree of 'civilisation' she ascribes to certain classes. She throws the book onto a table in disgust:

> No, I can't stand that! […] It's too imbecile. It really is what our slangy friend calls 'rot', and very dry rot. […] An awful apparatus of mystery; blood-curdling hints about the hero, whose prospects in life are supposed to be utterly blighted. And all because—what do you think? Because his father and mother forgot the marriage ceremony. (*CL*, p. 116)

Helen Borisoff considers this a sign of 'emancipation' (*CL*, p. 116), she tries to argue that in certain social circles, such situations would not be unusual, with Irene responding 'Oh yes! Shopkeepers and clerks and so on. But the book is supposed to deal with *civilised* people. It

[483] '[T]o politicians like Salisbury jingoism was not a useful political fuel but a blind force, "a strain of pure combativeness" at the base of society', John Darwin, *Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System 1830–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 95.

really made me angry!' (*CL*, p. 116).[484] Her literary taste and socio-economic sympathies are thus aligned.

Irene reveals her sympathy for the imperialist State, contrasting Arnold's personality with the 'robustious semi-civilisation' of his fellow colonists (*CL*, p. 123). Here, Gissing problematises the issue of imperialist masculinity by presenting a hierarchy within this group of colonialists and showing that there are degrees of distinction within it by which a woman such as Irene might be successfully duped. Even Dr Derwent is forced to admit that Arnold's faults are balanced by his 'aristocratic temper' (*CL*, p. 123). However, Irene also begins to understand empire as something beyond its baser significance; instead, she starts to see the immense power that it represents (*CL*, p. 123). She is in danger of being awed by the State, which emblematises her class status, her significance in society, yet she considers Piers's idolatrous poetry as distinct from Arnold's interests; literary merit (or lack thereof), as in the case of the 'imbecile' novel, represents class distinction and snobbery.

In presenting the complex socio-political life of the Jacks family, Gissing shows how an imperialist ideologue can develop and/or be inadvertently nurtured. Arnold spends part of each day at the offices of an unnamed company, one that is linked to an important British colony, presumably based in London, so he is remote from the colony itself (the reader is left to guess — India, perhaps). Since his interest in this colony was ignited 'at the time when he was gaining vigour and enlarging his experience in world-wide travel', he is portrayed as something of a conqueror on a modest scale (*CL*, p. 10). In contrast to Piers, who is both boyish and studious, Arnold seems effortlessly knowledgeable of practical things. Unlike his father, he dislikes poetry (amusingly, he vows to severely condense Tennyson's *In Memoriam* into a significantly shorter poem — though, interestingly, has nothing to say on its homosexual

[484] Emphasis added.

theme) (*CL*, p. 10).[485] Arnold's love of the British Empire is compared to a religion, which is a natural link given the proselytising missionary aspects of British imperialism.[486] His support of Home Rule in Ireland, a pressing colonial concern in the late-Victorian period, is merely a disguised mistrust of Ireland's ability to rule its own affairs: 'I would grant Home Rule of the completest description, and I would let it run its natural course for — shall we say five years? When the state of Ireland had become intolerable to herself and dangerous to this adjacent island, I would send over dragoons' (*CL*, p. 11). Arnold's charm and restless spirit help explain why his intolerant views are tolerated, and his mother does not express her opinion on Home Rule, which she is against, as she thinks it would be an 'error in taste' to 'proclaim divergence from her husband's views' (*CL*, p. 11).

Arnold's education appears to have given him charm and other seductive qualities but he reflects the State's imperialist project: barbarism in civility's clothing. He impresses Irene when he reveals his friendship with Trafford Romaine, the 'Atlas of our Colonial world; the much-debated, the universally interesting champion of Greater British interests!' (*CL*, p. 74 — in this passage, the narrator ironically co-opts Arnold's enthusiasm). According to Arnold, Trafford is 'the greatest man in the Empire!' and holds the 'true Imperial conception', although he does not explain exactly what this true conception is. Although Arnold is filled with hero worship and patriotic fervour, in Irene's company he holds back from excessive vivacity (unlike, say, Alexander Otway when drunk) due to 'good form', talking like a typical public schoolboy (*CL*, p. 75). This reserve and politeness, a by-product of a rich boy's education, is the veneer of civility, a seductive mask to hide the barbarism of imperial ventures. Gissing, all too aware of this, nonetheless acknowledges that this is what makes him attractive; it is the very aspect of his personality that compels confidence. Gissing also highlights the link between

[485] This contrasts with Piers's appreciative quotation of two lines from the same poet's 'Ulysses', *CL*, p. 35.
[486] See, for example, Andrew Porter, '"Cultural imperialism" and protestant missionary enterprise, 1780–1914', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 25.3 (1997), 367–91. doi:10.1080/03086539708583005, accessed 12 May 2024.

the world of imperialism and that of sport: 'He followed Trafford Romaine as at school he had given allegiance to his cricket captain; impossible to detect a hint that he felt the life of peoples in any way more serious than the sports of his boyhood, yet equally impossible to perceive how he could have been more profoundly in earnest' (*CL*, p. 75).[487] Thus, he is a paradoxical figure, at once deadly serious and utterly trivial. Irene is able to see through his mask, comparing him to a 'high-bred bull-dog endowed with speech' (*CL*, p. 75). She asks him, pointedly, if he considers the British race 'the finest fruit of civilisation', which of course he does, yet he is unaware of any irony when he compares the British Empire to the Roman Empire, insisting that 'there are no new races to overthrow us' (*CL*, p. 76). Gissing knew the central lesson of Gibbon well, that any empire, even the most extensive and powerful, will inevitably collapse in time.

As elsewhere in Gissing, culture is the domain of the privileged few, but in *The Crown of Life*, we see it threatened by New Imperialism. In his description of Irene's maternal cousins, whose rural house contains a library which supplies the 'essentials of culture', and in Jerome Otway's poring over Dante, Gissing shows that culture is the product of leisure and reading the praxis of the few (*CL*, p. 79). Irene's mother's cousins also offer wisdom, and Irene is aware that the 'smartness' which is so effective in the polite society of London is unnecessary here: 'The things of life and intellect appeared in their true proportions' (*CL*, p. 80). The cousins accurately identify Arnold, based on Irene's description of him, as a new type of Englishman or 'perhaps of an old type under new conditions', which refers to the new imperialism and the resurrection of the hero worship of an earlier period, specifically mentioning Walter Raleigh (*CL*, p. 80). Cecily Devereux argues that '[t]he New World has always served as a site for the

[487] On the significant role that sport played in the transmission of imperial and national ideas from the late-nineteenth century and beyond, see Richard Holt, 'Empire and Nation', in *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, Oxford Studies in Social History (Oxford, 1990; online edn, Oxford Academic, 2011), pp. 203–79. Althusser, classifying sport as a cultural ideological state apparatus, mentions its role in chauvinism, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', p. 104.

potential realization of a fantasy of pastoral recovery for the Old. The late Victorian version of this fantasy differed from earlier Old World visions of the New only in being couched within the period's imperialist discourses of race regeneration, social purity, and imperial renewal — what Bernard Semmel has called "imperial social reform", and what is often identified as the "New Imperialism."'[488] Concerning the expansion of England, a popular topic of the day, one of the cousins wryly questions the notion of civility that is being produced by thuggish imperialism: 'It won't do for a great people to say, "Make room for us, and we promise to set you a fine example of civilisation; refuse to make room, and we'll blow your brains out!" One doubts the quality of the civilisation promised' (*CL*, p. 80).

The cousins are unable to convince Irene, who is impressed by Arnold, despite his flaws, and as the reasons for this are not made explicit, several suggestions can be made. Her moderately wealthy background means that she must be part of the imperialist system, that is, the State has given her privilege; thus, she must support the State's ideology. Alternatively, it is simpler human magnetism, Arnold's immense confidence assuring Irene that he is right-headed and rational; a 'barbaric civilisation' such as that produced by the British state requires 'civilised barbarians' to carry out its work. It is also important that the state ideological apparatus ensures that its citizens believe that they are civilising other countries, as the merchant whom Piers encounters in Liverpool believes:

> I say that it's our duty to force our trade upon China. It's for China's good—can you deny that? A huge country packed with wretched barbarians! Our trade civilises them—can you deny it? It's our duty, as the leading Power of the world! Hundreds of millions of poor miserable barbarians. And […] what else are the Russians, if you come to that? Can they civilise China? A filthy, ignorant nation, frozen into stupidity, and downtrodden by an Autocrat! (*CL*, pp. 254–5)

[488] Cecily Devereux, 'New Woman, New World: Maternal Feminism and the New Imperialism in the White Settler Colonies', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 22.2 (1999), 175–84 (175–6). doi:10.1016/S0277-5395(99)00005-9, accessed 12 May 2024.

There is hypocrisy here, since the merchant has been inculcated with British state ideology, and is unable to see beyond that. Duty is the imperialist's refrain to justify its cruel treatment of foreign subjects.

Gissing also presents the imperialist as using the language and ideology of romance, with the 'civilising' instinct in Arnold bleeding over into his romantic life. When Irene insists on ending their engagement to be married, Arnold asks if she is one of the women who 'has to be conquered', and in contemplating how the cancellation of their marriage should be handled, describes it as potentially 'unchivalrous' (*CL*, pp. 234–5). When Arnold insists on their marriage going ahead regardless, the free indirect discourse of the narrative co-opts his militaristic language:

> All the man's pride rose to assert *dominion*. The prime characteristic of his nation, that personal arrogance which is the root of English freedom, which accounts for everything best, and everything worst, in the growth of English power, possessed him to the exclusion of all less essential qualities. He was the *subduer* amazed by improbable defiance. He had never seen himself in such a situation; it was as though a *British admiral on his ironclad* found himself mocked by some elusive little gunboat, newly invented by the *condemned foreigner*. His intellect refused to acknowledge the possibility of discomfiture; his soul raged mightily against the hint of bafflement. Humour would not come to his aid; the lighter elements of race were ousted; he was solid insolence, wooden-headed self-will. (*CL*, p. 238, emphases added)

The imagery Gissing is presenting here is comic, yet Arnold's humour, a characteristic of his until now, is absent. The novel uses his own language to mock him in this passage.

In Gissing, a good education is not merely a grounding for a career; it is crucial to self-realisation. Mrs Hannaford hopes that her sister, who has recently been bereaved of a rich American husband, will send her some money. She also has a distinguished but not wealthy brother, Dr Derwent (the novel somewhat contradicts this later on, suggesting that he has moderate wealth due to a mechanical invention — *CL*, p. 83). Unfortunately for Mrs Hannaford, 'little care had been given to her education; her best possibilities lay undeveloped' (*CL*, p. 18). There is a sense that, had more attention been given to her education, she might have avoided an unhappy marriage.

Is a good education the key to success in life? Clearly, Gissing gives the character of Irene the potential to be attracted by two men (or two kinds of man): she has the wit to find

Piers engaging and the love of the active life to be attracted to Arnold. The question being raised here is what will make the difference? Furthermore, is her wit enough to help her avoid a marriage as unhappy as Mrs Hannaford's? Irene's education is 'vastly better' than Olga's (*CL*, p. 20).

As in real life, in Gissing's novel a good education is not sufficient to prevent young men from desiring a colonial career. Therefore, the personal qualities that add to an education or colour it, are important too. Even in a minor character, Gissing shows how youthful promise can be squandered on fashionable militarism. Irene's brother, Eustace, although not a conspicuously brilliant scholar, is nonetheless introduced as something of an ideal of young manhood: 'he had in perfection the repose of a self-conscious, delicately bred, and highly trained Englishman. In a day of democratisation, he supported the ancient fame of the University [of Oxford] which fostered gentleman' (*CL*, p. 20). Here and elsewhere, Gissing considers the democratisation of English society (culture, literature, etc.) one of the negative aspects of modernity. Although Eustace is athletic, he engages in physical activity purely for the sake of exercise and 'not for the pride of emulation' (*CL*, p. 20); thus, Gissing initially distinguishes the character from the kind of athleticism favoured by Arnold. Gissing also distinguishes him from Piers, who overworks himself for the civil service examination. Despite earlier efforts, Piers gave up on a career in law, whereas Eustace is successfully studying for the bar. Five years later, however, Eustace appears to idolise Arnold, successfully modelling himself on the imperialist in his speech and mannerisms (*CL*, pp. 198, 201) and eventually marries the widowed Mrs Jacks. Thus, he has, despite early promise suggesting otherwise, succumbed to emulation of fashionable imperialism/militarism.

Irene, in questioning Piers about what possibilities his career in government might open up for him, betrays her socio-economic concerns, whereas his initial interests lie in a career that will allow him to engage in study for its own sake (*CL*, p. 33), though he later expresses

regret for this—'with rage he looked back upon those insensate years of study, which had weakened him just when he should have been carefully fortifying his constitution' (*CL*, p. 99). In the milieu in which he finds himself, with Arnold and Hannaford, such an ostensibly aimless existence should be anathema to him. Indeed, Piers is well aware that his chosen career is rather dull and unambitious, and meeting Irene triggers a desire to change course:

> A dull, respectable clerkship; with two or three hundred a year, and the chance of dreary progress by seniority, till it was time to retire on a decent pension? That, he knew, was what the Civil Service meant. The far, faint possibility of some assistant secretaryship to some statesman in office; really nothing else. His inquiries had apprised him of this delightful state of things, but he had not cared. Now he did care. He was beginning to understand himself better. (*CL*, pp. 34–5)

Directly working for the State can thus be interpreted as not understanding oneself, since for most people, it is a sacrifice of individuality. What has confused Piers seems to be his lack of worldly experience (due to youth) and his love of study for its own sake, being happiest 'when, throwing himself into bed after some fourteen hours of hard reading, he felt the stupor of utter weariness creep upon him, with certainty of oblivion until the next sunrise' (*CL*, p. 35).[489] A psychological contributing factor to his inability to settle on a career may be his somewhat peripatetic existence, unusual among his milieu.

Social codes can be useful in keeping a country's population under control, but Piers is somewhat resistant to them, making him less malleable as a subject of the state. We see his awareness of the social influences at work on him at his father's funeral:

> Had he obeyed his conscience, he would have followed the coffin in the clothes he was wearing, for many a time he had heard his father speak with dislike of the black trappings which made a burial hideous; but enforced regard for public opinion, that which makes cowards of good men and hampers the world's progress, sent him to the outfitter's, where he was duly disguised. With the secret tears he shed, there mingled a bitterness at being unable to show respect to his father's memory in such small matters. That Jerome Otway should be buried as a son of the Church, to which he had never belonged, was a ground of indignation, but neither in this could any effective protest be made. Mute in his sorrow, Piers marvelled with a young man's freshness of feeling at the forms and insincerities which rule the world. He had a miserable sense of his helplessness amid forces which he despised. (*CL*, p. 108)

All characters in the novel appear to be conscious of their own adherence to (or disobedience of) social codes of conduct, dress, and so on, as well as other characters' adherence to codes or not—for example, Irene notices Olga's decline into Bohemianism, not least through her

[489] It is worth bearing in mind that education is separate ontologically from 'experience'.

unusual ‘walking-dress’, in contrast to Irene’s dress, in colours considered aesthetic in the late 1880s (*CL*, pp. 131–2 and 127). Daniel affects an Oxford accent and his concern for gentlemanly appearance and, to a lesser extent, conduct (*CL*, p. 110).

Killing Pater

As seen in Chapter 2, to serve the state while nurturing a Paterian inwardness produces monsters of solitude. Piers seeks a career that might incorporate Paterian individualism, offering a ‘way out’ for such domesticated human animals as Hugh. As shown in the last chapter, Paterian aesthetics are to some a substitute for religion; similarly, in *The Crown of Life*, empire is used by some as a substitute for religion. John Sloan identifies a link between sexual barrenness and socio-political disintegration in Gissing’s novel:

> Piers Otway’s version of the City indicates a world where the forces of oppression have become obscure, but systematic. He sees the triumphant façade of its ‘huge rampart-streets’ as part of a huge machine which reduces man to ‘a portion of an inconceivably complicated mechanism’. The novel itself opposes militarism, newspaper jingoism and ‘hard selfishness’. Lee Hannaford [and] Arnold Jacks […] conflate civilisation with racial superiority in a commonplace justification of imperialism, but are themselves seen to be unresponsive to true culture and civilising influences. [Jack and Hannaford’s] sterility is seen to be a symptom of a new, acquisitive, power-hungry society which channels and perverts the vital sources of man’s instinctual physical life. The correlation of barren sexuality with a wider pattern of social and cultural disintegration becomes a significant index of the interpenetration of the private and the social, of inner and outer worlds.[490]

Sloan is correct in his observation that Hannaford and Arnold conflate civilisation with racial superiority to justify imperialism, but they are unresponsive to ‘true culture and civilising influences’ only insofar as they repurpose it towards their own ends; in other words, civilisation has led them to where they are.

Hannaford has use value for the state, thanks to the almost cartoonishly enlarged mania, greed, and xenophobia of imperialism that represents a component of his individualism. His is not quite the kind of cursed education discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis; instead, the state not only sanctions but also provides this education, a blessing that is also a curse. The publication of *The Crown of Life* preceded the outbreak of the Second Boer War, yet it describes

[490] Sloan, *Cultural Challenge*, pp. 146–7.

several issues affecting both sides between the First Boer War and the prelude to the second one. Hannaford has invented a new gun and a new kind of explosive, the latter of which he tries to sell to the British government for a fortune (*CL*, p. 84). Mining engineers, prospectors, and businessmen had entered the Transvaal but had been stymied by oppressive taxation, including the monopoly on dynamite.[491] People such as Hannaford are therefore extremely valuable to the state in its endeavours of greed abroad. Piers compares the house in Surrey to an armoury (*CL*, p. 12).

Unsurprisingly, Arnold is fascinated by Hannaford: 'He loves his country, and is using his genius in her service' (*CL*, p. 12 — we find later that they are similarly entertaining in conversation — p. 16). Hannaford is a clearly unhinged and potentially very dangerous individual, yet in Arnold's (and doubtless many others') opinion, he is perfectly suited to the national mania, greed, and xenophobia of imperialism; indeed, in his attempt to facilitate murder on a global scale by selling explosives (or an explosive invention) to the British government, he has magnified his individuality to state level. Thus, the state affirms, normalizes, and assimilates a selfish and insane individual based on their use value. This is not to oversimplify the character: his wife considers him 'profoundly selfish, and recognised the other faults which had hindered *so clever a man* from success in life; indolent habits, moral untrustworthiness, and a conceit which at times menaced insanity' (*CL*, p. 16—emphasis added). He also hates art (whereas Arnold is indifferent) and is estranged from his wife, who is 'something of an artist': '[he] spoke of all art with contempt — except the great art of human slaughter' (*CL*, p. 16). Despite his linguistic talent, he 'at heart distrusted and despised all but English-speaking folk' (*CL*, p. 16).

The family unit (an ideological state apparatus, according to Althusser) has not accommodated him, indeed he is isolationist, yet the State can potentially find use in him. Five

[491] Searle, *A New England?*, p. 269. For a detailed account of the Second Boer War, see pp. 275–307.

years later, he is successfully working for an explosives manufacturer (*CL*, p. 202). Whether this is producing explosives for the empire is not explained but is a valid possibility, and would suggest that his contribution is destruction. There is a peculiar irony to Dr Derwent's suggestion that someone should 'explode' Hannaford's head off, since the latter's potential contribution is death on a large scale; therefore, the ideas in his head would be better if his head did not exist (*CL*, p. 202).[492]

The question of how barbarous civilisation really is, is a serious one posed by the novel. Gissing also presents this question elsewhere, for example in *In the Year of Jubilee*. Moreover, there is an obvious parallel between Hannaford in *The Crown of Life* and Hugh in *The Whirlpool*: the latter's sexual impotence reveals an inner world crushed by his domestic environment. Civilisation for him is killing animals and subjugating 'inferior' races abroad. That his pent-up aggression leads to manslaughter of a dangerous Paterian dilettante is perhaps a sign of success, an indication of the absurdity of civil society.

[492] Alexander bears comparison with Hannaford and Arnold. His patriotism is xenophobic and centred around his profession; he believes that 'the Englishman is the top of creation', although he is quick to amend this to 'English, Irish, or Scotch' (forgetting Welsh) because his wife is Irish (*CL*, p. 51). He claims to have travelled and seen the world, though it is not clear how far. To him, England is synonymous with civilisation and 'the other nations don't count', and war is 'glorious' (*CL*, p. 51). Civilisation, from his perspective, is not civil; it is wild, domineering, and destructive.

5. Educational Capital and Drudgery

> 'Few who are not writers — and especially not writers of fiction — can know the strain imposed by literary "creation".'[493]
>
> 'I was not sorry that he failed with periodical literature, for writing for reviews or newspapers is bad training for one who may aspire to write works of more permanent interest. A young writer should have more time for reflection than he can get as a contributor to the daily or even weekly press. Ernest himself, however, was chagrined at finding how unmarketable he was.'[494]

The previous chapters examined how Corelli, Pater, and Gissing, in different ways, encouraged their readers to seek individualism through high culture and self-education rather than through the state. This chapter first explores educational capital in the world of work, specifically the contrast between a pragmatic professionalism and writerly literary perfectionism in *New Grub Street*. If the goal of education is individualism, employment should ideally serve to reify this, yet most work in the late-nineteenth century mocks individualism and serves the state. As shown in Chapter 4, this theme is explicit in *The Crown of Life*; here, it is more discreet yet equally omnipresent. This chapter proposes a link between the defeated artists and triumphant capitalistic writers in *New Grub Street* and the complacent half-educated reader-consumers of *In the Year of Jubilee*, introducing real-life parallels with Gissing's characters (Stevenson/Jasper, Henry James/Edwin). This shows Gissing continuing this theme throughout his major period, albeit applying it to a different milieu. Next, this chapter examines the rough and tumble of the labour market, the allure of the prestige of writing as a profession, and so on, as a way of understanding Amy, Edwin, *et al.*'s motivations. Gissing also introduces other factors affecting the world of work and opportunity; there is an inexorability about the fates of Biffen and Edwin that is not attributable to education or effort that must be taken into account in any discussion of the novel. Finally, the chapter considers careers in friction with education, arguing that most careers cannot fulfil the promise of an education like Edwin's.

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[493] Vyver, *Memoirs of Marie Corelli*, p. 62.
[494] Butler, *Way of All Flesh*, p. 424.

The question of how to achieve individualism through education and avoid state assimilation is one that concerns Gissing as much as it did Matthew Arnold, yet the latter approached it from a different angle, believing that serving the state was the ultimate goal of the educated individual and that their potential only needed bringing out. The earlier nineteenth-century public intellectuals John Stuart Mill and Samuel Smiles believed that industriousness was valuable in allowing an individual to compensate for any apparent defects in their natural intelligence, whereas Francis Galton considered intelligence and merit to be inherited traits:

> I have no patience with the hypothesis occasionally expressed, and often implied, especially in tales written to teach children to be good, that babies are born pretty much alike, and that the sole agencies in creating differences between boy and boy, and man and man, are steady application and moral effort…The experiences of the nursery, the school, the University, and of professional careers, are a chain of proofs to the contrary.[495]

He believed that no amount of social engineering could change or ameliorate the vast innate difference between the brightest and least bright. Gissing's fiction coincides somewhat with Galton's views but the former finds hope for intellectual improvement in the innately gifted, not dissimilar to what Arnold called 'aliens', those who had the potential to make public-spirited meritocratic contributions to the state but lacked the right circumstances to bring it out.[496] Arnold believed that a national education system would achieve this; Gissing saw self-exile as a way of achieving individualism and avoiding state assimilation.

A further parallel between Gissing's time and Mill's is that both authors were aware of the need to find work that could allow them to produce serious work and indulge their intellectual proclivities somewhat while not suffering unduly and subsequently failing from exhaustion. Mill, as described in his posthumously published *Autobiography* (1873), worked up from the 'bottom of the list of clerks' in the East India Company to the role of Examiner of Indian Correspondence two years before the company's territories in India were annexed by

[495] Wooldridge, *Aristocracy of Talent*, p. 211.
[496] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

the British Crown.[497] (Gissing calls him a 'dry stick' in a letter to Wells.[498] He borrowed Mill's *Autobiography* from the library on 27 June 1892 but did not record his thoughts on it.[499]) Mill's career thus spanned the period 1823–1858. Although he worked in an earlier period, his thoughts on what career to pursue after working for the company apply almost directly to the 1880s literary scene of *New Grub Street*:

> Books destined to form future thinkers take too much time to write, and when written come, in general, too slowly into notice and repute, to be relied on for subsistence. Those who have to support themselves by their pen must depend on literary drudgery, or at best on writings addressed to the multitude; and can employ in the pursuits of their own choice, only such time as they can spare from those of necessity; which is generally less than the leisure allowed by office occupations, while the effect on the mind is far more enervating and fatiguing. For my own part I have, through life, found office duties an actual rest from the other mental occupations which I have carried on simultaneously with them. They were sufficiently intellectual not to be a distasteful drudgery, without being such as to cause any strain upon the mental powers of a person used to abstract thought, or to the labour of careful literary composition.[500]

Edwin's desire to take an easier job while writing on the side can be seen in light of this as an attempt to provide relief from the labour of careful literary composition and achieving a sense of balance amenable to a comfortable writing life. Wild is sympathetic towards Edwin's attempt to establish a work–life balance:

> Whereas [Hood and Scawthorne] appear principally designed to objectify Gissing's personal feelings of indignation and frustration, Reardon's social function in the novel is more subtly and therefore more successfully interwoven with his developing character. […] The difficulty he experiences in securing a living through literature is mercifully eased by regular office work, during which time Reardon comes to appreciate the benefits of work 'easily learnt and not burdensome'. The emotional stability provided by a stable income after an extended period of financial uncertainty also helps to stimulate Reardon's impulse to write. […] Because of the growing literary prejudice against clerical work in the 1890s, Reardon's position here provides an illuminating alternative vision of 'dull' but regular and secure employment.[501]

However, his reading ignores the Schopenhauerian aspects of Gissing's thought: here, Edwin has found a cool rock in a circle of fiery coals; it is only a temporary solution (and, as shown later in this chapter, his pursuit of an unglamorous clerical career will undermine Amy's ambitions).

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[497] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, ed. John M. Robson (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 78.
[498] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 8, p. 127.
[499] Gissing, *Diary*, p. 280.
[500] Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 79.
[501] Wild, *Rise of the Office Clerk*, p. 41.

Literature as Trade

Intellectual interests and high culture do not affect Jasper in the same way or to the same degree as they affect Edwin. In a frequently cited passage of *New Grub Street*, the former tells his sisters that 'literature nowadays is a trade': it is not about Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare any more.[502] In some respects, this is an unusual group of authors for him to introduce into the conversation, and perhaps betrays the limits of his education: Homer is an ancient poet whose life and the commercial circumstances in which he produced his verse are relatively unknown; Dante's work is the epitome of literature for the cultural elite — although, paradoxically, *The Divine Comedy* is a popular classic of world literature; and Shakespeare was a highly popular playwright of his day.[503] Indeed, Shakespeare as a playwright was conspicuously subject to the pressures of the marketplace in the sense of a paying audience. It scarcely needs pointing out that not one of the three authors is a novelist, and all three predominantly wrote verse. For Jasper, who is not as well versed in world literature as he would like people to think, they serve as representative geniuses or canonical worthies, producers of 'Great Literature', freed from market forces by the natural force of their genius. They are certainly three of the most, if not *the* most, revered authors in Western literature. (Jasper also mentions George Eliot, although this is in relation to what his sisters might write and so is used as an exemplar of great female authorship; in *In the Year of Jubilee*, Nancy Lord compares her own writing deprecatingly to George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, suggesting that female writers should compare their work only, or mainly, to other female writers.)[504]

[502] Gissing, *New Grub Street*, p. 8. See p. 12 for Edwin's comments on George Eliot *et al.*
[503] For a literary canon-related discussion of the two respective kinds of universalism represented by Dante and Shakespeare, see Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (London: Papermac, 1995), pp. 51–2.
[504] Herrnstein Smith uses the same three examples of male writers as indicative of orthodox Western education, *Contingencies of Value*, pp. 52–3. Gissing, *Jubilee*, p. 355. See also Gissing's 'The Foolish Virgin', in which Mrs Halliday says that 'Thousands of such women [as the educated lady Rosamund Jewell] — all meant by nature to scrub and cook — live and die miserably because they think themselves too good for it', in *The Day of Silence and Other Stories*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (London: Everyman, 1993), pp. 80–101 (p. 101).

Thus, in Jasper's mind, as in the minds of several authors, journalists, and critics in the 1880s, great literature and the novel sit somewhat uneasily beside each other — Walter Scott, for example, was recognised as a great novelist throughout the Victorian period but he began, and forged his reputation, by writing poetry, although his regionalism (the Borders), romanticism, and the fact that he wrote historical fiction also helped bolster the prestige of his novels.[505] (As Brantlinger notes in *The Reading Lesson*, Matthew Arnold, who applauded universal education, did not wish to see mass novel-reading; similarly, Ruskin, though he admired a few novelists including Scott and Dickens, condemned the fiction of his age.)[506] The crucial question for Jasper is not what great work he might produce but rather what he, a man of intelligence but not genius, might earn a living by. He knows the difference between great and commonplace literary talent; equally, he believes that popular 'trash' is intended as such, and therefore requires talent too: 'If only I had the skill, I would produce novels out-trashing the trashiest that ever sold fifty thousand copies. But it needs skill, mind you: and to deny it is a gross error of the literary pedants' (*NGS*, p. 13). Like Piers in *The Crown of Life*, Jasper pursued a career in the civil service as a younger man, but his ultimate career as a journalist, after failing as a novelist, serves the state by other means (p. 9). (At the opening of the novel, Jasper's face is described as being of 'bureaucratic type' (p. 5).)

Although Gissing presents him alongside Edwin for comparative purposes, it should not be assumed that they are direct opposites; Edwin, for example, is also fully aware that producing 'trash' requires a certain kind of skill and is not, as might be wrongly inferred, one of the literary pedants to which Jasper refers. In Bourdieu's terms, Jasper and Edwin are conscious that the literary field is the site of a double hierarchy: Edwin accepts the heteronomous principle but understands that he needs to be judged according to the

[505] Keating, *Haunted Study*, pp. 334–5, 351.
[506] Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, p. 19.

autonomous principle. Although Bourdieu gives as an example of the former 'bourgeois art' and of the latter 'art for art's sake', these distinctions are somewhat blurred in Gissing's novel.[507]

Edwin seeks validation from the minority, the well-educated few, but the literary marketplace of the 1880s restricts his ability to produce serious literature for this readership, effectively reducing the amount of such fiction, and certainly the amount of second- or third-rate fiction in this vein. The autonomous principle does not allow Edwin (or Biffen) to survive: 'degree specific consecration (literary or artistic prestige), that is the degree of recognition accorded by those who recognize no other criterion or legitimacy than recognition by those whom they recognize' bestows esteem but does not offer financial sustenance.[508] Edwin appears to want to be legitimised only by those rare few whom he recognises as being sufficiently well educated to appreciate his best work, although he bows to pressure from Amy and Jasper to try to produce something worthy of the market, that is, something successful in bourgeois terms. His failure to do this indicates that Gissing is aware that those lower-middle-class authors wishing to produce anything other than bourgeois literature are at risk of extinction. Thus, the new publishing world of *New Grub Street* cannot sustain the double hierarchy, restricting the type of literature that can be produced and the type of author able to produce such literature. Modernity is presented as a threat to a certain kind of writing.

This prompts questions about the kind of literature that Edwin and Biffen are producing, and the literary value, and educational value, associated with it. There is also the issue of whether Edwin's education, which includes the value he places on it, has impeded his commercial success. He is portrayed as a mediocre yet talented writer, who has enjoyed a modicum of success and misguidedly expects to be able to sustain that success: he describes

[507] Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed', *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. and intr. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 29–73 (p. 40).
[508] Bourdieu, 'Field of Cultural Production', pp. 29–73 (p. 38).

his work as not altogether common and not designed to attract the vulgar (*NGS*, p. 47). He defines his work in negative terms against what he perceives as threats to good writing: to attract the vulgar and produce common work must be avoided. Biffen writes what he hopes is the perfect novel about the working class and, in doing so, accidentally produces literary art that cannot be appreciated by working-class readers, since his ideal reader must be sufficiently well educated and disinterested to be able to understand its value. Another question, a challenging one to be sure, is what is lost by the death of these authors? Or, to rephrase, why should these authors survive? Adrian Poole argues that the characterisation of Edwin as talented but mediocre is deliberate, since it illustrates 'the *expectations* of such a man to find a role within a controlling cultural élite, such as was recognised to be in control of the major cultural institutions of previous generation, but which has now suffered an irreversible diaspora'.[509] Poole finds the emotional centre of the novel in Edwin's bitterness at no longer being a minority artist at the centre but instead at the periphery of the general culture (this recalls the issue of minority, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis).

Edwin does not lack educational or cultural capital; however, without economic capital, the educational capital is close to worthless. He rejects modernity while being fully cognisant that it will destroy him, since he lacks the economic capital to support his status as a minority artist. As Theophile Gautier said, 'Flaubert was smarter than us… He had the wit to come into the world with money, something that is indispensable for anyone who wants to get anywhere in art'.[510] It is important here to acknowledge a fine point in relation to Edwin's character: his complaint is not so much that he must produce novels that are less commercially successful but more that he must earn a living by his writing, and the only kind of writing he is able to produce is relatively unsuccessful; moreover, 'conscious insincerity of workmanship' is anathema to

[509] Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1975), p. 140.
[510] Quoted in Bourdieu, 'Field of Cultural Production', p. 68.

him (*NGS*, p. 48). Therefore, he cannot continue to produce the only kind of literature that he is capable of producing. To interpret Edwin's failure as deliberate or as a needless, vanity-inspired self-imposed exile is wrong, however: as he acknowledges, he lacks the will power to write commercially (*NGS*, p. 42).

By contrast, Jasper can do nothing else. He considers literary culture to be part of the superstructure, not the base; the drudgery of Grub Street in itself is excess/pointless/unrewarded labour.[511] His status as a man of his day, 'the literary man of 1882' at the outset of the novel, suggests fashionableness but also ephemerality. The reasons for his attraction to the literary marketplace are peculiar to the period: a century before, and a man like him would have pursued a different trade. This is most likely not the case for Edwin, whose initial interest in literature was a desire to write literary criticism. Jasper believes that position must come first for a writer such as Edwin, whose books he describes as 'not works of genius, but […] glaringly distinct from the ordinary circulating novel' (*NGS*, p. 26): 'Men won't succeed in literature that they may get into society, but will get into society that they may succeed in literature' (*NGS*, p. 27).

According to Jasper, the threat of the new Grub Street for his friend Edwin is modernity, that is, the nature of the modern literary marketplace as a technologically enhanced, global business: the latter lives in the world of Samuel Johnson's Grub Street, and is not able to survive the new version (*NGS*, p. 8). Edwin's account of himself, however, is different:

> I am no uncompromising artistic pedant; I am quite willing to try and do the kind of work that will sell; under the circumstances it would be a kind of insanity if I refused. But power doesn't answer to the will. My efforts are utterly vain; I suppose the prospect of pennilessness is itself a hindrance; the fear haunts me. With such terrible real things pressing upon me, my imagination can shape nothing substantial. (*NGS*, p. 46)

[511] The definitions of 'base' and 'superstructure' used in this thesis are those described in Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986 reprint), pp. 75–82.

For him, it is a question of will (see also *NGS*, p. 70, where Edwin talks about being 'overcome by necessity'). Jasper seems able to turn his hand to anything, and confidently believes that others can, yet he has himself failed to write fiction.

Edwin chooses to write novels, yet he is limited by the format popularised by Mudie's Circulating Library that dominated the form at the time, that is, the three-decker; he compares the thought of a blank three-volume novel having to be written to an 'interminable desert' (*NGS*, p. 44). However, even in the early 1880s, the format's eventual decline was apparent (Amy notes Jasper's awareness of this: 'in future people will write shilling books' — *NGS*, p. 49): Edwin is relieved when he reads about certain authors abandoning the 'procrustean system' in favour of single-volume books (*NGS*, p. 142). Biffen's own novel, for example, is a single volume, 'the length of the ordinary French novel' (*NGS*, p. 187). Market forces determine the type of books that can be written and, as the word 'procrustean' suggests (Edwin's word, as conveyed by Gissing's free indirect discourse), potentially suppress an author's individuality.

Biffen, however, is defiantly not interested in satisfying demand; according to him, the successful novelists of the day are 'in touch with the reading multitude; they have the sentiments of the respectable; they write for their class' (*NGS*, p. 333). Class is ambiguous here, as it may refer to intellect as well as wealth/social status. Biffen's inability to survive indicates that market forces are also a form of natural selection. His masterpiece, *Mr Bailey, Grocer*, described by one reviewer as a 'pretentious book of the *genre ennuyant*' (*NGS*, p. 431), in concentrating on the quotidian aspects of working-class life, would put off its intended audience: why read about what they already know and may have a severe distaste for? The audience is instead the middle/upper-middle-class reader, who would — to Biffen's mind — enjoy being transported to a different class, relishing the literary realism. The novel's failure suggests that middle-class readers, including the critics, are not interested either; the reader is largely left to surmise why this might be, although Jasper's suggestion that it is decent but

‘rather depressing’ provides one answer (*NGS*, p. 241). Sykes, who speaks ‘like a man of education’ and tells Edwin that Biffen originally wanted to write working-class stories for working-class readers, believes that ‘nothing can induce working men or women to read stories that treat of their own world. They are the most consumed idealists in creation, especially the women. Again and again work-girls have said to me: “Oh, I don’t like that book; it’s nothing but real life”’ (*NGS*, p. 336). The working-class novels *Kipps* and *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* (1914) and Dickens are mentioned in Rose’s *Intellectual Life*, although, regarding the latter, Sykes says that he ‘goes down only with the best of them, and then solely because of his strength in farce and his melodrama’ (*NGS*, p. 337).[512]

The Struggle for Success

The discussion so far has almost exclusively focused on the male characters of *New Grub Street*, whereas Gissing is careful to present his female characters as being part of the social system that propels the male characters into decline or success. This chapter diverges from Katherine Mullin’s characterisation of Amy as something of a femme fatale, and provides a more sympathetic interpretation; if Amy derails ‘the careers of the men she captivates’, as a femme fatale would, there is certainly no conscious malice or ill intention (*NGS*, p. xx). Rather, she is aware of herself as a commodity in the marketplace of late-nineteenth century marriage, an institution that undergoes change during the course of the novel due to the Married Women’s Property Act 1882. She is also acutely aware that if she is not married to a successful man, that is, a man with a prestigious career of some kind (not necessarily literary), she is wasting her life. In Bourdieu’s terms, for Amy, the heteronomous principle of hierarchisation and the autonomous principle of hierarchisation are interdependent: literary prestige produces success,

[512] The perceived low attention span of ‘quarter-educated’ readers and their low income would contribute to the demise of the three-decker and the popularity of the shilling book. In reality, an author such as Edwin would do well to share some of Jasper’s optimism about the new readership.

albeit potentially long-term success.[513] She is also attracted not to the industry of writing but to something else: what 'attracts and fascinates in the occupation of artist is not so much the art itself as the artist's lifestyle, the artist's life'.[514] Her youth, intelligence, and beauty have marked her out: 'I ought to have a place in the society of clever people. I was never meant to live quietly in the background. Oh, if I hadn't been in such a hurry, and so inexperienced!' (*NGS*, p. 319). The narrator explains that her education has not progressed beyond the 'final schoolgirl stage', yet through a highly useful training of the intellect under her husband's influence which led to a rejection of his tastes in favour of reading periodicals designed to popularise scientific subjects, she has started to develop into a 'typical woman of the new time, the woman who has developed concurrently with journalistic enterprise' (*NGS*, pp. 319–20).[515]

This of course recalls Jasper and not Edwin, and it is significant that Gissing's examples of the thinkers whom she has not read but whose 'tenor' or theories she knows something about are Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin (*NGS*, p. 320). Gissing suggests that she knows enough to convince others of her knowledge, which implies that she can perform culture and thereby survive among the literary denizens of drawing rooms, social functions, publishing events, and so on. In Gissing's later novel, *In the Year of Jubilee*, the events of which open in 1887, Nancy Lord has read a recently published book on evolution (unnamed, the book is likely Spencer's *The Factors of Organic Evolution* (1887)) and believes that, if necessary, she could talk about Darwinism; '[b]ut who wanted to talk about such things? After all, only priggish people'.[516] Amy knows what she needs to know to progress socially; Nancy does, too, but she is aware of the vacuity of such cultural performance. If Amy is a femme fatale, she is not acting through her own agency. Instead, she aims at the sociability required to help her husband

[513] Bourdieu, 'Field of Cultural Production', p. 38.
[514] *Ibid.*, p. 66.
[515] In the novel's final scene, Jasper tells Amy that Marian was 'only a clever school-girl', *NGS*, p. 456.
[516] Gissing, *Jubilee*, p. 83.

sustain a literary career in a viciously competitive market (and thereby provide her own living).[517]

By contrast, education to Edwin is an end in itself, and remembering classical lines and discussing scansion and metre with Biffen provide intellectual pleasure. He was educated at an 'excellent local school':

> at eighteen he had a far better acquaintance with the ancient classics than most lads who have been expressly prepared for a university, and, thanks to an anglicised Swiss who acted as an assistant in Mr Reardon's business, he not only read French, but could talk it with a certain haphazard fluency. These attainments, however, were not of much practical use; the best that could be done for Edwin was to place him in the office of an estate agent. His health was indifferent, and it seemed likely that open-air exercise, of which he would have a good deal under the particular circumstances of the case, might counteract the effects of study too closely pursued. (*NGS*, p. 51)[518]

As discussed in Chapter 4, Gissing also presents the effects of study too closely pursued in *The Crown of Life*, in Piers's cramming for the civil service examination.[519] Unlike Piers, who ultimately decides against taking the examination, Edwin pursues a studious career as a serious literary author. Edwin's excellent education in part dooms him in the new literary marketplace of his day.

His impressive education/culture is not being utilised properly or in the appropriate sphere, and the absurdity of this is taken to an extreme when he is living alone in Islington, one of the poorest parts of the city, where worth is judged by outward appearance or what Simon J. James calls 'bodily capital'.[520] When Edwin, dressed in shabby clothes, recites a passage from *Antony and Cleopatra* aloud in a back street, repeating the last two lines for the magnificence

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[517] Discussing Alfred Yule's disastrous marriage and waning career, Simon J. James suggests that 'his failure to socialize is his failure to succeed. […] Conspicuousness is both the means of success and the measure of it; the invisible writer is thus a failure.' James, *Unsettled Accounts*, p. 104.

[518] For a discussion of Edwin's and Biffen's old-style liberal education and the influence of Romanticism, see Sloan, *Cultural Challenge*, pp. 90–1. There is a brief discussion of Gissing's ironic presentation of the isolated romantic writer in the figures of Edwin, Biffen, and Sykes in Brantlinger, *Reading Lesson*, p. 14.

[519] Cramming was a popular topic in fiction throughout the nineteenth century — see Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), George Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* (1903; written in the 1870s/1880s), H. G. Wells's *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul*, and indeed, the character of Jessica Morgan in Gissing's own *In the Year of Jubilee*. See also Cordner, *Education in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*.

[520] James, *Unsettled Accounts*, p. 96, which refers to Jasper's physical decline towards the end of the novel. Gissing often shows awareness of a character's physical decline. Edwin refutes Amy's assertion that she has suffered by pointing out that she appears to be healthy (*NGS*, p. 310).

of their sound, he invites mockery from two passers-by. They consider him a 'strayed lunatic'; it makes no social sense for culture to be displayed or performed in this sphere (*NGS*, p. 301).

Within the literary marketplace, however, education and status *are* interlinked, which is important to bear in mind when considering Edwin and Amy's relationship since, together, the two things motivate their behaviour. Edwin's strong desire, like Henry James, to put only his most serious work before the public is soon undercut by economic necessity, and Amy, whose conscious aim in marriage is social distinction, is both a practical person (she suggests that he take a holiday and try to write more popular novels) and a human agent reminding Edwin of this necessity. She is aware, also, that she and Edwin differ, socially and intellectually, in terms of background, referring to how 'people of my world' would regard his giving up writing to become a clerk (*NGS*, p. 207). She considers the profession of literary man as 'one mode of distinction', especially the novelist, since they 'now and then had considerable social success' (*NGS*, p. 211). (Later in the novel, Jasper asks Marian if she wants to 'lead a simple, unambitious life? Or should you prefer your husband to be a man of some distinction?' (*NGS*, p. 419), referring to the suburban life versus the city-based life of a successful writer.) For her, as for her mother, who presents a more extreme case, a job should primarily be a mark of social distinction, an author is one 'to be welcomed in the penetralia of culture', whereas Edwin, in light of his failing health and inability to produce serious literary work, becomes more concerned about security and increasingly less inclined to engage with society in any way (*NGS*, p. 211).[521]

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[521] The following is a useful passage highlighting the differences between mother and daughter:

> Like her multitudinous kind, Mrs Yule lived only in the opinions of other people. What others would say was her ceaseless preoccupation. She had never conceived of life as something proper to the individual; independence in the directing of one's course seemed to her only possible in the case of very eccentric persons, or of such as were altogether out of society. Amy had advanced, intellectually, far beyond this standpoint, but lack of courage disabled her from acting upon her convictions. (*NGS*, p. 214)

Gissing considers social conflict to be 'savage', and Edwin and Amy's marriage arguably becomes emblematic of such conflict, with the latter's failure to understand her husband's desire for purely literary distinction and his failure to understand his wife's desire for social distinction (*NGS*, p. 210). (In Gissing's last completed novel, *Will Warburton* (1905), the title character's education and gentlemanly conduct are considered far beneath his job as a grocer and he compromises by selling books.)[522] Significantly, Edwin's desire for distinction outside of literature does not appear to exist; he believes himself extraordinary because he has written and published serious novels. Amy, by contrast, believes that he is only as good as his last achievement.

Edwin tries to assert his *individual* value through his work/education, while Amy is concerned about his, and by extension her, *social* value. When he asks Amy, 'If I had to earn my living as a clerk, would that make me a clerk in soul?', she evades the question; however, it is clear that the answer would be affirmative (*NGS*, p. 174). Judged purely as process, the drudgery and monotony of writing have much in common with menial clerical work; Edwin's 'soul' is improved by the product of his writing (i.e. serious novels) or the moral component of the job (engaging readers, not simply entertaining them), or simply working on his own, since being in the company of other workers, combined with the relatively low status of the work, would serve as a reminder that he is not a man apart. Here, the marriage as microcosm of society demonstrates the immiscibility of individual and social value. Amy is also aware of the superior value of Edwin's education, as shown by her advice to him to find a position worthy of it if he has decided not to pursue a literary career (*NGS*, p. 228). Education, for her, has social value but little intrinsic worth. In eventually marrying Jasper, who has strong social instincts, Amy confirms her preference.

[522] See, for example, Gissing, *Will Warburton: A Romance of Real Life* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), p. 296. Bowlby, *Just Looking*, p. 159.

Education is not everything, and Edwin, though impressive intellectually, is undermined by socio-economic circumstances and illness. Much of the criticism on *New Grub Street* notes the pathos of Edwin's situation while rebuking him for his mediocrity. However, it ignores his implied illness, whether mental, physical, or both. His low energy prevents him from focusing on his work and leads to lassitude and misdirection of attention, manifesting, indeed misinterpreted, as indolence and wilful self-destruction (Amy claims he has 'lost his talent', whereas John Yule declares that he 'doesn't care to work' — *NGS*, p. 216). There is also his pride or stubbornness, which thwarts his 'rescue' by Amy and her inheritance from John Yule (in distinction to the younger John Yule, or Jack) (*NGS*, p. 269). Moreover, such criticism of Edwin ignores the fact that Jasper is also threatened by mediocrity: as the latter points out to Marian, 'It is not merit that succeeds in my line; it is merit *plus* opportunity' (*NGS*, p. 419).[523] Edwin cannot survive because his temperament is not suitable for the new literary marketplace, where social ties are more important than talent. He has little social skill and is more interested in writing serious literature.

By contrast, the more journalistic characters in the novel have an optimistic temperament and know exactly how to use their education to achieve commercial success, even seeking to exploit the new Board-educated readership. Whelpdale and Jasper's discussion on a new periodical for the 'quarter-educated' is reminiscent of a parlour game, as it involves changing the names of periodicals slightly (*Chat* to *Chit-Chat* and *Tatler* to *Tittle-Tattle*), to humorous effect, so that they appeal to, and arguably mock, a mass audience:

> the great new generation that is being turned out by the Board schools, the young men and women who can just read, but are incapable of sustained attention. People of this kind want something to occupy them in trains and on 'buses and trams. As a rule they care for no newspapers except the Sunday ones; what they want is the lightest and frothiest of chit-chatty information — bits of stories, bits of description, bits of scandal, bits of jokes, bits of statistics, bits of foolery. Am I not

[523] For comparison, see Wells's *Kipps*: Sid, who is Board School-educated and therefore has less educational capital than Kipps, nonetheless succeeds on his own merit, becoming part of modern industry in the form of manufacturing bicycles. Kipps, on the other hand, inherits a fortune just as he received a paid education, yet his educational capital and cultural capital are insufficient to grant him access to high society. Kipps has opportunity without merit.

right? Everything must be very short, two inches at the utmost; their attention can't sustain itself beyond two inches. Even chat is too solid for them: they want chit-chat. (*NGS*, pp. 407–8)[524]

A rare example of a Board school-educated character in the novel is the Reardons' maid-servant (*NGS*, p. 42).[525] In light of the many accounts of such people (in this case, readers) presented in Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, Whelpdale's suggestions are broad and patronising, all essentially arising from his observation that they are 'incapable of sustained attention', and Jasper, who considers them seriously, is complicit.

Since Gissing does not provide details of the Reardons' maid-servant, we must look elsewhere for examples of similarly educated characters. In *In the Year of Jubilee*, Samuel Barmby's education is unfocused, and constant reading of newspapers, in other words journalism instead of serious reading, has rendered him incapable of sustained attention. He and his friends offer insight into the undisciplined or misguided reading of the autodidact. Gissing contrasts the value of reading serious books with that of consuming newspapers by listing some incongruities in Barmby's reading:

> Quite uneducated, in any legitimate sense of the word, he had yet learnt that such a thing as education existed, and, by dint of busy perusal of penny popularities, had even become familiar with names and phrases, with modes of thought and of ambition, appertaining to a world for ever closed against him. He spoke of Culture, and imagined himself far on the way to attain it. His mind was packed with the oddest jumble of incongruities; Herbert Spencer jostled with Charles Bradlaugh, Matthew Arnold with Samuel Smiles; in one breath he lauded George Eliot, in the next was enthusiastic over a novel by Mrs. Henry Wood; from puerile facetiae he passed to speculations on the origin of being, and with equally light heart. Save for Pilgrim's Progress and Robinson Crusoe, he had read no English classic; since boyhood, indeed, he had probably read no book at all, for much diet of newspapers rendered him all but incapable of sustained attention. Whatever he seemed to know of serious authors came to him at second or third hand. (*Jubilee*, p. 180)

A nineteenth-century reader well versed in canonical literature would likely not praise the highly popular Mrs Henry Wood alongside George Eliot, although readers' hodgepodge

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[524] Pierre Coustillas surmises that the term 'quarter-educated' was inspired by an acquaintance of Gissing's, the German linguist and amateur artist Ernst Plitt: 'Clearly the man was something of a swindler and a fool in one, also an individual who cared for the image of himself he was producing in his own eyes. Thus before they left Paris, he purchased several books in a cheap series, choosing works suggestive of hard reading like Condorcet and Pascal, and asserting that since he had little time to give to it, his reading must be "deep". Yet he could not persevere with a book or even a newspaper for more than ten minutes. Gissing must have had him in mind when he introduced into *New Grub Street* the concept of "quarter-educated" readers.' Coustillas, *Heroic Life*, vol. 2, p. 9.

[525] The fact that no personal details are provided about this servant may suggest that Gissing had little interest in portraying Board-school educated people.

approach to reading has been well documented.[526] Barmby is the 'quarter-educated' type of reader that Whelpdale and Jasper have in mind for *Chit-Chat*. Alfred Yule implies that the subtlety of one of his articles is the reason for its being ignored by readers, implying a certain kind of reader not dissimilar to Barmby (*NGS*, pp. 282–3).

Gissing satirises the real-life equivalent of Whelpdale's proposed periodical, *Tit-Bits*, while presenting the creators of such things with irony and some sympathy — after all, *Tit-Bits* was very popular among middle-class readers. The fact that such a periodical could also be very instructive or useful was not Gissing's concern, and more a consideration for a younger author such as Arnold Bennett.[527] For Jasper and Whelpdale, socio-economic developments tied to modernity and the publishing opportunities they produce (e.g. commuters reading on trains) are to be mocked, embraced, and exploited.

They are hardly exceptional. In a letter of 1886, Robert Louis Stevenson ironically advised Edmund Gosse to not try too hard with his writing: 'If an author wants to succeed, the trick is not to produce really "good work", but something less than "good", something suitable to the inferior intellectual level and aesthetic taste of the mass audience.'[528] This sounds like Jasper. However, given that much of Stevenson's work is canonical, popular with many different intellectual levels, and caters to many aesthetic tastes, 'talking down', as Gissing might characterise it, is not a creative dead-end, nor does it have a patronising effect.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Stevenson, whose *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* Gissing had read in 1886, was anathema to him by June 1888, when he noted the following in his diary: 'my prejudice against the man is insuperable, inexplicable, painful; I hate to see his name, and certainly shall never bring myself to read [another] one of his books. Don't quite

[526] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp. 365–92.
[527] See John Goode (ed.), 'Introduction', *New Grub Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. xvii.
[528] Quoted in Brantlinger, *Reading Lesson*, p. 173.

understand the source of this feeling.'[529] That he later (in 1902) considered that this may have been due to jealousy suggests that Jasper is in part based on an irrational fear of this type of writer, that is, a writer who recognises literature as a trade and is able, quite consciously, to exploit it. Indeed, Jasper disarms the reader by being fully conscious of his purely market-driven nature, while compelling and repelling the reader with his pride: 'If I seem to speak exultantly it's only because my intellect enjoys the clear perception of a fact' (p. 7).

One of Stevenson's admirers, Henry James, had a different approach to the marketplace: whereas Stevenson is somewhat more akin to Whelpdale and Jasper, James had found early success that waned with the years and is more readily comparable to Edwin or Biffen, despite obvious differences, not least James's enormous literary output. He wanted to distinguish himself in the 'age of trash triumphant', the barometer for success inevitably being commercial failure; on the other hand, he tried and failed to write popular fiction, and *Guy Domville*, his attempt to match Wilde's success on the stage, was also unsuccessful. The New York Edition, a beautifully bound, meticulously compiled, revised, and prefaced collection, was a commercial flop, and thus crowns his achievement as much as the triumvirate of novels, beginning with *The Ambassadors* (written first, though published second).[530] His ostensible self-exiling (not his physically moving to Rye), *a la* Joyce or Dante, was also banishment. Gissing, too, realised that his own appeal was only to a coterie of discerning readers.

Both Edwin and Biffen are presented with varying degrees of pathos, yet the question remains, why does it matter that they should succeed in the literary marketplace? What precisely would be lost if, say, Whelpdale, a similar character-type albeit finally successful, earned a living as 'a commission agent for some sewing-machine people' (*NGS*, p. 131)? If the

[529] Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 12–13; *Diary*, p. 33. He later proved himself wrong by reading several books by Stevenson, starting with the travelogue, *An Inland Voyage*, which he enjoyed enough to reread at a later date (*Diary*, pp. 278, 512).
[530] For an excellent account of James's preparation of this edition, see Michael Anesko, *'Friction with the Market': Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 141–62.

waste of an education is the issue, then Reardon could become a teacher and disseminate his classical learning. The threat, as Gissing presents it, is that there will be a loss in individuality. If the serious writer is driven out of the marketplace by the onerous demands of the three-decker and the related usurpation by writers of shilling shockers and journalistic writing, then the marketplace will be dictated by fashion and populated by ephemera. The Board schools will produce ignorant armies of readers to be indoctrinated by newspapers and 'cheap' fiction.

An intelligent person requires a good education but is intelligent enough to realise that education without social connections is not enough to succeed. Barmby, in noting the distinction between civilisation and barbarism in the Chinese Empire's scarcity of newspapers compared to the British Empire's, recommends Carlyle to Nancy, an author who, together with Goethe, is, according to Barmby, an education in himself (*Jubilee*, pp. 50–1). Gissing's presentation of Barmby is satirical, yet the realism of the character inheres in his consciousness of mass education: 'the people' have wider access to education and culture than ever before (*Jubilee*, p. 57). These are traditionally linked to the dominant class, and thus, the dominant class is forced to distinguish itself from the mass by redefining education and culture: 'Board educated' becomes a slur, culture becomes 'culture'.

The Soul of Man Under Capitalism

The grammar school-educated John Yule is comparable to Mrs Stratton's boys in *Isabel Clarendon* or Arnold Jacks in *The Crown of Life* in his efforts to promote the Volunteer movement and sports amongst the youth of Wattleborough and his aversion to books and libraries, reading mainly newspapers (*NGS*, pp. 16-18). He sees the Board schools and popular press as '[m]achinery for ruining the country' (*NGS*, p. 22). Milvain sees everything as an opportunity for marketable writing, even articles warning readers against reading, *a la* Thomas Carlyle (*NGS*, pp. 23, 467–8n). The resultant and deleterious effects of such articles on the

reading public are beyond his interest. Indeed, the reading public is beneath his contempt: 'it's obvious what an immense field there is for anyone who can just hit the taste of the new generation of Board school children. Mustn't be goody-goody; that kind of thing is falling out of date. But you'd have to cultivate a particular kind of vulgarity' (*NGS*, pp. 31-2). He admits later to Reardon that he will always hate the people he writes for (*NGS*, p. 67); thus, although the public demands less-than-excellent writing, it is equally created by the authors who perceive such a demand.

For all the drudgery of literary work, there is the prestige of the profession, which Amy is aware of and which clearly attracted Edwin at one time since it offers intellectual prestige or educational capital. Despite the drudgery, he considers his work to require peace of mind; that is, a certain degree of security, or even leisure, is needed to engage in such work. A famous counterexample would be Anthony Trollope, who in his *Autobiography* (published in 1883, during the period in which the novel is set) describes the unglamorous details of his literary work and provided details of his routine job at the Post Office.[531] Since Trollope's account caused some controversy, Edwin's view of literary work, at least to begin with, accords with Amy's sense of the author's career as one of prestige. This sense is also shared by lower-middle-class characters in Wells's *Kipps*: Buggins and Miss Mergle idealise the profession, with only Carshot showing awareness of the toil involved.[532] Their ignorance of the job

[531] There is no record in Gissing's letters or diary that he read the *Autobiography*. He certainly had little regard for Trollope's novels; see Gissing, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 151; vol. 3, p. 105 (the latter is addressed to Bertz: 'Trollope? Ah, I cannot read him; the man is such a terrible Philistine').

[532] 'They proceeded to enlarge upon the literary life, on its ease and dignity, on the social recognition accorded to those who led it, and on the ample gratifications their vanity achieved. "Pictures everywhere — never get a new suit without being photographed — almost like Royalty," said Miss Mergle. And all this talk impressed the imagination of Kipps very greatly. Here was a class that seemed to bridge the gulf. On the one hand essentially Low, but by factitious circumstances capable of entering upon those levels of social superiority to which all true Englishmen aspire, those levels from which one may tip a butler, scorn a tailor, and even commune with those who lead "men" into battle. "Almost like gentlefolks" — that was it! He brooded over these things in the afternoon, until they blossomed into daydreams. Suppose, for example, he had chanced to write a book, a well-known book, under an assumed name, and yet kept on being a draper all the time.... Impossible, of course, but suppose — it made quite a long dream. And at the next wood-carving class he let it be drawn from him that his real choice in life was to be a Nawther [an author]' Wells, *Kipps*, p. 61.

explains their idealisation of it. In *New Grub Street*, however, Amy's judgement, despite her experience of living with an author, is clouded by her social aspirations, and Edwin, whose experience is first hand, eventually resists the more commercialised aspects.

He ultimately wants the life of a scholar but cannot achieve it. Writing fiction is not his true calling but the only way he feels he can earn, or try to earn, a living. In conversation with Jasper and Amy, Edwin considers his spending money in his youth on travelling to Italy and Greece 'a mistake from the practical point of view':

> That vast broadening of my horizon lost me the command of my literary resources. I lived in Italy and Greece as a student, concerned especially with the old civilisations; I read little but Greek and Latin. That brought me out of the track I had laboriously made for myself. I often thought with disgust of the kind of work I had been doing; my novels seemed vapid stuff, so wretchedly and shallowly *modern*. If I had had the means, I should have devoted myself to the life of a scholar. That, I quite believe, is my natural life; it's only the influence of recent circumstances that has made me a writer of novels. A man who can't journalise, yet must earn his bread by literature, nowadays inevitably turns to fiction, as the Elizabethan men turned to the drama. (*NGS*, pp. 69–70, emphasis added)

His turn to fiction may be as inevitable as his turn to clerk work, simply a way to survive, not to live.

Indeed, the scholarly author is an anomaly in the modern publishing world of *New Grub Street*; in a world of fakery and sham education, the most talented performer succeeds while the serious novelist does not, the experts in nothing (journalists) rewarded instead of the experts. Biffen, who is well educated and can deftly deploy Latin phrases in conversation, produces a book that is saved from a real fire only to be 'burned' by the critics and ignored by readers. He eventually dies by suicide. Jasper, whose use of Latin is nearly always tautologous and whose education as an adult has been subordinated to commercial interests and the building of career prestige, enjoys a mass readership and, by the end of the novel, has secured the editorship of *The Current*.

Work and Hereditariness in Gissing

We see in Edwin an acceptance of his harsh fate but we also see (in him and Biffen) sufficient self-awareness to wonder *why* he accepts it:

> 'Doesn't it strike you that you and I are very respectable persons? We really have no vices. Put us on a social pedestal, and we should be shining lights of morality. I sometimes wonder at our inoffensiveness. Why don't we run amuck against law and order? Why, at the least, don't we become savage revolutionists, and harangue in Regent's Park of a Sunday?'
> 'Because we are passive beings, and were meant to enjoy life very quietly. As we can't enjoy, we just suffer quietly, that's all.' (*NGS*, p. 325)

Edwin is a disinterested observer of life, who believes that its best moments are 'those when we contemplate beauty in the purely artistic spirit — objectively'. Biffen's reply acknowledges that there are types of people whom circumstances may darken but who are not capable of change.

This is worth scrutinising, although it is important to ask whether anyone in the novel undergoes permanent change. Jasper makes great claims for his adaptability, yet he scarcely changes, despite hardship (by the end of the novel, he is physically older than his years) and a darkening of his character, albeit a darkness always promised by the nature and degree of his ambition. The one authorial intrusion into the narrative offers an apologia for people of the Biffen/Edwin kind:

> try to imagine a personality wholly unfitted for the rough and tumble of the world's labour-market. From the familiar point of view these men were worthless; view them in possible relation to a humane order of Society, and they are admirable citizens. Nothing is easier than to condemn a type of character which is unequal to the coarse demands of life as it suits the average man. These two were richly endowed with the kindly and the imaginative virtues; if fate threw them amid incongruous circumstances, is their endowment of less value? You scorn their passivity; but it was their nature and their merit to be passive. (*NGS*, p. 377)

Given Gissing's deftness in ambivalence elsewhere, this passage can be seen as one of the novel's flaws, yet critically, it helps to establish Gissing's naturalist quality of presenting the effects of environment upon individuals ('rough and tumble of the world's labour-market') while confirming that an author's intention guides but does not always control the meaning (Barthes), since in Gissing, free will is possible and circumstances may darken an individual without fundamentally changing them. As such, the self in Gissing is mobile, offering a range of possible actions, and performance being key to progressing in society. The imperviousness of individuals to true change suggested by Biffen is both pessimistic and optimistic — a lack of ability to adapt and a fundamental inability to have one's true nature erased by

circumstances. Before his death, his memory reverts back to a time when he was not interested in the 'mission of literary realism' (*NGS*, p. 437).[533]

Does Gissing invest his characters with the ability to change *permanently*? Lucy Crispin argues for the mutability of the self in Gissing's work:

> The individual seeking to know himself, and to live and act from that sense of identity, is a familiar Victorian figure: the individual plotting his own life without the assurance of the Divine blueprint. If the eighteenth century novelist writes from the assumption that 'character does not change: it solidifies', the nineteenth-century novelist writes with the understanding that both nature and nurture combine to shape an essentially-mutable self. Your social circumstance; what happens to you; what you choose or choose against: all these things matter.[534]

What actually changes in Gissing's characters is the realisation that they were never capable of permanent change. Crispin further asserts that 'Gissing's man is subject to dreams of an alternative life, but either unable to realize that dream, or the victim of disappointment if the dream does become a reality'.[535] Edwin is not quite the first, since his dreams of an alternative life are not what he actually wanted after all, and the reader is not permitted to know Jasper's reaction to realising his dream. The crux of individualism versus social utility is that '[t]he self's own self-image may be very different from the social role the individual inhabits'.[536]

Gissing's ideas on heredity inform his fiction; as C. J. Francis points out, 'although Gissing laid no special emphasis on the heredity theory, it lay at the back of his thinking about character'.[537] How does Gissing's sense of inherited traits — what Darwin called 'prepotency', which denotes the 'disproportionate transmission of hereditary characteristics by one parent vs. the other parent'[538] — affect education? In one of Gissing's novellas, *Sleeping Fires* (1895), Louis Reed, who is born in the 1870s and passes from working-class parents (Eliza Morton/Langley) to middle-class (the Reeds), to upper-class (Lord and Lady Revill), rejects

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[533] Possible exceptions to this argument are Scawthorne (narrator suggests that if he'd been born with money and love, he would have been a better person — this is only hypothetical) and Bob Hewitt in *The Nether World*.
[534] Lucy Crispin, 'Exile: Self-image, Social Role and the Problem of Identity', in *A Garland for Gissing*, ed. Bouwe Postmus (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 41–9 (p. 42).
[535] Crispin, 'Exile…', p. 44.
[536] *Ibid.*
[537] C. J. Francis, 'Gissing's Characterisation: I. Heredity', *The Gissing Newsletter*, 3.1 (1967), pp. 1–5 (p. 4).
[538] Darwin, *Annotated Origin*, p. 274n.

aristocratic ideals in favour of Radicalism, which suggests, given his upper-class *Bildung*, that class is innate, an inherited trait on his mother's side or his father Langley's. The ending, as Maltz argues, is ambiguous about Langley's feelings towards philanthropy, suggesting that the dislike of the upper classes has been inherited by Louis from his mother.[539]

Since Gissing made no formal study of heredity, the question of where his ideas on this subject came from is intriguing.[540] In 1889, he read Ribot's *L'Hérédité Psychologique* (is Mrs Abbott ridiculed for reading this, as Parrinder suggests in his note?).[541] Francis highlights the similarities between Schopenhauer's thinking and that of the realists: 'he too believed that a man was born with a fixed inherited character, and that the only development of character was growth of knowledge'.[542] For Gissing, educational development (*Bildung*), properly achieved, appears to offer an escape from biological predetermination or only briefly. If character is innate, education is the only challenge to that; however, its success in Gissing's fiction is severely limited.

Career vs. Education

Whereas Edwin's schooling has given him a good education and at least set him up for a career, in Gissing's fiction, good schooling does not necessarily provide a good education or career. For example, in *In the Year of Jubilee*, Horace Lord's failure to choose a professional career, according to his father's wishes, despite 'good schooling' is evidence that Gissing did not

[539] Maltz, 'Blatherwicks and Busybodies: Gissing on the Culture of Philanthropic Slumming', in *George Gissing: Voices of the Unclassed*, ed. Martin Ryle and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 15–27.
[540] Francis, 'Gissing's Characterisation: I. Heredity', p. 2. Francis notes Mrs Abbot's brief mention of Ribot's *L'Hérédité Psychologique*, which occurs in Gissing, *Whirlpool*, p. 33. See Grylls, *Paradox of Gissing*, pp. 64–5: '[Gissing's] use of Ribot is far from suggesting uncritical approval; and when Rolfe talks fashionable Spencerism ('If a child dies, why, the probabilities are it *ought* to die; if it lives, it lives, and you get survival of the fittest'), the later development of the plot, in which Rolfe's affection for his son is crucial, condemns such bravado as blindly immature.'
[541] 30th and 31st Oct 1889, Gissing, *Diary*, pp. 170, 555n; see Gissing, *Commonplace Book*, pp. 59–62.
[542] Francis, 'Gissing's Characterisation: I. Heredity', p. 4.

believe that such schooling is sufficient for a decent education, that indeed, it is a matter of personal will (*Jubilee*, p. 17).

His sister Nancy's fate as a matriarchal figure obedient to her father's will and later her husband's shows that talent, education, and determination to succeed are insufficient when faced with socio-political oppression. Despite a privileged upbringing, she is ultimately lost, due in part to her gender. She has culture but no wisdom in deploying it:

> Nancy deemed herself a highly educated young woman, — 'cultured' was the word she would have used. Her studies at a day-school which was reputed 'modern' terminated only when she herself chose to withdraw in her eighteenth year; and since then she had pursued 'courses' of independent reading, had attended lectures, had thought of preparing for examinations — only thought of it. Her father never suggested that she should use these acquirements for the earning of money; little as she knew of his affairs, it was obviously to be taken for granted that he could ensure her life-long independence. Satisfactory, this; but latterly it had become a question with her how the independence was to be used, and no intelligible aim as yet presented itself to her roving mind. All she knew was, that she wished to live, and not merely to vegetate. Now there are so many ways of living, and Nancy felt no distinct vocation for any one of them. (*Jubilee*, p. 16)

Unlike Edwin in *New Grub Street*, she is initially not compelled to earn a living and instead must find a life (later, of course, she becomes a writer); unlike Horace, she has ambition but a lack of direction. There is also the possibility that she lacks direction because she has been guided by a man with myopic vision, namely her father, depriving her of true independence; without her father or husband, despite her tremendous promise, she is blind.[543]

In Gissing, education without social connections produces exiles. It is a distinguishing feature for a young man or woman who is neither rich nor poor: Stephen believes that it should prevent or protect his daughter from socialising with the 'rag-tag and bobtail' (*Jubilee*, p. 33) and that it should save his son from marrying beneath him:

> After all your education, haven't you learnt to distinguish a lady from a dressed-up kitchen wench? *I* had none of your advantages. There was — there would have been some excuse for *me*, if I had made such a fool of myself. What were you doing all those years at school, if it wasn't learning the difference between real and sham, getting to understand things better than poor folks' children? […] here you come to me and talk of marrying a low-bred, low-minded creature, who wouldn't be good enough for the meanest clerk! (*Jubilee*, p. 37)

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[543] Nancy does not merely want to vegetate, whereas for Lionel, leisure is a badge of distinction. Observing his new lodgings in London, he notes 'an air of civilisation about the house'. Such items as a bath, a small bookcase, and an easy-chair are considered respectable: 'You feel you are among people who tub o' mornings and know the meaning of leisure' (*Jubilee*, p. 279). The educated classes are also described as the idle classes: the distinction between them and the lower classes is that they use their knowledge for its own sake, not to be useful (*Jubilee*, p. 137). Those who aspire to be upper class yet lack the financial means work to distinguish themselves sufficiently — in intonation, in acquiring Latin, etc. — in order that they do not need to work.

Stephen reveals a conservative character when reprimanding his son (see also *Jubilee*, p. 39). As Nancy realises, education alone is insufficient: 'One must live as the better people do' (*Jubilee*, p. 41).

Parental education also influences career success. Nancy's parents are perhaps not well placed to judge their children's path through life based on education, since they have not received much of it themselves, and this may explain the disorientation experienced by Nancy and Horace in their working lives. Mrs Damerel was not educated beyond the age of twelve, whereas Stephen describes himself as uneducated (see, for example, *Jubilee*, p. 120). In having Stephen question whether he was right to pay for Nancy's education, Gissing shows the precarious nature of lower-middle-class life in London during the 1880s/early 1890s. There is small social progress, which is insufficient to avoid painful consciousness for greater progress.

The alternative, presumably, is ignorance. Lionel's thoughts on Nancy's position prior to marrying her are redolent of his class:

> He regarded her as in every respect his inferior. She belonged to the social rank only just above that of wage-earners; her father had a small business in Camberwell; she dressed and talked rather above her station, but so, now-a-days, did every daughter of petty tradesfolk. From the first he had amused himself with her affectation of intellectual superiority. Miss Lord represented a type; to study her as a sample of the pretentious half-educated class was interesting; this sort of girl was turned out in thousands every year, from so-called High Schools; if they managed to pass some examination or other, their conceit grew boundless. Craftily, he had tested her knowledge; it seemed all sham. She would marry some hapless clerk, and bring him to bankruptcy by the exigencies of her 'refinement'. (*Jubilee*, pp. 123–4)

Gissing presents the crude prejudices of the gentry satirically: being necessitated to labour is ignoble; for the daughter of a man of business to talk well is to talk above her station; confidence through academic attainment is merely conceit; the position of clerk is invoked to devalue her (it is earlier invoked by Stephen for a similar purpose).[544] Lionel considers her the

[544] Jessica, whose initial aim to become a graduate of London University involves intensive cramming and to whom culture is everything, is presented as a contrast to Nancy in the pursuit of 'culture' (later deemed idle vanity on Jessica's part): she toils during her leisure time, spoiling her health, her brain becomes 'a mere receptacle for dates and definitions, vocabularies and rules syntactic, for thrice-boiled essence of history, ragged scraps of science, quotations at fifth hand, and all the heterogeneous rubbish of a "crammer's" shop. […] She went to bed with a manual and got up with a compendium' (*Jubilee*, p. 18). This fatalistic approach to education/culture is undermined by the negative effects it has on the learner (Mill disapproved of the human brain as fact receptable), indeed undermined by its own absurdity. Gissing is aware that she has little choice in the matter, since marriage presents its own insurmountable challenges.

product of ‘charlatan education’ operating on a ‘crude character’: ‘Who could say what the girl had been reading, what cheap philosophies had unsettled her mind? Is not a little knowledge a dangerous thing?’ (*Jubilee*, p. 125). Thus, serious attempts at autodidactism are fought down; her knowledge is ‘sham’ (*Jubilee*, p. 124).

As stressed throughout this chapter, few careers utilise a person’s education, yet there are other factors determining success in the ‘right’ career. In *New Grub Street*, education is a mocking cruelty to the lower classes; in *In the Year of Jubilee*, usefulness in industry mocks Nancy’s education.[545] A newly chosen career as a novelist is one ‘wherein her education would be of service’ (*Jubilee*, p. 250). Thus, education is potentially useful in the creative arts, whereas useful industry has no need for it. Is literary art presented as one of the viable ends of education? In Nancy’s case, in a controversial ending, she decides to give up on this career, which she is undoubtedly talented enough to succeed at, in favour of supporting her husband. In Edwin’s case, he lacks the will power, energy, and money to sustain a career as a serious literary author.

Although it offers little comfort to Edwin, the prestige of the profession of writer offers some solace; a lowly position in employment, which is synonymous with social standing, adds mental suffering to physical degradation. In *In the Year of Jubilee*, Mary Woodruff’s confident assertion that education is a mockery for the poor, making the pangs and pains of life only more exquisite, accords with her status as a former domestic servant to the Lords, yet she offers an insight frequently thematised in Gissing’s work: consciousness of a lowly social position adds mental suffering to physical degradation. Mary’s humiliating position is confirmed by Lionel’s

[545] ‘Walking about the streets of London in search of suggestions, she gained only an understanding of her insignificance. In the battle of life every girl who could work a sewing-machine or make a matchbox was of more account than she. If she entered a shop to make purchases, the young women at the counter seemed to smile superiority. Of what avail her ‘education,’ her ‘culture’? The roar of myriad industries made mocking laughter at such futile pretensions. She shrank back into her suburban home.’ (*Jubilee*, p. 249)

approval, considering her 'the most wonderful phenomenon in nature — an uneducated woman who was neither vulgar nor foolish' (*Jubilee*, p. 344).

Conclusion

This conclusion considers why certain working-class characters are more amenable to middle/upper-class acceptance than others, one of the main determining factors being education/culture. It then considers how the working-class trauma of *not* being accepted by the upper classes persisted after the *fin-de-siècle*. In *Demos*, Mrs Eldon marks Richard Mutimer out: 'He is not quite the man I expected; more civilised. I should suppose he is the better kind of artisan. He talks with a good deal of the working-class accent, of course, but not like a wholly uneducated man.' Hubert observes that Mutimer's letter is 'anything but illiterate'.[546] Wild notes the appeal of the main character of Besant's *All in a Garden Fair* (1883) to a predominantly middle-class readership:

> One revealing aspect of the implicit negotiation taking place between writer, publisher and reader is recognised in Besant's decision to make his hero Allen Engledew a gentleman in reduced circumstances rather than a member of the socially ambitious working class. Allen, following his father's suicide, does begin office work in the same position as a Board school educated clerk whose 'parents were too poor to keep [him] at school after fourteen or fifteen, or to teach [him] anything beyond the ordinary school course'. Equally, however, he possesses the sort of innate social pedigree that makes him an acceptable three volume novel hero.[547]

Before 1880, the respective eponymous heroes of Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850) and George Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), despite being working class, are nonetheless characters that are amenable to middle-class readers because, first, they are skilled workers rather than labourers, and second, they possess unusual personal brilliance, 'highly exceptional minds among a debased proletariat. Workers might be depicted as respectable, impoverished, depraved, eccentric, pitiable, or criminal — but not thoughtful'.[548] Rather than admit that the working class comprises as varied a group of individuals as the middle class, the bourgeois

[546] Gissing, *Demos*, p. 103.
[547] Wild, *Rise of the Office Clerk*, p. 15. On Gissing's ambivalent attitude towards Besant, see Tom Ue, 'Moral Perfectionism, Optatives, and the Inky Line in Besant's *All in a Garden Fair* and Gissing's *New Grub Street*', in *Walter Besant: The Business of Literature and the Pleasures of Reform*, ed. Kevin A. Morrison (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), pp. 205–24.
[548] Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 389.

prefer to attribute any working-class person's talents to an anomaly, that is, they belong to the middle class.[549]

The protagonists of Gissing's novels who are marked out above their class *ex*ceed by dint of intellectual capability and toil, though they do not *suc*ceed in a system that is designed to prevent their success. The pessimistic aspects of Gissing's deterministic fiction create, where Dickens's and Eliot's novels do not, a sense that the system will not even allow exceptions to rise, and therefore, the system (state education, the field of cultural production) is corrupt.

In 1948, the headmaster of a school in Manchester wrote that inequality was a natural phenomenon, that socio-economically better-off children deserved their privilege because they came from superior genetic stock, echoing Mrs Waltham in *Demos*. He argued that since these children 'would probably become leaders in every branch of human life', they required an education suitable for this.[550]

The infamous eleven plus examination, introduced in the mid-twentieth century and designed to select the brightest pupils, has become emblematic of much of what Gissing and his contemporaries were concerned with in terms of education. It purports to select the brightest students yet serves to highlight inequalities and allow the more privileged to get through while penalising those from poorer backgrounds. Middle-class parents can afford private tutors for their children; their living environment may be calmer, less noisy, less cramped, and so on, creating a more suitable environment for their children to study in; one or both parents may have the required leisure time to focus on the intellectual needs of their child/ren; and the contents of the exam may benefit middle-class children, with questions related to travel, high

[549] Mrs Waltham explains away Mutimer's gentlemanliness by attributing it to 'something superior in his family' (Gissing, *Demos*, p. 150), ignoring the possibility that an engineer could be courteous and polite without innate privilege.
[550] Todd, *Snakes and Ladders*, p. 196.

culture, and so on. Moreover, many experts believe that intelligence testing is flawed, with intelligence being too narrowly defined.[551]

The trauma of failing the eleven plus continued to haunt some children into adult life. In *Snakes and Ladders: The Great British Social Mobility Myth*, Selina Todd describes the case of Ann Davies, whose parents came from working-class families but had improved their circumstances through work, failed the examination in the 1950s, after her parents had moved her and her younger sister from inner London to the suburbs. Ann left school at fifteen years old and obtained a clerical job in local government, no small achievement; however, her sister passed the eleven plus, attended the local grammar school, and moved on to university, eventually becoming a librarian. Although Ann would later attend and excel at university, the damage was done: 'My self-confidence has always been extremely low and even getting a first-class degree didn't change that (I felt I'd only got it by working really hard, not by being clever!).'[552] The shame of having to work hard at study and not simply being 'clever' is characteristic of many of the class-conscious characters and authors of the *fin-de-siècle* discussed in this thesis.

By reading deeply in Gissing and his contemporaries, we can see the contradictions in the various hierarchies of merit foisted on British children and adults; we can understand better the unnecessary suffering and cruel humiliations inflicted on them; we can slough off the absurdities that arise from sometimes arbitrary compartmentalisation; and we can find new, fairer ways of thinking about education by focusing on the extraordinary benefits that it bestows, rather than the trauma and limitations it can impose.

[551] See Todd, *Snakes and Ladders*, pp. 191–215.
[552] *Ibid.*, p. 202.

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