SELF-IDENTIFICATION IN FOUR NOVELS OF GEORGE GISSING

by

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B.A. University of Cincinnati, 1956
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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
M.A
in the Department of
ENGLISH

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
April, 1962
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Date **April 10, 1962**
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study the effect of self-identification upon the characterization of major figures in four novels of George Gissing. Gissing's use of his own experiences and ideas in the presentation of Osmond Waymark in *The Unclassed*, Richard Mutimer in *Demos*, Edwin Reardon in *New Grub Street*, and Godwin Peak in *Born in Exile* reveals that they are to a marked degree expressive of his own convictions. With the exception of Mutimer, all represent fictional counterparts of Gissing himself. The projection of autobiographical detail in Gissing's work could be a source either of strength or of weakness. His ability to express his own sympathies through the characters in his novels could result either in a weakly disguised expression of his own starved ambitions or in a forcefully developed self-analysis. The conclusion follows that as Gissing himself matured and gathered a firmer apprehension of his own abilities and failings he was better able to give dramatic reality to the elements of his own temperament and experience which he consciously or unconsciously transferred to his characters.

A survey of Gissing's early life shows that several of the themes which pervade his novels are reconstructions of aspects of his own life story. Gissing served as the prime example for his portrayal of intelligent and sensitive young men who were too poor to remain aloof from the materialistic
Victorian society. His refusal to compromise caused him to become resentful towards his society, and this fact is mirrored in the failures of the main characters to achieve a satisfactory relationship with their environment. Gissing's craving for womanly affection and companionship is clearly indicated in the extremes of attitude which the various characters maintain towards women.

The early novels, *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed*, are unsuccessful because the main characters do not achieve an independent reality within the structure of the novels in which they appear. The reason for this failure is that Gissing's identification with Golding and Waymark was uncritical and prevented him from examining the characters as entities apart from himself. *Demos* is considered because Richard Mutimer illustrates the converse of the judgment that Gissing could only respond favorably towards those characters with whom he identified. Gissing's lack of sympathy for Mutimer prevented him from being entirely fair in his characterization.

A change is to be noted in the handling of the major figures in *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile*. Edwin Reardon and Godwin Peak, although they obviously represent aspects of Gissing himself, achieve a fictional identity as something apart from the person of the author. Gissing had come to look upon himself and his career with sufficient detachment to enable him to present his fictional counterparts fairly and objectively. The elements of self-pity and apology were refined out of the uncritical idealism of the young author, and, as he
acquired a patient and realistic vision of life, self-identification became a source of strength in characterization.

The present study will evaluate the results of Gissing's self-identification upon characterization in the novels discussed and attempt to trace the trends in development suggested in the course of such a study.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Background</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. The First Two Novels</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. The Uncertain Experiment and a Return to the People</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. The Razor and the Breadknife</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Philosophy and the Business of Life</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Conclusion</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

An analysis of characterization in the novels of George Gissing will often expose a close relationship between the life and ideas of the author and those of the main characters in the novels, for Gissing identified himself with many of them to a considerable extent. This fact has accounted for the application, in recent criticisms of Gissing's works, of the term "Gissing-man" to describe epigrammatically the type of character generally selected by the author as the novels' main figures. Although in time Gissing's artistry as a novelist and ideas as a student of life matured, his self-identification with central figures remained a consistent and sometimes troublesome aspect of his handling of character. In many of the novels Gissing seems characteristically unable to effect a satisfactory separation between his own experiences and ideas and those of his characters. In Gissing's work, the result is a limitation in the presentation and development of character. This limitation affects the form and content of the novels and accounts for many of the thematic and structural weaknesses found in them.

Certainly no novelist is able to create a fictional world without some reliance upon the facts of his own emotional and intellectual background in order to give substance and
dramatic reality to the novel's view of life. He cannot, as it were, spin whole cloth out of airy nothings. Accordingly, some self-identification is to be observed in the nature of the creative process; therefore, it is not per se undesirably or ruinous to the writing of fiction, and the failure to take an author's background into account when necessary becomes a limitation of the critical perspective, the refusal to do so a self-imposed handicap. One critic observes:

Appreciation of an author's writings does not usually depend upon familiarity with his personal life-story, yet no writer is able to make a complete separation between his creative impulses and his individual experience of living: there is inevitable, if not obtruded, interaction. With George Gissing there was more than interaction, there was the closest interweaving.1.

The point to be made here is that Gissing's treatment of character suffered, not merely because he identified with characters in the novels, but because that identification was often uncritical and unreflective, thereby distorting the attempted reality of presentation and verisimilitude of development. Further, not all the deficiencies of Gissing's characters are primarily deficiencies of artistry. They are often the inevitable result of the identification with characters by an author who was more interested in ideas than in the practical conduct of life, and who was more at home with the glories of the classical past than with the society in which he found himself placed. The statement by the Academy that "Mr. Gissing is in love with ideas and can illustrate them through flesh and blood: his work lives,"2 rightly identifies the author's preoccupation with intellectual matters, but is
not always justified as an evaluation of characterization in his novels.

It is well to note with Walter Allen "only through character can the novelist's apprehensions of man's fate be uttered at all."

This is true of the characters of all good novelists. Part of the novelist's art is to mediate between his characters and the reader; and he does so with every word he puts to paper, for every word he chooses furthers his expression of his attitude towards his characters and the total situation he is rendering.... We say they are objective; in fact, they betray their opinions on their characters and situations and - inasmuch as every novel is an extended metaphor of the author's view of life - on life itself. They do so by the very choice of the characters they write about, the thoughts and feelings they give them, and the behaviour and motives they attribute to them; and they cannot do otherwise.3

Gissing's personality and temperament caused him to view the world subjectively rather than objectively; he saw the world in terms of himself, not himself in terms of the world. Consequently, Gissing's sympathies extended only to those types of characters of whom he could approve. As a young novelist Gissing was seldom able to create a sympathetic character who did not share either the author's views or his experiences. What is worse, characters often become mere spokesmen for the ideas of the novelist and lose the chance for independent reality which they should maintain in their fictional world. Therein lies the failure of the Gissing hero when measured against life, and the failing is often to be found in the temperament of the author himself, not simply in the execution of his intentions. Although he seldom refrained from conceiving his heroes as facets of himself,4 as Gissing
became more objective or realistic about himself, his treatment of characters improved with the coincident maturing and development of his work more generally.

Gissing undertook the writing of fiction as a profession when the novel was a sprawling, often ungainly, mass in three volumes. His was "the legacy of the mid-Victorian novel — moral thesis, plot, underplot, set characters, descriptive machinery, landscape colouring, copious phraseology, Herculean proportions, and the rest of the cumbrous and grandiose paraphernalia of *Chuzzlewit*, *Pendennis*, and *Middle march*." Although Gissing may at first have docilely accepted what he looked upon as the mixed blessings of his inheritance, he was a sensitive and industrious craftsman and sought constantly to improve his work. He was often acutely critical of his own work, and "when his opinions altered as he developed, he looked back upon earlier work with distaste, condemning his own books for their immaturity, their superficiality, or their wrongheadedness." As Mrs. Donnelly observes, "Gissing was one of the few novelists aware that a revolution in both the technique of fiction and the mode of living was taking place, and slowly he emancipated himself from the old Victorian conventions." The course of Gissing's career shows that he became less subject to the undesirable, but traditional, elements of the novel as maintained earlier in the Victorian period, and was able to produce among others, a novel which Mrs. Donnelly describes in the following terms:
The flavor of Eve's Ransom is subacid. The style is concise, dramatic. The more noisome aspects of romantic love have disappeared, and with them Gissing's usual paralysing identification with the hero, his prolixity and didacticism.

Just as there is improvement to be noted, generally, in Gissing's performance as a novelist, so is there to be observed a fuller and less subjective working out of the concept of character. At length he acquired sufficient objectivity about himself to understand that identification with one's own scholarly instincts was not a sure index of the worth of a character.

Foolishly arrogant as I was, I used to judge the worth of a person by his intellectual power and attainment. I could see no good where there was no logic, no charm where there was no learning. Now I think that one has to distinguish between two forms of intelligence, that of the brain, and that of the heart, and I have come to regard the second as by far the more important.

It will be the effort of this thesis primarily to analyse the characterization of the main figures in four of Gissing's novels: The Unclassed, Demos, New Grub Street, and Born in Exile. A study of the author's use of his own ideas and the details of his own experiences in the characterization of the major figures in these novels may fairly be said to explore the limits of that aspect of Gissing's fiction although it closes, as it were, in mid-course. The later novels do not significantly amplify the consideration of Gissing's ideas or his technique, and with the possible exception of his one effort in the writing of historical novels (the unfinished Veranilda), they exhibit largely a reworking of old themes.
CHAPTER II.

BACKGROUND

George Robert Gissing was born at Wakefield in Yorkshire on 22 November 1857, the eldest of five children. His father, a pharmaceutical chemist, had come to that industrial town as a young man and had married the daughter of a solicitor. Gissing's father, who esteemed literature, possessed a substantial library and encouraged his children to keep up a familiarity with the classics of English letters. It was he, then, who first instilled in Gissing the love for reading and study which were to characterize his life; here are found the origins of a trait, which in the priggish extreme, caused Gissing to insist upon intellectual cultivation as a necessary quality in his associates. Unfortunately the pleasant and long-remembered association with the father did not continue beyond the boy's thirteenth year when Thomas Waller Gissing died. That Gissing looked back fondly upon the memory of his father is evidenced in his first novel in the sympathetic, even idealized treatment, of old Samuel Tollady who, like Gissing's father, maintained an interest in botany and whose library contained volumes dealing with that subject. Although the father's death did not render the family destitute, it was necessary, if the young Gissing were to continue at school, that his education should be assisted by financial aid in the form of scholarships. At Lindow Grove, a Quaker boarding school, situated at Alderly Edge in Cheshire, where he and his
two brothers were sent shortly after the father's death, he proved to be an excellent student. In 1872, he placed first among all those in England who took the Oxford local examination. As a result he was awarded a scholarship at Owens College, Manchester, which he entered at about the age of 16. Continuing his fine work he received, at the end of the first session, a prize for an English poem, a special prize in classics, and the Shakespeare scholarship; in addition, he took a high place in the London intermediate arts examination.

It was not Gissing's intention to remain long at Owens College. It was to be hoped that study there would enable him to proceed to Oxford or Cambridge as soon as possible, or, in the event that he should not be successful in this regard, to prepare him to take the examinations for London University. At Owens College Gissing met Morley Roberts who later wrote *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, a thinly disguised fictional account of Gissing's life. Roberts serves as the main source of information regarding the unfortunate consequences of the path Gissing was about to follow, consequences which did so much to blight the course of his life. At any rate, he took up with a young prostitute and, in a fashion less idealistic than that of Osmond Waymark in *The Unclassed*, attempted to redeem the girl from the errant ways which he felt were impressed upon her by the vices of society and the evils of poverty, not by any innate depravity. But Marianne Helen (Nell) Harrison had neither the virtues of Ida Starr, nor her sincere and passionate desire to escape her fallen
ways. The results for Gissing were unhappy, and he realized success only in an idealized form in the rewards he bestowed upon his fictional alter ego, Waymark. Gissing, who intended to marry the girl, and eventually fulfilled that intention, had very little money with which to support her, and was reduced to the commission of petty thefts in order to implement his desires for her rehabilitation. The locker room thefts were discovered in the spring of 1876; "It was a ghastly business," says Morley Roberts,² and Gissing could not remain at the College. Nor could he, after the brief term of imprisonment, return to that institution. Ironically, the young man whose delight was literature, whose vision of reality was the world of the Roman Empire, and whose temperament was so ill-suited to the discharge of the concerns of ordinary existence, found himself an outcast from university life: the prospect of a career as a scholar was utterly denied him. He had not the means to pursue his interests privately, and his reputation was too tainted by the scandal to afford him entry into any other college.

The resultant, self-imposed exile to America, which followed upon Gissing's misfortune, afforded him a fresh start, but the experiences of his stay in the new world were not unattended by the miseries of poverty and loneliness. Although Gissing might tell his brother approvingly that "our democratic notions do not allow of division into classes,"³ he was not long thereafter to find that social equality counted little if one had not the money with which to purchase the
commodities for existence. After an unsuccessful effort to obtain employment on the editorial staff of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Gissing accepted a position as assistant teacher in a Massachusetts high school. But Gissing was lonely and restless; accordingly, he left Waltham and travelled west to Chicago, where he arrived with very little money and no promise of any position likely to secure him funds. In a short time, however, he succeeded in convincing the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* that the paper lacked adequate fiction, and that he could produce acceptable short stories for it. He remained in Chicago until the newspaper declined the purchase of subsequent stories. Not discouraged, he then went to Troy, New York, where, he had heard, a newspaper had published one of his tales entitled *The Sins of the Fathers*. On the way, he had stopped to view the vast Niagara Falls where for a moment, in the agony of his lonely destitution, he had contemplated suicide; one suspects that it is with some self-pity in retrospect that he has Arthur Golding carry out this last resort and cast himself into the flood in *Workers in the Dawn*. In Troy Gissing met with little success and, like Whelpdale in *New Grub Street*, existed for several days on peanuts.

"On landing at Troy I was as badly off as when I reached Chicago; I had less than a dollar. And the worst of it was I had come on a vain errand; the editor treated me with scant courtesy, and no work was to be got. I took a little room, ... and in the meantime I fed on those loathsome pea-nuts, buying a handful in the streets now and then. And I assure you I looked starvation in the face."
Gissing then struggled on to Boston and thence home to England, poor in worldly goods and, perhaps, in spiritual resolve, but now committed irrevocably to the pursuit of the craft of fiction as a life's profession. The sad events in the lives of many of his fictional counterparts will show that, in Gissing's case, art and nature often existed side by side. The story of Arthur Golding is in some respects even prophetic regarding events in Gissing's own life. Upon his return from America he resumed the compulsive and self-destructive attempt to rehabilitate a woman who was not worthy of his efforts. Gissing effected the plan, which had become confirmed during his weary months in America, to renew his association with Marianne Harrison, and he "lived with her in a succession of dismal lodgings among the back streets off Tottenham Court Road." A.C. Ward continues:

He craved a woman's companionship, both for the assuaging of his sexual needs and to ward off his ever-pursuing dread of loneliness; and being, as he deemed, responsible for the welfare of Nell, though she had been the instrument of his social downfall, he bound himself to her by marriage in 1879. She was already sick with a complication of ailments, both were in dire poverty, and Nell degenerated into a drunken virago whom Gissing at length found intolerable.

H. G. Wells, though perhaps not always a reliable authority on Gissing, makes an illuminating comment regarding the dichotomy in Gissing's attitude toward women: his inability, until late in his life, to find in a single woman both his physical and his spiritual companion. He states that, in spite of Nell's unengaging character and temperament:
Clearly there was for him something about this woman, of which no record remains, some charm, some illusion or at any rate some specific attraction, for which he never had words.... His home training had made him repressive to the explosive pitch; he felt that to make love to any woman he could regard as a social equal would be too elaborate, restrained and tedious for his urgencies.

The soundness of Wells' opinions may be proved by the fact that soon after the death of Nell (in 1888) Gissing once again immersed himself in a hasty relationship with a girl equally ill-suited to his sensitive temperament. Gissing seems to have craved womanly companionship, and the ease of satisfying his emotional and physical needs with individuals of the lower class was perhaps irresistible to one so acutely conscious of his poverty. The rationalization afforded by the prospect of social reform may have provided the self-deceived Gissing with additional justification for entering into these unpromising entanglements. The hopes and disappointments which attended these affairs were to find extremes of treatment in the successes and failures of Gissing's heroes with women of the lower class. Golding and Casti, in the first two novels, are the victims of women whom the author reduces to mere caricatures of all that he considered repugnant and loathsome in the women of the proletariat. On the other hand, Waymark's attachment to Ida Starr indicates such an extreme of idealization that the hero, besieged as he is by fears of his own inadequacy and suspicions regarding his motives, is almost unable to claim the benefits of her redeeming virtues.

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jotted down in the young Gissing's diary, seizes upon this point:

Clearly the sketches are the rationalizing, whether consciously done or not, of Gissing's disastrous experiences in Manchester. It is significant that one girl resembles "something seen in a dream," just as Gissing's dream always surpassed the real woman; that "a woman of the town" reclaims a man, just as, Gissing liked to imagine, Nell's love would reclaim him; that redemption of men occurs after all seems hopeless. Guilt, inadequacy, redemption, sublimation mingle wildly in the tormented mind of a very young man.9

Conversely, Gissing's treatment of his heroes' connections with women of lofty temperaments, particularly those of the higher classes, may be said to cast some additional validity upon Wells' observations. Arthur Golding, a man of exceptional abilities, but a member of the lower class, aspires in vain for the return of his love of a talented and noble young woman who is socially his superior. On the other hand, Bernard Kingcote, in Isabel Clarendon, wins the love of his lady, but refuses to accept her offer of marriage because the relationship would be, to quote Wells again, "too elaborate, restrained and tedious for his urgencies."

Like many of his fictional counterparts Gissing had been visited with the unexpected blessing of a legacy. He reserved the capital and attempted to make use only of the interest therefrom and existed the while on the meager recompense which was the reward of his efforts as a private teacher. The greater part of this legacy was directed to the payment of costs for the publication of his first novel. In any event, he does not appear to have been well paid for his various labours and, no doubt, continued to subsist in partially starved wretchedness. At
length, after unsuccessful endeavours to have published a novel whose title is now even forgotten, Gissing produced another work which he first entitled Far, Far Away. Upon the advice of Smith, Elder and Company to whom he had taken the novel after the rejection of the manuscript by Chatto and Windus, he retitled it Workers in the Dawn. He wrote of the book, in a letter to his brother, in the following terms:

Herein I am a mouthpiece of the advanced Radical party. As regards religious matters, I plainly seek to show the nobility of a faith dispensing with all we are accustomed to call religion, and having for its only creed a belief in the possibility of intellectual and moral progress. Hence it follows that I attack (somewhat savagely) the modern development of Ritualism, which, of course, is the absolute antithesis of my faith.

In doing all this, I have been obliged to touch upon matters which will be only sufferable to those who read the book in as serious a spirit as mine when I wrote it. It is not a book for women and children, but for thinking and struggling men. If readers can put faith in the desperate sincerity of the author, they will not be disgusted with the book; otherwise it is far better they should not read it.

It was, then, with desperate sincerity that Gissing came upon the literary world in 1880, and all the self-assumed social, political, and religious crusades of the young author, as well as his doubts and paralysing indecision, are to be found in the failures of the novel's hero both as an individual and as a fictional creation.
CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST TWO NOVELS

In _Workers in the Dawn_, Gissing, as though in an effort to recreate the possible conclusion of an event in his own life, summons up from memory the hypnotic power of the great Niagara Falls, and has Arthur Golding plunge himself into the icy waters of the river below. The passage is striking for many reasons, not the least of which is the descriptive force with which Gissing has evoked his own experience. Here, as seldom elsewhere in the novel, the scene acquires an objective vividness not dependent upon the author's social consciousness or subject to the narrowness of his perspective on other matters. By contrast, one might cite the opening chapter of the novel wherein the author leads his reader through the miasma of the London slums. There the distinct pressure of the novelist's heavy-handed and didactic treatment diminishes the force of his intensity because the impression is conjured up by the selection of details which the author will not let speak for themselves.

Walk with me, reader, into Whitecross Street. It is Saturday night, the market night of the poor; also the one evening in the week which the toilers of our great city can devote to ease and recreation in the sweet assurance of a morrow unenslaved.

Let us press through the throng... and look in, as long as the reeking odour will permit us.1

More significant, however, is the relationship of the suicide of the hero to the rest of the novel; the scene finally and unmistakably marks the author's sympathy with the hero, a
sympathy which has been consistently maintained throughout the course of the latter's unhappy career. Although the reader does not wait until the last page to discover that Golding is, for the most part, his creator's alter ego, this final identification is all the more impressive because of its incongruity to the remainder of the book. That Golding should come to America is not so wonderful, but that he should come here in the last chapter of a three-volume novel, in no way concerned with or necessarily motivated by the prospect of such a journey, only to commit suicide, indicates an uncritical implementation of autobiographical matter. Golding might just as easily have ended his unhappy existence by jumping off the London Bridge. However, after wearily contemplating such a move, he weakly affirms that the zest for life will not yet permit him to end his life. Now the quarrel is not with the novelist's solution to a hopelessly entangled plot whose only resolution appears to be death in some form. The quarrel lies with fact that the author's identification with Golding has caused him to present the suicide in the terms of his own experience at the Niagara Falls. Vivid as the individual event may be, the overall effect is to distort the structure of the novel and to weaken the fabric of its plot.  

Indeed suicide seems the most convenient manner of resolving the hero's inability to find a satisfactory relationship between himself and his environment, and between the elements which war within his own nature. Even in his treatment of Golding as a child the author strikes a note characteris-
tic of the temperaments of many of his heroes.

Arthur had already several times given indications of what in a child of higher birth we might, perhaps, be allowed to call chivalrous feeling; as it is I suppose we must content ourselves with allowing the poor lad a negative commendation, and say that he was in some way distinguished from the other boys of his position by a certain want of brutality, an absence of vulgar selfishness. Already he displayed a consideration toward the female sex which the vast majority of youngsters brought up in his circumstances have no suspicion of. 3

Gissing continues to develop the temperament of a sensitive and intelligent young man who is too gentle and too pure to be corrupted in spirit by the vices of society, yet too sympathetic to be unresponsive to the residue of humanity which he encounters in the squalors of poverty. He is too humane to ignore the pleading of his social conscience, yet too aristocratic entirely to submerge his artistic conscience in the expression of his desires for reform. The opportunity to become an artist weans him from the doctrines of philosophical Radicalism inculcated upon him as a youth by old Samuel Tollady. Gissing himself is only thinly veiled when he writes thus of Golding:

As he grew older he felt within himself the stirrings of a double life, the one due to his natural gifts,... the other originating in the outward circumstances of his childhood.... These two distinct impulses seemed to grow within Arthur Golding's mind with equal force and rigidity.... To which of the two should he wholly devote himself? As he drew on towards his eighteenth year he spent many and many an hour in vain efforts to decide. 4

A little later we read that "he was unable totally to destroy an apprehension that the decision might never be reached, that the doubt and hesitation would form the burden of his life,
and that a future entered upon without the ardour of conviction could not fail to teem with perplexity and suffering."5 Gissing's own doubts regarding the uneasy relationship between his two consciences did not long outlive this novel. Waymark, in the following novel, indicates that the philanthropic concerns for general social reform have been replaced by a more detached artistic perspective. A fuller discussion of Gissing's resolution of these seemingly irreconcilable ambitions will be presented in Chapter IV.

As if the self-consuming struggle between artistic and philanthropic ambitions were not enough to blight Golding's career, the weaknesses inherent in an ambivalent nature cause him to seek affection and recognition, and, in turn, to indulge an unsatisfying self-pity when his desires are frustrated. Gissing himself had complained to Morley Roberts: "It was a cruel and most undesirable thing that I, at the age of sixteen should have been turned loose in a big city, compelled to live alone in lodgings, with no body interested in me but those at the college."6 Little insight into the temperament of the author is required to conclude that the basis of the relationship between Golding and Carrie Mitchell was rooted in Gissing's own bitter memories. Golding is portrayed as an innocent idealist whose only attitude toward the girl is that of honest affection and the philanthropic desire that she be reclaimed from moral and intellectual depravity. Gissing's unenlightened self-appraisal is further emphasized by the coincident fact that the entire blame for the failure
of the enterprise is levied uncritically against the girl of
the streets. Thus the nature of Gissing's identification
with Golding causes the novel to assume an unsatisfying
perspective. Gissing's failure to be honest in the portrayal
of the hero is particularly disappointing in a novel in which
the hero becomes a principal index of values. The use of
autobiographical detail is put to great advantage by some
novelists, but at this early stage Gissing had not learned
its proper implementation. What little the novel gains in
immediacy as a result of this uncritically assumed identity,
it loses in the uneven and unconvincing quality, which such
treatment obtains. It would seem that Gissing's fidelity
to external detail and his ability to evoke the wretchedness
of the London streets and the low state of their inhabitants
reveal an intimate observation, but that his attempts to
evaluate these observations in terms of the vacillating
sympathies of the hero cause serious thematic and formal
deficiencies.

Just as Carrie Mitchell is the evil genius who acts
as the agent of so many of Golding's misfortunes, Helen Norman
is the good angel whose virtuous and self-sacrificing example
reclaims the spirit of the hero after his resolve has disinte-
grated. Gissing's selection of descriptive terms in the
treatment of this figure is sufficient evidence that she has
won his admiration as a womanly ideal. When Lucy Venning
refuses a proposal of marriage in order to remain as the dying
Helen's companion, Gissing feels compelled to enshrine the
consumptive maiden:

"Dear affectionate child!" exclaimed Helen, passing her arm round Lucy, and looking down on her with a calm tenderness which seemed to invest her pale Madonna-like face with a halo of sanctity. "Do you really mean that your love for me would overpower that you have so long felt for Mr. Heatherley?"  

One can remember earlier in the novel when Golding himself says: "She is indeed a goddess!... and she is as far superior to me as a 'Madonna' of Raphael is to this miserable smudge I call a picture!" Gissing must have disapproved of the hero's excess of idealized sentiment, for he deleted the speech in his subsequent, but unfortunately incomplete, revision.  

It is this type of idealized spiritual and intellectual excellence that makes Helen Norman an unconvincing character; inasmuch as she is a necessary force in the development of the hero's career, this failure in characterization is damaging to the structure of the novel as a whole.  

If Workers in the Dawn serves to catalogue Gissing's own bitter experiences in the attempted reform of a fallen woman, who reverts finally to her former ways of vicious alcoholic depravity, then The Unclassed represents the success which Gissing had hoped for in the unfortunate enterprise. It is significant that Harriet Smales, a vulgar and shrewish young woman, who becomes at length a caricature of meanness and selfishness, is the character in whom is concentrated the author's ill-will towards women of the lower class. Conversely, the reformed prostitute, Ida Starr, is a person of considerable charm and enlightened sympathies. Mme Cazamian comments: "La donnée des Hors-cadres ... révèle le vif sentiment qu'avait
l'auteur des tentations qui assaillent les femmes dans les basses classes; les excuses qu'il trouvait à celles qui se laissent se démoraliser; l'indulgence qu'il était porté à leur témoigner, et le crédit qu'il leur estimait dû. Il se laisse aller à transformer la réalité selon son désir. In the preface which he added to the edition of 1895 Gissing begs the indulgence of the reader for the extravagance of his youthful idealism. Although this does not alter the quality of the book itself, it is evidence of the maturing of opinions, and as we shall see in the discussions concerning New Grub Street and Born in Exile, it does indeed strengthen the assertion that "much of the Gissing novels, particularly the earlier ones, is disguised autobiography." Gissing states in his apology that:

On reconnaîtra là l'ouvrage d'un très jeune homme qui voit sous un jour romanesque les plus tristes faits de la vie...; ce récit est resté tel quel, et doit être lu comme un conte, simplement. Le merveilleux ne comporte pas d'enseignement, et on peut pardonner à la jeunesse son idéalisme.

Gissing naively claimed, in a letter written to his brother shortly after the publication of The Unclassed, that, "Waymark is a study of character, and he alone is responsible for his sentiments." It becomes easily apparent that his failure to perceive this identification indicates the lack of insight from which both he and Waymark suffered. In Gissing himself this failing often accounted for misplaced sympathies; in Waymark it results in a tiresome hesitation in the choice of conduct; in both one detects an inability to assess true
values. As has been observed, no novelist can conjure up plots and characters out of thin air, and, in the case of a young novelist whose experiences, however profoundly moving, are not great in breadth or range, the intrusion of autobiographical detail is not unexpected. "He was hardly more than a boy when he began his novels; the first was published before he was twenty-two; the fund of experience on which he had to draw was limited to his school career, a short sojourn in America, and his struggles in the great arena of London." As his letters reveal, Gissing did not make any great effort to prepare himself for the practical conduct of life. Like Reardon, in New Grub Street, he spent much of his time reading works which did little to facilitate his integration with his environment. Typical is his assertion that Gibbon afforded him much insight into the problems of the day: "The period he treats of is at the root of our modern civilization. By looking back into the old world, and forward into the new, it embraces a most significant extent of time, and is rife with lessons." At the time Gissing claimed to be living on lentils. His brother William, to whom Gissing was fondly devoted and whose early death robbed him of an esteemed companion, struck at the root of Gissing's quarrel with society as well as that of his heroes in similar circumstances when he wrote to the novelist in 1879:

I know your reply to all this, and indeed it grieves me to the heart, "Give me the means and I will eat." Oh, George, don't despair, spend as much as you can upon food.... Take breath and continue the struggle as cheerfully as possible. But whither do your steps lead?
I confess I cannot see. You are gaining immense stores of knowledge, almost, I fear at the expense of your life; but what about means of life which disagreeable subject we must face. People will not pay you for being learned, but they will if you make them more so. More over it is no satisfaction to get knowledge for the sake of keeping it yourself; it must be circulated either in lectures or books.16

Gissing might protest that Waymark was "alone responsible for his sentiments," but such a remark cannot be taken seriously. The opening chapter of Book II, entitled "The Advertising Agency," reveals both the author's convictions regarding Victorian notions about science and social evolution and his identification with Waymark. Gissing's ideas are seldom hard to discern, and, in the several of the earlier novels, they are stridently delivered with the author's youthful conviction that he must use the novel as the agent of his social criticism. Although Gissing discarded many of the notions of contemporary reformers which were espoused in the first published novel, The Unclassed shows that he was still concerned with the evils of poverty and the spectacle of the lower classes. He stated in a letter written on May 30, 1880: "But in that book [Workers in the Dawn], I have, so to speak, written off a whole period of my existence."17 With the possible exception of Isabel Clarendon and A Life's Morning, however, it was not until he had returned from a trip to Italy that Gissing's interests really changed, and he began to be more objective in the portrayal of the Victorian social scene. Coincidentally he was later to shift his attention from the squalor and depravity of the proletariat to the materialism and vapid self-contentment of the middle class. It is not surprising, then, that he
assails the false claims of social progress here, just as he had exposed with trenchant antipathy the hypocrisies of conventional religion in *Workers in the Dawn*. (Observers have praised Gissing's technique of analysing society by the grouping of characters into social classes or types, but it is clear from these novels that characters like Waghorn, Harriet Smales, the Whiffles, and many other minor characters remain either mere caricatures or suffer from the author's obvious attitudes towards them.) At any rate, Gissing continues to lead his reader by the hand when the situation demands.

Glance over these sheets of closely-printed matter, and be initiated into the most pitiless age the sun ever calendared. See here disclosed, working without disguise, the central motor of our common life. Science, formulating the machine's operation, teaches us to speak politely of the survival of the fittest. The lecture platform resounds its praises in economic eloquence, lauding the principle of universal Competition. Every-day experience, and its concentrated index the advertisement column, put the matter in plainer language, do not care to hide the fact of a brutal fight for livelihood, and sum up in intelligible terms all the meanness, ruthlessness, anguish, and degradation which such a system implies.

Both Gissing and Waymark deplored the Philistinism of the Victorian era, and both attempted, in spite of the fascination which the plight of the lower classes seemed perversely to work upon them, to evolve a code of conduct and belief which would permit them to remain artistically aloof from that which so entranced them. Gissing in the laborious course of over a dozen novels attempted to work out an approach to his subject matter which might deservedly be called objective and realistic. In *New Grub Street* and with perhaps
greater success, depending upon the tastes of the reader, in *Born in Exile*, Gissing achieved a representation of his view of life which, while it could not be called dynamic or epic, presented clearly and patiently what he saw before him. Gissing's later success in the dispassionate portrayal not only of external detail but also of ideas and of emotions is not evidenced by their treatment in *The Unclassed*. Waymark falls far short when measured against Reardon and Godwin Peak in the later novels: Gissing's shortcomings in self-understanding result in a main figure whose inability to fix upon a consistent set of ideals or follow a decisive line of behavior imposes a desultory and unevenly textured form upon a novel which, one feels, should have come off better. In the author such a state is the accident of early development; in the main figure of the novel it is necessarily evidence of unsure and faulty characterization. Waymark is too often the stage for Gissing's debates with himself. His difficulty in reaching conclusions stalls the pace of the novel.

*The Unclassed*, in addition to being an expression of wish-fulfilment needlessly delayed because Waymark "is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," is in some respects a catalogue of the type of intellectual friendship Gissing shared with Eduard Bertz and perhaps with Morley Roberts. The friendship is initiated by Casti's response to Waymark's newspaper advertisement. When one examines the tone of Gissing's treatment of that fact, the device is seen to be somewhat heavy-handed, not because it is starkly coincidental and inconsistent with the associations suggested, but because
the author is unable to refrain from a didactic management of the correlation of ideas inherent in the matter. In the earlier novels Gissing, who was always sensitive and fearful that he might be misunderstood, did not fully appreciate the ability of objective detail to give rise to the inherent or implicit significance which he perceived in certain situations. Frequent and obtrusive interpolations prove that Gissing wished to make sure that the reader understood him. Hence we find: "Once again, in glancing over these columns, you come across an announcement which strikes you with a sense of incongruity, some appeal to the world at large for something not statable in terms of cash or credit, the utterance of one whose needs do not in any way connect themselves with a salary." Waymark's advertisement proclaims to the outside world his defiance of its standards and his helpless inability to secure the friendship of an intellectual associate with whom to share his exile without resorting to the voice of its medium. Into the dark night of despair he ventures an ironic plea:

"WANTED, human companionship. A young man of four-and-twenty wishes to find a congenial associate of about his own age. He is a student of ancient and modern literatures, a free-thinker in religion, a lover of art in all its forms, a hater of conventionalism. Would like to correspond in the first instance. Address O.W., - News Rooms."22

Although he protested that he and Waymark were not the same person, who can say that such an advertisement did not give expression to Gissing's own "despairing cry of a hungry heart"? Waymark is perhaps more patently forceful and aggressive than
was his inventor, yet the identification is sufficiently emphatic to render inept in many instances the characterization of the novel's major figure.

It has been suggested above that many of the problems caused by identification in Gissing's novels arise from the author's personality and temperament as well as from the in-artistic use of his experience in fictional form. It should also be noted that Gissing was, at this stage, still handicapped by the demands of his Victorian reading public for works in keeping with the established conventions of form and idea in the novel. The need to produce fiction in three volumes resulted in the inclusion of much digressive and irrelevant background material. The first hundred or so pages of *The Unclassed* dealing with "Antecedents," were easily telescoped and integrated into the expression of the more immediate concerns of the book in Gissing's later re-working of these matters. The Victorian audience also demanded respectability and good taste, and favored a happy ending. Gissing was sometimes asked to recast unhappy endings in a manner foreign to the logical demands of theme and structure. As Morley Roberts observed in his introduction to *A Life's Morning*, "art and Aristotle and the laws of tragedy might demand the purging pain of Emily Hood's death, but James Payn [the publisher's reader] knew better." Like Reardon, the author struggled against what he considered the prostitution of his art, and held out as long as he was able to satisfy his meager needs for food and shelter.
The main point to be considered, however, is that Gissing's own ambivalence of character and uncritical identification with Waymark result in an uncertain characterization which stultifies the pace of the novel. The nominal resolution that is achieved is so tenuous that the hero is, as it were, rewarded off-stage, after the close of the story. Though Waymark is more convincingly articulate and better able to deal with the dilemmas confronting him than Arthur Golding, he falls far short of either Reardon or Godwin Peak as a character at odds with life. The Gissing man is as yet too abstract, too theoretical to absorb experience as well as to examine it as merely artistic material. He is too enamored with his own intellect and too fascinated by the egotistic fabric of his own analysis of a decadent society. In sum, both Gissing and his man have a long way to go before acquiring the patient and tragic vision so well announced in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. The seeds of artistic vision and the essence of Gissing's social critique are present in Waymark, but their development is at best nascent. The conflict between the view that "only as artistic material has human life any significance" and a genuine concern for the plight of the starving masses produces a dichotomy where it ought to assume a thematic significance. It is not strange that Waymark's reactions to his experiences in Litany Lane are not capitalized upon by the author; Gissing seems to have been unable to express the possibilities for dramatic conflict here. Through Waymark Gissing uses detail rather to express his own distaste than to evoke the situations which provided him with
artistic detail. This is particularly true of the treatment of Waymark's swoon in Slimy's stench-ridden cell. The revulsion Gissing himself experienced at the spectacle of social degradation before him expresses the very kind of egotism and pedantic observation which made Golding a poor companion for Carrie Mitchell and now makes Waymark quaver in the face of actual contact with his own artistic material. It is doubtful that Gissing inflicts these horrors upon Waymark as an expression of self-criticism or self-chastisement, and one may conclude that the latter is an unconvincing participant in the author's drama.

Waymark's unsatisfactory resolution of the increasing ambiguity of his relationship with Ida Starr is further proof that Gissing was not sufficiently critical of Waymark. The tedious and protracted resolution is largely attributable to Waymark's vacillating and obsessive self-doubt. On the other hand it is also true that Ida Starr behaves occasionally like Longfellow's little girl permanently reformed. That the presentation of her is somewhat idealized is suggested by her unquestioning loyalty and devotion to Waymark.27

To see the situation whole is to realize that Gissing had much to learn, and that the major failing of the first two novels, apart from deficiencies now assessed against what are considered the undesirable aspects of the Victorian novel, is found in the author's inability to create a fully convincing set of characters, endowed with believable qualities, about whom he might weave his own view of life. Success, in characterization where it is to be seen, is often diminished.
to a great extent by the author's insistence upon participating in the lives of his main figures. This fault required maturity in the artist in order to be overcome. In the case of Gissing, successful characterization was necessarily preceded by the ripening and deepening of his own view of life. At this stage of his career, Gissing had not yet acquired a mature and patient vision. Like Waymark he was still a young man in search of a philosophy, perhaps uncertain of his abilities and his fortunes, yet paradoxically dogmatic and pedantic.
CHAPTER IV
THE UNCERTAIN EXPERIMENT AND
A RETURN TO THE PEOPLE

Before Gissing entered the "grim little world" of Thyrza, Demos, and The Nether World, he wrote two novels which convey the superficial impression that they are untypical of the novelist in subject matter and setting. Isabel Clarendon and A Life's Morning reflect interest in a side of life not previously entertained by Gissing. Although the earlier novels show some treatment of life other than in the slums, there is revealed in these two novels a change in emphasis which is significant in the analysis of Gissing's work. The reason for Gissing's temporary desertion of the proletariat and their environment is suggested by the change in his own fortunes. Through the patronage of Frederic Harrison and others, he was for the first time in his life permitted access to circumstances more fashionable and more comfortable than those in which he created his first novels. The ambivalence with which Gissing assimilated his experiences as a guest in the Harrison's home and at Mrs. Gaussen's country house is to be noted in Gissing's own career, as well as in Isabel Clarendon and A Life's Morning. Harrison had asked his literary friends to patronize Gissing, and they gave him the opportunity to augment his meager income by contributing to various periodicals in the operation of which they were influential. Gissing, however, characteristically refused to exploit these favors at the expense of the goals he has set for himself as a novelist.
Although he admired the aristocracy and grace of living of the class whose generous offices were being tendered to him, he remained yet a stranger to it. His brother Algernon observed that he was temperamentally and environmentally prevented from making the most of such favors:

All this sounded hopeful enough, and no doubt in many cases would have meant that the tide had actually turned. But temperament, no less than harassing domestic circumstances, robbed Gissing of all material advantage from this unbounded kindness of Mr. Frederic Harrison. It is idle to speculate on what the young author might have done had he been personally free to battle with poverty only. Certainly, Sam Johnson himself could not live and work on less. But, as it was, Gissing had for ever to lament bitterly that he was incapable of journalistic work, and no less of congenial social life if he was to apply himself to literary work at all.

One sees, correspondingly, in the inability of Kingcote to seek journalistic employment and, later, of Reardon, to accept the practical advantages of momentary opportunity, a fictional rendering of Gissing's own plight. His strict sense of personal and artistic integrity caused him to forego the means which might have afforded him the later leisure to pursue his literary aims. It is hardly surprising that Gissing's novels show a particular sympathy for young men like himself: "a class of young men distinctive of our own time - well-educated, fairly bred, but without money." 2

A Life's Morning was written after Isabel Clarendon, but was withheld - perhaps wisely - from publication until 1888 when it was issued in serial installments. 3 For the purposes of the present analysis it is interesting to note that in a novel which shows the author's increasing skill in other
matters, the major failing is in the characterization of the hero, Wilfred Athel. In spite of the comment of the *Athenaeum* that "*A Life's Morning* is excellent as regards incident and characterization,"\(^4\) Athel is peculiarly weak as a major figure. He continues, in a manner typical of the Gissing hero, to regard himself in the light of self-examination whose misdirected intensity seems rather to thwart self-knowledge than to secure it. Gissing's own background may have caused him to be ill at ease with such a figure. Hence the intellectual attainments of the hero are maintained in so pedantic a manner that it would seem that the author needed to bestow them upon Athel in order to justify his own association with a class which regarded him as a protege.

Scarabs were his only playthings, and by the time of his going to school he was able to write letters home in a demotic which would not perhaps have satisfied Champollion or Brugsch, but yet was sufficiently marvellous to his school fellows and gratifying to his father.\(^5\)

More generally characteristic, however, is the fact that intellectual attainment is not an unqualified blessing. The characterization is further complicated because Gissing uses Athel to express his own multiplicity of interests. Athel points with pride to this fact in himself, but with a lack of self-knowledge common in earlier examples of the Gissing-man, he later warns Beatrice Redwing against "trying to be a bit of everything."\(^6\)

"I have such an appetite for knowledge, surely the unhappiest gift a man can be endowed with; it leads to nothing but frustration.... My despair is the universality of my interests.... I cannot separate lines of study."\(^7\)
The most disappointing aspect of characterization is the ease with which young Athel wins the heart of the governess Emily Hood. Gissing was required to alter the original course of the novel, which was to have ended finally in her death. This, however, does not entirely mitigate the fact that, in the early novels, attractive and intelligent young women, usually drawn with some skill, too easily fall for young men whose good looks hardly compensate for the egotistic pride with which they maintain their intellectual superiority. Certainly Emily's tragic death would have been more artistically satisfying than the reunion insisted upon by the publisher. In either event the desire of Gissing's women to be subjected by their lovers exposes the author's indulgence of wish fulfillment.

It was her resource to remember his energetic will, his force of character; the happiness of passively submitting to what he might dictate; sure of his scrupulous honour, his high ideal.8

Mrs. Donnelly suggests that, "in having Emily sound like Jane Austen, and Wilfred like a caricature, Gissing failed to provide unified tone."9

In Isabel Clarendon, the desire of Kingcote to worship the kind lady who favours him with her affections, when coupled with his intentional self-abasement, makes of their association a macabre parody of the courtly love theme which is unsatisfying because one suspects that it was not seriously intended to be so.10 In Kingcote's extravagantly chivalric attitude towards Isabel Clarendon we find Gissing's idealization of the
type she represents. In Kingcote's impotent reaction to his own poverty and in his consequent refusal to marry her we see Gissing's sensitive awareness of his own unclassed position. Of greater moment, however, than the hero's unworthiness of her love is the fact that the conclusion of the novel follows inevitably from the nature of the characters and events presented. Here, as is not sufficiently the case in the preceding novels, Gissing exacts from the elements of his story a performance more generally in keeping with the demands of moral realism. The theme of the love of a poor but intelligent man for a woman of a higher class is not new in Gissing's novels. In *Isabel Clarendon*, however, there is a more consistent management of thematic elements than, for example, in *Workers in the Dawn*. Gissing deals with an attraction which the reader knows cannot be happily resolved. Therefore Gissing wisely refrains from rewarding the latently misanthropic Kingcote with the redeeming love of the heroine. It is with corresponding good sense that Gissing has Kingcote refuse her offer of love, for it must be realized that the two are of incompatible temperaments. To have brought them together at the last would have provided an ending inconsistent with the tone of the novel.

That the tone of the novel is not marred by excessive interpolation indicates that Gissing was beginning to acquire some maturity of vision and increasing skill in characterization. Although, as shall be discussed presently, he could not yet see the hero exclusively as a fictional individual and
could not forego the opportunity to elaborate upon notions which are not based upon circumstances within the plot, this particular novel has achieved some measure of success because it is guided by an intention which is primarily artistic rather than socially argumentative. This is not to suggest that these are irreconcilable intentions. Artistic aims may be adequately maintained in the novel of social criticism, and in a given novel the coexistence of the two may be a source of strength or of weakness. Waymark is an early spokesman of this theory which attempted to merge realism in the treating of social questions with artistic detachment. Gissing himself revealed perhaps the underlying tension in this theory, when he wrote to his brother in 1883.

I am by degrees getting my right place in the world. Philosophy has done all it can for me, and now scarcely interests me any more. My attitude henceforth is that of the artist pure and simple. The world is for me a collection of phenomena, which are to be studied and reproduced artistically.... The impulse to regard every juncture as a "situation" becomes stronger and stronger. In the midst of desperate misfortune I can pause to make a note for future use, and the afflictions of others are to me materials for observation.12

It may be argued that Gissing was too much involved in mankind either to stylize the details of experience or to suppress his own personal reactions to the raw materials he gathered from observation. It is certainly true that Gissing did his best as well as his worst work when he dealt with subjects in which he had a personal bias. The somewhat pale quality of Isabel Clarendon may be traced to the fact that Gissing's treatment
of his subject lacks force because the subject is deficient in appeal for that side of Gissing's temperament which could not escape the notion that art involved social responsibility. He wrote to his brother Algernon: "I would make a chief point of the necessary union between beauty in life and social reform." In another letter he stated that "human life has little interest for me, on the whole - save as material for artistic presentation. I can get savage over social inequities, but even then my rage at once takes the direction of planning revenge in artistic work." This novel lacks the impetus which might motivate a writer like Gissing to execute his revenge in artistic work. One has only to compare the many similarities between the persons and events in Isabel Clarendon and those in New Grab Street to find exposed the weaknesses of the earlier novel. Gissing's treatment of his subject also lacks strength because the hero is inadequate to the task of providing the novel with what seems to be offered as a focus of interest. Hence the deficiencies in the characterization of Kingcote injure the structure of the novel as a whole.

Gissing does not seem to have been able to apply to Kingcote the method of characterization which he describes in his observations regarding Isabel:

He who is giving these chapters of her history may not pretend to do much more than exhibit facts and draw at times a justifiable inference. He is not a creator of human beings, with eyes to hold the very heart of the machine he has himself pieced together; merely one who takes the trouble to trace certain lines of human experience, and, working here on grounds of knowledge, there by
aid of analogy, here again in the way of bolder speculation, spins his tale with what skill he may till the threads are used up.15

Gissing does not exercise the same restraint in the handling of Kingcote. Kingcote is intended to be an unreclaimable misfit whose only solace is inertia and to whom sleep represents an escape from experience. The hero's passivity and negation of the will to live are hardly deserving of pity. Yet Gissing presents him with indulgent sympathy and apologizes extensively for the misfortunes which the hero, in large measure, has brought upon himself. The facts of Kingcote's situation do not justify his misanthropy or his inability to find his place, and no background information is presented which might qualify that judgment. While it must be admitted that Gissing is here much more objective and less culpable for the excesses occasioned by identification in the earlier novels, the conclusion remains that Gissing has made of Kingcote an excuse for the expression of ideas and sentiments which are not always suggested by the context of the novel.

The attempt to assess the effect of identification upon a novel like Demos meets with considerable difficulty because the hero is more a function of the author's views than their spokesman. In other words, Gissing's treatment of Richard Mutimer serves to make of the latter an object lesson regarding proper and improper ways to reform society. The novel illustrates Gissing's views regarding the folly of placing large sums of money in the hands of the poor. Gissing
reports the views of old Richard Mutimer, and the irony of this theme becomes prophetic as the old man's legacy causes many of the misfortunes which result from the hero's misuse of the money. "To leave wealth to young men of the working class would have seemed to him the most inexcusable of follies; if such were to rise at all, it must by their own efforts and in consequence of their native merits; otherwise let them toil on and support themselves honestly." Now Mutimer's efforts to realize practically his dream for English Socialism are worthy of some admiration, and his native abilities are not insignificant. Yet his fate in the novel is meted out just as surely as if he were a fellow of slight merit and less vision because his career has been guided by what were to Gissing principles of unenlightened reform. Where Gissing had become conservative in his views, Mutimer is a radical reformer. In hoping to lead the people to a better life Mutimer unlooses the power of Demos, and the un­chained fury of the vulgar mob destroys the symbol of its liberation. The treatment, then, tends to be unsympathetic. Gissing selected a hero from among the poor class and endowed him with a consciousness of the reality of poverty and its effects upon one's good intentions, but he abandoned Mutimer because the latter has not his creator's intellectual cast and passive introspection. Though Gissing might from time to time question the worth of historical study as a discipline embody­ing the values of a traditional perspective, Mutimer's failure to attend to the author's views regarding education as the only
effective agency for social reform condemns him to a death which is something less than tragic because one feels that the end is rather the outcome of the writer's views than a necessary consequence of the order of things. The hero's fall expresses Gissing's judgment upon the hero himself, his schemes for reform, and the mob which turns against him. Gissing distrusted and feared the power of Demos, and it is expected that its well-intentioned champion should in some manner be corrupted by the power which is visited upon him by the sudden acquisition of unearned wealth. Gissing was an artist, and, as Waymark has observed, the artist is by nature an aristocrat; Mutimer is neither. If Gissing has not been just with his hero, it is because he is not fairly sympathetic to the type of character represented by Mutimer.17 Although he is not typical of what has come to be called the Gissing man, the handling of Mutimer shows Gissing's increasing proficiency in characterization.

Within the first hundred pages of a fairly long novel Gissing establishes the character of Mutimer in such a way as to reveal all his own sympathies and prejudices. He indicates his own values in the discussion of Mutimer's benefactor; surely Gissing agreed that "to one who lacks money the world is but a great debtor's prison."18 The remedying of this fact was for the old man, a matter of individual concern not the occasion for the attempted re-ordering of society as it became for young Mutimer. The ancestor, in Gissing's opinion, had a firmer vision of the structure of the body social and politic.
The defects of his 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. Remaining the sturdiest of Conservatives, he bowed in sincere humility to those very claims which the Radical most angrily disallows: birth, hereditary station, recognised gentility - these things made the strongest demand upon his reverence.19

In another author such a statement might be significant as descriptive matter establishing the outlook of a particular individual. In Gissing such remarks are touchstones in the canon of the author's personal opinions and, in Demos, become values against which the hero is weighed and found wanting. Similarly, the description of Mutimer's library clearly reveals Gissing's attitude toward what must be taken as Mutimer's deficiencies. It is not enough that the bookcase was full of volumes.

They were all of Richard's purchasing; to survey them was to understand the man, at all events on his intellectual side. Without exception they belonged to that order of literature which, if studied exclusively and for its own sake, - as here it was - brands a man indelibly, declaring at once the incompleteness of his education and the deficiency of his instincts.

Yet, withal, Mutimer is an exceptional individual, a person uncommon among the proletariat: "Richard represented - too favourably to make him anything but an exception - the best qualities his class can show."20 Mrs. Donnelly strikes at the heart of the "aristocratic tone" of the novel when she states that "Gissing was no longer a partisan of the working class, and was interested, in fact, in only the most unusual specimens it had to offer."21

If one examines the other characters in the novel who
represent values which Gissing prized, the character of Mutimer may be seen in fuller perspective. The parson Wyvern, for example, is an individual for whom Gissing expresses high regard; he is described as a man of "thought and character." One sees that in his exchanges with Mutimer he comes away quite the better. His bookish tastes and the quality of his detachment from the concerns of social reform become not simply traits of the individual but values against which the hero is measured. "But surely you are not a Socialist, Mr. Wyvern?" asks the busybody Mrs. Mewling. "I am a Christian, madam," replies the clergyman, "and I have nothing to do with economic doctrines."

Samuel V. Gapp observes that "Gissing's early and temporary interest in reform was of a highly idealistic nature." One suspects that he is oversimplifying in a manner characteristic of his attempt to base the fine points of Gissing's work in his interest in classical studies, but there is a measure of truth in his analysis that "Gissing's interest in reform, in social, economic, and political speculation was a thing of the past by 1885." As a young man Gissing had attended political meetings because he wished to take part in social reform. At this time, however, he attended Socialist meetings to gather material for the preparation of Demos, Thyrza, and The Nether World. The surest example of Gissing's feelings toward Mutimer is to be seen in the treatment of Hubert Eldon, the prodigal son. Gissing's uncritical approval is excessive and suggests that Hubert represents values which are expressive of the author's
own sentiments. That they are used to levy judgment against Mutimer is equally obvious. The passage which clearly reveals Gissing's own uneasiness as well as his general feelings is worth quoting in its entirety:

The working man had the advantage as yet. Hubert in vain tried to be at ease, whilst Mutimer was quite himself, and not ungraceful in his assumption of equality. For one thing Hubert could not avoid a comparison between his own wasted frame and the other's splendid physique; it heightened the feeling of antagonism which possessed him in advance, and provoked the haughtiness he had resolved to guard against. The very lineaments of the men foretold mutual antipathy. Hubert's extreme delicacy of feature was the outward expression of a character so compact of subtleties and refinements, of high prejudice and jealous sensibility, of spiritual egoism and all-pervading fastidiousness, that it was impossible for him not to regard with repugnance a man who represented the combative principle, even the triumph of the uncultured classes.26

Gissing's characterization of the two men betrays the author's feelings about Mutimer, and it results in a failure to achieve the dispassionate objectivity he claimed to be seeking. He is, after all, dealing with a character with whom he cannot sufficiently identify.

Mutimer, on the other hand, though fortune helped him to forbearance, saw, or believed he saw, the very essence of all he most hated in this proud-eyed representative of a county family. His own rough sculptured comeliness corresponded to the vigour and practicality and zeal of a nature which cared nothing for form and all for substance; the essentials of life were to him the only things in life, instead of, as to Hubert Eldon, the mere brute foundation of an artistic superstructure.27

It is clear that Gissing prefers the effete Eldon to the vigorous, but misdirected hero of the novel. The author's
view of Mutimer and his kind is phrased in Eldon's pessimistic analysis of the evil power of the masses:

"I seemed to be holding a dialogue with the twentieth century, and you may think what that means..."

"The man was openly exultant; he stood for Demos grasping the sceptre."28

As a result of his exaggerated sympathies for a character whose aristocratic gentility he admired, Gissing uses Eldon uncritically to establish his own preconceived evaluation of Mutimer. Ironically, it is Mutimer who provides the novel with whatever vigor and unity are to be found in its plot and theme. In their particular failings Thyrza and The Nether World are weaker novels just because they lack the strength and dominance of a central figure like Mutimer. Had Gissing treated Mutimer more along the lines of some of Hardy's major figures, a firmer novel might have resulted, one more closely suggestive of tragedy.29

It remains now to relate the problems of characterization to the structure of the novel as a whole. One of the problems of identification is caused by Gissing's poor judgment in the treatment of a weak figure like Eldon as an index character.30 Wyvern also is an index character, yet his instructing Mutimer in the philosophy of Plato is not offensive artistically. Although Wyvern does serve as a standard of measurement, that function is a suitable element in the characterization of him. Such is not the case with Eldon. Gissing's use of the latter for purposes of judging Mutimer prevents the novel from developing organically. The identification of the author with a fixed set of values which are not convincingly
illustrated by the organic elements of the novel involves a weakness in execution. As a result, Mutimer's downfall, while logical enough as the consequence of human frailties, is not completely persuasive esthetically. Mutimer's career is to some extent manipulated by the author's malevolent intentions. In a novel purporting to be objective and realistic, the reporting of detail should be an instrument of characterization supported simply by the details themselves; such is not sufficiently the case here. The pedantic description of Mutimer's table manners is an almost intolerable example of the author's obtrusive management of detail. That Gissing's own views regarding the subject matter tended to obscure his artistic intentions is indicated in a letter to his brother, written in August of 1885:

I think it is better to tell a story precisely as one does in real life, hinting, surmising, telling in detail what can so be told and no more. In fact, it approximates to the dramatic mode of presentment.31

In *Demos* Gissing was unequal to the practical application of such a theory, and, in fact, his work never fully reached this James-like standard for realism in fiction. In a novelist so subjective in his approach to his work success as well as failure in characterization came largely through identification. Gissing needed to become justly critical, himself, before he could identify with major figures without indulging the weaknesses of his own temperament. For this reason Reardon and Godwin Peak are convincingly and fairly drawn, and Waymark and Golding, in the earlier novels, are largely motivated by the
author's zeal for his own starved passions.\textsuperscript{32} The converse of this theory is illustrated in Demos. Gissing's inability to identify with Mutimer results in a lack of sympathy which affects characterization. Although no novel can exist without the creative impulse supplied by the author's life-view, it has come to be accepted as a standard of modern criticism that the facts of the novel shall provide their own causality and that the life view shall be suggested by the structure of the work itself. In Demos, Gissing's life-view is not simply the basis for the selection of subject. It interprets and manipulates the selection of events which condemns Mutimer. Russell Kirk has the following words to say in his sometimes unenlightened apology for the novel:

The suffering masses cannot rule their own passions: they are not fit to rule society. This is the theme of Demos (1886), in which the working-class socialist hero, Richard Mutimer, turns out to be a working-class socialist scoundrel, corrupted by ambition and prosperity, as the novel develops; and the ruined young squire who undoes Mutimer's philanthropic projects is a better and a wiser man.\textsuperscript{33}

It is only a seeming paradox that Gissing should have created a strong novel based upon a character with whom he was unable sympathetically to identify. A brief discussion of Thyrza and The Nether World may present some of the reasons for this fact. Frank Swinnerton siezes upon the notion that Gissing's particular defect as a writer lay in a "generalizing and moralizing habit which is the novelist's danger."\textsuperscript{34} In Demos Gissing was deprived of a central character about whom he could weave the fabric of his own disenchantment. He was
forced by the very nature of the hero to treat of practical matters and to deal with the realities of social reform without excessively abandoning himself to the passive qualities of his own personality. Thyrza, on the other hand, is overly sentimental because it lacks a character of Mutimer's strength of purpose. Thyrza herself is unsatisfying as a heroine because her sweetness and gentleness do not satisfy the need for realism in characterization.  

Gilbert Grail, perhaps too much like Gissing himself, is more intent upon visiting libraries and galleries than upon facing reality and suffers from defects similar to those of the heroine. The character of Egremont is awkwardly distorted by the author's desire that he should espouse Gissing's own values. His remarks about the supreme importance of beauty and his morbidly sentimental self-analysis belong more to a reflective essay like Ryecroft than to a novel.  

The Nether World expresses successfully "the paradox that the poor and the hunted are nowhere more unhoused than amid a huge armada of houses." The characters, however, are not really appealing, and the statement of theme depends upon the indignant tone of Gissing's attitude toward his subject. Jane Snowdon and Sidney Kirkwood are average indeed, and the ultimate worth of the novel is in the grimly photographic scenes through which Gissing guides the reader with an almost malign intensity.
CHAPTER V

THE RAZOR AND THE BREADKNIFE

In his long and appreciative introduction, to Gissing's The House of Cobwebs, Thomas Seccombe observes that "during 1886-7 he began really to write and the first great advance is shown in Isabel Clarendon." Gissing observed similarly in a letter of reply to his sister Ellen on March, 14, 1886: "It delights me to have your praise of Isabel. Yes, I think the end was inevitable - at all events in real life, and between people of such character." A few months later he confirmed his affection for the book: "Demos is, of course, vastly better from a literary point of view, but I shall always like Isabel." Although pleased by the favorable reactions of others toward his work, Gissing must have suspected that he was in strange waters. He had already expressed this uneasiness in a letter to his brother in October of 1885:

Thank goodness my powers obviously grow; but I fear I have been led from my right track in Isabel Clarendon and Emily [A Life's Morning].

He had also been advised by George Meredith that he was making a mistake in leaving the "low-life" scenes. Encouraged by Meredith, Gissing wrote Demos, which he planned as "rather a savage satire on working class aims and capacities." Aided by the timeliness of its subject, Demos enjoyed a reasonable success and prepared the way for Thyrza in 1887.

The last of the three proletarian novels, The Nether World, appeared in 1888. This novel is easily the bitterest
in tone of the three and most tellingly reveals the author's attitude toward the life and circumstances of the lower classes. Notably, it was begun shortly after the death of his wife. However sordid and unpleasant must have been the details of Gissing's first marriage, her death affected him strongly. He wrote to his sister that "it seems so miserable that a man of my age should be so utterly companionless." Additional evidence is found in his diary:

... In nothing am I to blame; I did my utmost... Fate was too strong. But as I stood beside that bed, I felt that my life henceforth had a firmer purpose. Henceforth I never cease to bear testimony against the accursed social order that brings about things of this kind.9

In the novel Gissing seems to have made good his analysis of self delivered some years earlier: "I can get savage over social iniquities, but even then my rage takes the direction of planning revenge in artistic work."10 The diary entry which announced the book's commencement is grimly terse: "March 19... Began a novel to be called The Nether World and wrote six pages which satisfy me."11

The exhaustion following the production of three bitter and remorseless excursions into the world of shadows and of miseries must have cloyed Gissing's interest in the proletariat as a fit subject and unsuited him for further efforts in this regard. He lost interest for a while in journeys to "a hat factory, a lunatic asylum, and other strange places" in search of material.12 The proceeds from the sale of The Nether World enabled Gissing to make a much anticipated trip to Italy. The
relationship between this and a second trip to the scenes of classical antiquity, and the change to be perceived in his handling of character and subject does not appear to be one of mere coincidence. A letter written after his first return from Italy states: "Little by little, the subjects of my books will probably change a great deal; in fact, the process has already begun, as you will see in The Emancipated." The experiences of actual travel among the ruins of the heroic past and the impact of a contemporary culture so different from his own may have provided the sensitive Gissing with a fuller perspective of reality. Indeed the novels of the period evidence a change to "a somewhat different type of realism, a change from such powerful pictures of the slums as The Nether World to studies of the middle class." The maturing of Gissing's vision of life (coupled with a modestly increasing financial security) is responsible for the change in treatment in two of his finer novels, New Grub Street and Born in Exile. The Emancipated, whose "main point is the emancipation of its principal female character ... from her Puritan background by means of the artistic and intellectual influence of Italy," belongs to this period, but it is not one of Gissing's better works. He intended the book as a satire, "rather savage in places, especially that directed against religious formalism." Gissing recognized the book's failings, but seemed to retain a sentimental affection for it: "It is a strange uncomfortable book, few will like it and very few indeed understand it; but on the whole it pleases me." Mrs. Donnelly's statement that,
"a novel, after all, should be concerned with manners and process, not résumés," is well directed against The Emancipated. Equally true are her observations regarding the close of one phase of Gissing's career and the beginning of another:

The Nether World showed how cruelly his mind could analyse while his heart protested, but most of the wriggling human beings were outside the world that had produced Gissing himself, and toward which he felt more hostility than even the nether world roused in him. Now, in the bitter years of self analysis after 1888, he created character after character in search of the truth about himself. In the earlier novels no one except for Isabel Clarendon, perhaps, may be said to have much knowledge of self, but in the later novels, each man is upon the rack. Now Gissing would consider self-conscious men who knew their own measure, and he would discover with sadness, that the truth would not necessarily make men free.

However, one must study New Grub Street before one is able fully to appreciate her remarks.

When a writer, like Gissing, identifies with major figures in his novels it cannot be predicted, as a matter of course, that the result will be good or bad. Gissing's novels must be judged upon their individual merits and not be condemned because identification is a salient feature in the characterization of the heroes. To do otherwise is to reject the facts of Gissing's background as suitable material for fictional portrayal and to avoid the necessity of evaluating the work upon the success or failure of the author to render his subject satisfactorily. At length Gissing learned to be impartial in the handling of characters whose experiences and sentiments were based upon the details of his own life. Critics have, for the most part,
concluded that *New Grub Street* is Gissing's most successful novel, but what remains to be demonstrated fully is that the novel owes its strength to the quality of the author's identification with his subject. *New Grub Street* is more than an explanation or didactic exposition of the author's view; it is a fictional rendering of it.

There are admittedly flaws in the novel, but the flaws are those of execution, more often than those occasioned by deliberate assertions of attitude or opinion as in the earlier works. For example, Biffen's rescue of his manuscript from the flames of his burning tenement, however well-handled as an individual episode, is perhaps extravagantly developed, if one considers the causality it affords the narrative element of the story. Although the extensive treatment of Biffen's adventure is somewhat tangential to the course of the plot, the author's good taste avoids the sensationalism which the event might otherwise introduce. As it is, Gissing's artistic restraint is evident and, while the episode might offend those intent upon structural purity, the rescue of Mr. Bailey Grocer is a suitable aspect of the life-view presented.

What makes *New Grub Street* a satisfactory piece of fiction is the fact that it thoroughly and consistently defines Gissing's life-view in dramatic context. While he may never have fully realized the desideratum of "j'expose, je n'impose rien," there is found in this novel a relationship between philosophy and structure that is not always present in his other work. The dialectic of the novel does not present new
themes, or even an ambitious reworking of old ideas, but it
does suggest a more mature balancing of raw materials and the
artistic perspective which motivates their treatment. Before
considering in particular detail the use made of these themes,
some attention should be directed to the general artistic
perspective of *New Grub Street*. Following the remarks in
*Isabel Clarendon* which announce a theory of characterization,
Gissing speaks of the author as "merely one who takes trouble
to trace certain lines of human experience, and, working here
on grounds of knowledge, there by aid of analogy, here again
in the way of bolder speculation, spins his tale with what
skill he may till the threads are used up." Patently the
statement seems to advertise a somewhat unselective approach
to the details of experience, one which is photographic rather
than imaginative in its vision. Biffen carries such a practice
to a naturalistic extreme in *Mr. Bailey Grocer*, but Gissing
himself is not a practitioner of the same art in *New Grub Street*.
An analysis of the crudities of the early novels will show
that, in order to appreciate the deficiencies of his early
fiction, one must treat of the failure to achieve a balance
between the faithfulness to objective detail and the heavy-
handed insistence of a young author in attempting to insure
the recognition of his own viewpoint. Although good and evil
seem to go unrewarded or punished, a survey of several of the
elements of resolution in the first few books will show that
their treatment is not a matter of merely objective, or un-
selective, representation. The suicide of Golding and the
offstage death of Helen Norman reveal the badly knotted threads of an unwieldy narrative. The death of Julian Casti prevents the inconvenient lingering on of Waymark's alter ego. Mutimer's downfall is significantly accelerated by the author's fear of Demos and his distrust of the nineteenth century movement toward egalitarianism. The inevitable outcome of Isabel Clarendon, convincing as may be the moral realism upon which it is grounded, owes much to the unsuccessful characterization of Kingcote. Later on, the fate of Godwin Peak must be accepted, in part, as Gissing's judgment upon the hypocrisy involved in trying to prove that "one's philosophy has nothing to do with the business of life."

Gissing spoke of Thyrza as "a book which will contain the very spirit of London working class life." Gissing's artistic intentions, however, needed more than simple reporting in order to be achieved:

With me it is a constant aim to bring the present and the past near to each other, to remove the distance which seems to separate Hellas from Lambeth. It can be done, by grasping firmly enough the meanings of human nature.22

It is to be doubted, then, that an author who aimed at "the love of everything that is beautiful, and the contempt of vulgar conventionality,"23 was attempting to be "objective" in his attitude toward his raw material or the structural ordering of it in fiction. In an article appearing in the Pall Mall Gazette (Sept. 10, 1892) Gissing expressed his artistic judgment regarding this term:
To talk about being 'objective' is all very well for those who swear by words. No novelist was ever objective, or ever will be. His work is a bit of life as seen by him. It is his business to make us feel a distinct pleasure in seeing the world with his eye.... For my own part, I wish to go beyond that point, to have scope for painting, to take in the external world and (by convention which no novelist has set aside) the unuttered life of the soul.24

In an article entitled "Realism in Fiction", in the Humanitarian (July, 1895), Gissing continued to develop the notion of "objectivity":

What can be more absurd than to talk about the 'objectivity' of such an author as Flaubert, who triumphs by his extraordinary power of presenting life as he, and no other man beheld it.... Realism, then, signifies nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life.25

If identification is to be found anywhere in New Grub Street, it is to be found everywhere, for Gissing chose as his subject the world of the writer in its many aspects. In their professional and their personal lives the writers are revealed as is only possible through the consciousness of one to whom their several changes of fortune were known and understood. That each speaks justly of a portion of the life of the author indicates a considerable measure of self-knowledge in their creator. That the starving champion of the "ignobly decent", the journeyman literary advisor, the near-charlatan, and the blighted idealist all achieve an identity independent of their creator is an index of success in the fictional representation of the details of experience. Even characters and events peripheral to the development of the main plot contribute to the totality of the novel's effect. The treatment
of Alfred Yule and his family presents a good example of Gissing's ability in *New Grub Street* to use minor figures to illustrate ideas and attitudes which are also illustrated by characters with whom the author more closely identifies. Yule and his circumstances are a partial expression of Gissing's own unfortunate attempts to solve the dilemma of how a man with intelligence and no money may find a wife who is cultivated and accomplished and yet willing to share his poverty. With the hint of self-criticism which is often insinuated in the handling of the literary figures, Gissing tells the reader that Yule's "failings, obvious enough, were the results of a strong and somewhat pedantic individuality ceaselessly at conflict with unpropitious circumstances." In some respects, then, Yule is not unlike Reardon; but Yule's marriage is not unhappy for the same reason. His compromise consists of a marriage to a woman who is his social and intellectual inferior. The mature Gissing treats this uncomfortable union with a good deal of patience and insight; the extent of characterization is not so limited as the distorted portrayal of the marriage of Golding and Carrie Mitchell. The fairness of Gissing's presentation of Mrs. Yule insures a balanced treatment of the relationship between Yule and his wife. (She observes, as might Reardon, that, "Poverty will make the best people bad, if it gets hard enough." The passage which summarizes their situation shows the author's pronounced viewpoint, but it is a viewpoint which elaborates upon the subject of the novel and shows a degree of self-knowledge not encountered
in the earlier works.

One holiday he met this girl as she was walking with a younger sister in the streets; he made her nearer acquaintance, and before long she consented to be his wife and share his garret.... Many a man with brains and no money has been compelled to the same step. Educated girls have a pronounced distaste for London garrets; not one in fifty thousand would share poverty with the brightest genius ever born. Seeing that marriage is so often indispensable to that very success which would enable a man of parts to mate equally, there is nothing for it but to look below one's level, and be grateful to the untaught woman who has pity on one's loneliness.28

Without lingering over the possible similarities between this meeting and that of Gissing with his second wife,29 it can be seen that the movement from particular detail to general observation is neither unjustified nor distorted by excessive passion on the part of the author. Later, Gissing enlarges upon the Yule's marriage and makes of it something of a universal theme. The grim irony in the account of Yule's circle reveals an acceptance of things which cannot be changed.

These men were capable of better things than they had done or ever would do; in each case their failure to fulfill youthful promise was largely explained by the unpresentable wife. They should have waited; they might have married a social equal between fifty and sixty.

Another old friend was Mr. Quarmby. Unwedded he, and perpetually exultant over men who, as he phrased it, had noosed themselves. He made a fair living, but, like Dr. Johnson, had no passion for clean linen.30

Apart from the irascible overtone of the statement, it cannot be said to obtrude offensively to the degree encountered in sentiments expressed in earlier works. The particular facet
of the marriage relationship introduced here serves to provide relief for the fuller development accorded to Reardon and Amy; it also creates an additional background against which to view Milvain's dastardly, but opportunistic, discarding of Marian Yule.

To say that Reardon is Gissing's only fictional counterpart in the novel is to fail to realize the effect of the dispersion of elements of Gissing's background among the other characters. No one character represents a sure index of values, based upon an identification with Gissing, against which all other characters may be judged. To be sure, Reardon comes closest to being a counterpart for the author, but the identification involved may be considered as Gissing's critical self-appraisal, rather than the uncritical self-indulgence seen earlier. While events and ideas are transferred from the life of the author to the life of the character, little effort is made to spare Reardon the judgment which must follow his inability to succeed. Like Gissing, Reardon withdraws from the world, and the following passage from a letter to Gissing's sister Margaret would not surprise the reader if it occurred somewhere in the novel:

It is my rule henceforth to dine with no one. My solitude makes me more and more unfit to meet with people who are light hearted, and it is better not to make pretense. So henceforth I shut myself from all acquaintances and simply work on. 31

Gissing, too, was not content to "be reckoned among the petty scribblers of the day." 32 However, a comparison between the two shows Gissing to have been a man of some courage, who bent
judiciously with the demands of his craft, and Reardon to be, like Kingcote, a man "sensible of the blight on him, and resigning himself to let it eat him away." Reardon is intensely, but helplessly, self-conscious. Gissing, however, wisely does very little to mitigate the former's shortcomings or to importune the sympathy of the reader. Gissing's own miseries, as he wrote and rewrote his novels (and saw some of them discarded), did not prevent him from portraying the contemptible aspects of Reardon's character. It is well to note that there is always a measure of self-criticism in Gissing's analysis of Reardon.

It was significant, however, that no native impulse had directed him to novel writing. His intellectual temper was that of the student, the scholar, but strongly blended with a love of independence which had always make him think with distaste of a teacher's life.

Milvain, who, like Vincent Lacour and Mutimer, is accorded a certain amount of infamy for casting off a virtuous, but indigent sweetheart, represents the kind of commercial journalist that Gissing himself could not honestly be. Nevertheless, he serves as a reference for the evaluation of Reardon. Milvain's remark that "men won't succeed in literature that they may get into society, but will get into society that they may succeed in literature," serves to characterize both men. The remark is not an expression of self-deception, however, nor does it become the occasion for a tirade by the author. Milvain is aptly presented in order to show Reardon's weaknesses as well as his virtues. Indeed, the various writers act, at one level,
as facets or mirrors so that Reardon may be seen in the round. Whelpdale, whose longing for feminine companionship and whose unsuccessful love interests remind one of Gissing's own errant interests following the death of his first wife, retells the author's adventures in America and appears to have been no less deprived than Reardon who remains incapable of his own help. The literary advisor is presented as a likable individual, and the humor in the presentation of his misadventures indicates the author's detachment. It is this detachment which prevents the author from establishing an uncritical sympathy with Reardon. The resultant success in the characterization of Reardon insures the unity of narrative and thematic development in the novel, for Reardon is, after all, the novel's central concern. A final example of the author's incisive vision in the matter of Reardon may be given. As Biffen and Reardon journey to the bedside of the latter's wife and their dying son, Biffen makes a remark which crystallizes with almost symbolic appropriateness Reardon's plight. Biffen, too, appears to be "unfitted for the rough and tumble of the world's labour market"; yet he reminds Reardon of the value of the "common-sense disregard of delicacies" and asks:

"Why will you go cutting your loaf with a razor when you have a serviceable bread-knife?"

Biffen is rescued from flatness in characterization, in the sense of representing an idée fixe, by the independence of his own position and the fact that he would give his life for Amy Reardon.
The characterization of Amy Reardon again expresses a maturing of artistic vision. Her presentation as a self-possessed, credible individual is considerably different from Gissing's first efforts with women like Carrie Mitchell, Helen Norman, and Adela Waltham. She is presented as neither a termagant nor a madonna figure; nor is she accorded uncritically a prominence which makes her the ungrounded expression of the author's own desires and values. The successful handling of this figure enables Gissing to use her as a link between Reardon and Milvain. Her words reveal her sentiments and attitudes toward herself and her position: "If I had to choose between a glorious reputation with poverty and a contemptible popularity with wealth, I should choose the latter." At the same time, her words emphasize the pathetic inability of Reardon to compromise, and they foretell the false quality of Milvain's later success; her participation in the vicissitudes of each man gives to the novel a dramatic economy. The concurrence of the domestic tragedy and of the literary tragedy (the two areas of experience with which the novel is most directly concerned) provides the novel with a thematic unity which neatly coincides with the narrative development of the story. The pivotal position of Amy Reardon, then, gives to the novel an additional dimension, that of placing Reardon in juxtaposition with the real necessities of life. Thus it is shown that Reardon is unequal to the task of fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of a way of life which his needs have caused him to select. Reardon does not, however, become the occasion
for the author's unenlightened expression of self-pity. This emotion, which is seldom totally absent in Gissing's work, is, in New Grub Street, tempered by the honesty of characterization and the ripening of what were formerly expressions of self-pity into pleas for understanding. The mellowing of the author's statements of his own viewpoint may be observed in the following passage regarding Biffen and Reardon:

But 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 relation to a humane order of society, and they are admirable citizens. Nothing is easier than to condemn a type of character which is unable to meet the coarse demands of life as it suits the average man.... The sum of their faults was their inability to earn money; but indeed that inability does not call for unmixed disdain.40

The tone of the author's intrusions into the narrative seem to bear out Morley Roberts' opinion that "in Edward Reardon's portrait Gissing drew himself, not without self-pity and yet as the artist pitilessly."41

Gissing has skillfully cast the theme of the nature of the sex relationship within the context of Reardon's and Amy's marriage, yet preserved it as a thing apart. Reardon's own views are cast against the more normal, yet equally responsive, attitude of his wife. Reardon's approach to his relationship with Amy is cloyed by unreal dimensions and seeks to rationalize the fact that he is unable to supply food for their table. His wife rejects his idealized notions, just as she rebels against the notions of romantic love found in novels. She exclaims resentfully:
"Best or worst, novels are all the same. Nothing but love, love, love; what silly nonsense it is! Why don't people write about the really important things of life? Some of the French novelists do; several of Balzac's for instance. I have just been reading his 'Cousin Pons', a terrible book, but I enjoyed it ever so much because it is nothing like a love story. What rubbish is printed about love."42

This is her plea for realism, for "artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life," and, by implication, an out-cry against Reardon's escapism. The identification between Reardon and Gissing is particularly strong regarding this subject, and one may suspect that neither Reardon, nor Gissing, who admired the French novelists, fully appreciated the point which Amy Reardon makes. Both sought refuge in the world of classical studies, and Reardon's remark that "the best moments of life are those when we contemplate beauty in the purely artistic spirit - objectively,"43 points to the fact the valley of the shadow of books was a hiding-place as well as a goal. That Reardon's attitude represents a flight from the reality of the sex relationship and, therefore, from the 'practical difficulties and small irritations of existence' is betrayed in the conclusion of his argument with Biffen regarding beauty.44

The latter asserts that the artistic pleasure is "only one of life's satisfactions" Reardon answers:

"I am only maintaining that it is the best, and infinitely preferable to sexual emotion. It leaves, no doubt, no bitterness of any kind. Poverty can't rob me of those memories. I have lived in an ideal world that was not deceitful, a world which seems to me, when I recall it, beyond the human sphere, bathed in divine light." 45
Although *New Grub Street* is occasionally marred by the note of didacticism which pervades Gissing's work, the novel is for the most part a well constructed piece of fiction. The careers of Reardon and Milvain mingle in such a way as to suggest a counterpoint handling of the various elements of the novel. To this may be added the notion that Gissing's participation in these various elements makes of the novel a kind of complex self-examination. Lastly, many of the difficulties previously noted with regard to identification have been overcome in *New Grub Street*, and it may at length be submitted that the author's identification with the several elements of the story provides them with a certain reality which the dialectic of his viewpoint forges into an artistic structure.
CHAPTER VI

PHILOSOPHY AND THE BUSINESS OF LIFE

Born in Exile, published in the year following Gissing's second journey to Greece and Rome, shows a further accomplishment in the art of characterization. Many of the preceding novels attempted to present a study of the agonies and torments which attend the effort of the sensitive man of intellectual temperament to evaluate himself and his position in a hostile society. Only Gissing's treatment of Godwin Peak, however, seems satisfactorily to give artistic expression to the inner life of the character. Mrs. Donnelly observes that "the reader is forced to judge Peak largely from interior monologues, although these are not deep or penetrating enough to be called true 'stream of consciousness!' It is this attention to an inner viewpoint which makes the novel an ambitious, but not wholly unsuccessful, examination of problems which never ceased to trouble Gissing.

In Born in Exile Gissing achieves success in the characterization of an individual with whose ideas and attitudes he closely sympathized, and, paradoxically, it is the emphasis upon the inner nature of the figure that lends a tone of honesty and detachment to the novel. While it may be admitted that both Gissing and Godwin Peak were gifted individuals, the ultimate resolutions of their conflicts afford an important insight into the extent to which the author's identification with his hero was critical as well as imaginative. Gissing at
length learned that the world was not going to change for him and that the era of "unmitigated shop" would continue long after him; his dying words were "patience, patience.... God's will be done." 2 This patient attitude, based upon the fatigue resulting from the years of intellectual struggle and of physical deprivation, and mellowed by the comparative happiness of his final days, had its counterpart in Gissing's development as a writer of fiction. The railings of the young writer against the injustices of society were, at the last, tempered. "The final stage reached was, clinically, depersonalization, in which Gissing looked at all things as phenomena and made no moral judgments." 3 The effete and somewhat enervated tone of Ryecroft is indicative of this final stage. Gissing, then, came to realize the limitations of his opportunities. He recorded sadly in his Commonplace Book that "one of the most pathetic things is the power of human nature to subdue itself to necessity." 4 This comment, which may be compared to Ryecroft's statements of "resignation," is more responsive to his position than Seccombe's cavalier observation that "his attitude through life was that of a man who, having set out with the understanding that a second class ticket is to be provided, allows himself to be unceremoniously hustled into the rough and tumble of a noisy third." 5 How different this is from Peak's comment which expresses the vindictive and egotistic pride of the intellectual outcast and his resentful attitude towards society: "My one supreme desire is to marry a perfectly refined woman. Put it in the correct terms; I am a plebeian,
and I aim at marrying a lady."

Gissing stressed the differences as well as the similarities between Peak and himself in a letter to his friend Eduard Bertz:

In judging the tendency of "Born in Exile," you have been misled by the fact that the character of Godwin Peak is obviously, in a great degree, sympathetic to the author. But you will not find that Peak's tone is to be henceforth mine - do not fear it. Indeed, it seems to me that the whole tone of the book is by no means identical with that of Peak's personality; certainly I did not mean it to be so. Peak is myself - one phase of myself. I described him with gusto, but surely I did not, in depicting the other characters, take his point of view?

By this time Gissing had a firm grasp of the use of autobiographical detail, and Born in Exile illustrates his ability to present with intense fairness a character based to a significant extent upon self-identification. Walter Allen cogently argues that "in the character of the proletarian intellectual Godwin Peake... Gissing created a counterpart of himself seen and presented with such objectivity as to be thoroughly satisfying." This success in characterization is accomplished, Allen continues, "by stressing not the hypersensitivity in his make-up but the pride." Gissing himself withdrew from society and attempted, with a relatively honest vision, to present a view of society and to express "his preoccupation with the duty of the gifted man in a world of mediocrity." Peak, also conscious of the burden his own poverty has placed upon him, becomes a victim of his own ambition and courts the favours of the middle class under the hypocritical guise of religious liberalism.
The self-seeking Godwin Peak becomes his own judge and attempts to rationalize the dishonesty of his misrepresentations by the assertion that "one's philosophy has nothing to do with the business of life." On the other hand, Gissing learned early that, although it made him an outcast, society did not relieve him of the responsibility for his acts nor condone his efforts to set the order of things aright. ¹⁰ As a young man, perhaps bitterly remorseful over the vengeance of society after his own misdeeds, he had written to his brother Algernon:

The immortality of man consists in this reflection - that not a word we utter, not a thought we think, not a battle we win, not a temptation we yield to, but has, and must have, influence upon those living in contact with us, and from them, like circles spreading in a pool, extends to the whole future human race. Therefore it is of vast importance to me whether I set an example of an ignorant and a foolish man, or of one bent upon using his faculties to the utmost.¹¹

That Gissing's novel dealing with the inner working of the intellectual outcast should be accompanied by faithful characterization is explained by the fact that Gissing reserved, as existing apart from the exile's personal feelings, an order of values which condemned such hypocrisy as exhibited by Peak. Just as Gissing did not believe that there was a "science of fiction," he did not believe in the slick reconciliation of science and religion offered by both Peak and Bruno Chilvers. Neither does Peak, for that matter, and it is his double-dealing that accounts for his downfall. The simple dialectic of the novel inheres in the difference between honesty and hypocrisy, and it would be difficult to quarrel with so obvious
a differentiation or to cite its application as indicative of the author's "prejudice."

It is perhaps the very fact that both Gissing and Peak were religious skeptics which makes the novel so compelling a character study. Gissing was deeply concerned with religious matters, and, although he did deny an orthodox position, he was equally critical of the nihilist and the fanatic zealot. One must not, therefore, fall into the error of Gissing's sister Margaret when she wrote to him regarding *Born in Exile*: "It is a pity you should write on a subject you so little understand as Christianity." Later on, in *Ryecroft* Gissing gives a fairly explicit statement of his own position regarding the answers proffered by the science and religion of his day to his questions regarding himself and his relationship to the universe.

So far am I from feeling satisfied with any explanation, scientific or other, of myself and of the world about me, that not a day goes by but I fall a-marvelling before the mystery of the universe... now, as of old, we know but one thing - that we know nothing.

Now Gissing placed considerable emphasis upon the responsibility of the individual for the betterment of his own lot, but he did not join those of his contemporaries who replaced the loss of traditional religious values with the promises of scientific advancement and an unqualified optimism regarding man himself. Gissing's remark that, "If I hold any religion at all, it is Manichaeism," illustrates the notion of corruption in the human character which is to be found in many of
Gissing's novels.\textsuperscript{15} Godwin Peak's downfall is brought about because he surrenders his will to an authority in which he does not really believe. His hypocritical plans to become an Anglican minister in order to win the hand of Sidwell Warricome are carried on because he has been corrupted by a distorted zeal for improving his social position. Jacob Korg claims that the intellectual pride which motivates Peak's self-esteem and the indignation which attends his awareness that he is at odds with the world link him with the heroes of Turgenev and Jacobsen. "All three are victims of the negative philosophy formed in the heat of the stirring scientific insights of the nineteenth century... Contemptuous of tradition, religion and family ties, these young men have not yet found any new spiritual foundations."\textsuperscript{16} Gissing himself may not have reached the negative extreme involved in such tendencies, but he could certainly appreciate their effect upon the young intellectual whose mental capacities were not recognized as a value by the materialistic society of late Victorian England.

Gissing's full perspective gives the characterization of Peak the necessary dimension to raise \textit{Born in Exile} above the level of pedestrian excursions in autobiographically oriented fiction. Gissing had learned resignation as well as indignation, and at length come to the realization that the only way to face life was to bear it as it was. This fact is mentioned in a letter which also announces the completion of the first volume of \textit{Godwin Peak} (the originally planned title for the book). In answer to his sister Ellen's comments regarding
New Grub Street he states:

As for your comments on the philosophical tone of the book, well, it is too late for me to change my views on the universe. I do not dogmatise, remember; ... on the whole I confine myself to giving pictures of life as it looks to my observation of it. The outlook, certainly is not very cheerful; impossible for me to see the world in a rosy light.

At best it looks to me, only not intolerable.... The problem does not trouble me, either. I have reached the stage at which one is content to be ignorant. The world is to me mere phenomenon (which literally means that which appears) and I study it as I do a work of art - but without reflecting on its origin.17

Gissing at first intended to call the novel after the name of its hero, but changed the title to Born in Exile. Although the book continues to center about the professed disbeliever who supplies its raison d'être, the existing title is more responsive to the theme that Peak is the victim of a society caught between science and religion, neither of which could supply man with the answers necessary to relate his moral being with the universe. The old ways of faith and belief had been swept aside by the Gods of iron. Gissing used the phrase to describe "machinery, which is no longer a servant but a tyrannous oppressor of mankind."18 Even Peak's heredity represents the conflicting elements of the times: his mother feels that the boy should devote his exceptional abilities to the service of God and become a cleric; his father is a free-thinker in the tradition of William Godwin and seeks to have the boy follow the intellectual example set by the boy's namesake. This uneasy dichotomy of values intensifies the young
man's exaggerated sense of personal regard. His withdrawal from the vulgarity of his surroundings convinces him that the paths of the alien and the exile are his instinctive haunts. Now in the earlier novels Gissing, though faithful to external detail in a manner sometimes repugnant to his Victorian readers, relied too heavily upon didactic interpolation and resumé to bolster inadequate characterization. For this very reason the character of Bernard Kingcote is imperfectly developed. As his skill in characterization grew, however, Gissing learned to reveal character more dramatically so that interpretive remarks amplified rather than took the place of characterization. Therefore the remarks concerning the essential quality of Peak's outcast temperrament are neither distracting nor a weak substitute for reality in character development. The observation that "nature had decreed that he was to resemble the animals which, once reared, go forth in complete independence of birthplace and the ties of blood,"\textsuperscript{19} is properly related to Peak's own bitter acceptance of the fact that he is born in exile.

Gissing set himself the added task of rendering the inner thoughts of the individual in order to expose, rather than simply to explain them. The internal focus from which he presents various characters' examinations of self and society gives dimension to the novel. The treatment of Sidwell Warricome's reactions to Peak's dissimulation will illustrate Gissing's technique:
Was it not flagrantly true that English society at large made profession of a faith which in no sense whatever it could be said seriously to hold? Was there not every reason to believe that thousands of people keep up an ignoble formalism, because they feared the social results of declaring their severance from the religion of the churches? This was a monstrous evil; she had never till this moment understood the scope of its baneful effects, but for the prevalence of such a spirit of hypocrisy, Godwin Peak would never have sinned against his honour.

The rendering of the reflections of Sidwell gives a deeper perspective to the exposure of Peak as the author of "The New Sophistry." Her emotional and intellectual reactions enlarge upon the significance of Peak's crime. Although the novel is sometimes uncomfortably dominated by the interior viewpoint of the hero, it can be seen that Gissing's concern was not only with the hero himself, but also with the society which had alienated him. In a real sense, then, Peak's crime of hypocrisy is also the crime of society, and in examining the cause of one individual Gissing was also examining his society. Gissing's approach to the subject of the novel implies no wholehearted acceptance of Godwin Peak's machinations, but rather a sensitive accounting of the exile's attempt to further his own ambitions by falsely assuming the self-deceptions of his cultural environment. It must be remembered that Peak is not a self-deceived individual. Mme Cazamian clearly establishes this point:

Godwin Peak n'est pas un Tartuffe ordinaire.... il est sans illusions sur lui-même, et incapable de se donner le change en faisant siennes des convictions que son esprit refuse d'admettre, u'évitant de penser avec nettété, resource habituelle des faibles. Il manque à l'honneur vis à vis d'autrui, mais non vis à vis de lui-même.
On the other hand, it is society which is self-deceiving, which comes at last to believe in its protean disguise. It is this kind of dissimulation, not Peak's, which represents the "resource habituelle des faibles."

_Born in Exile_ records the estrangement of the sensitive individual from his society and eventually from himself. It is the latter aspect of the tragedy of Godwin Peak which is most instructive in the appraisal of the novel as a work of art, as a thing apart from the social criticism it offers. _Born in Exile_ represents a significant milestone in the course of Gissing's development as an artist, just as it represents "a key-book as regards the development of the author's character, a _clavis_ of primary value."²² First of all, one must understand the author's viewpoint as he tells his story. Gissing was essentially a moral individual whose problem in life was involved in the effort to reconcile his own inner moral nature with the unhappy awareness that there was no moral counterpart in the world about him. One need not, therefore, catalogue the parallels between Gissing's early life and the opening scenes dealing with the life at Whitelaw College and with Peak's background to discover sufficient affinities to establish the identification between the author and the hero. Gissing's intellectual and emotional set were receptive to a favourable consideration of the exile's plight, but the book does not, for that reason, express an exaggerated sympathy for Peak. The remarkable accomplishment of the book is that it expresses vividly and forcefully the course of Peak's inner development
within a plot structure which gives to that development a matrix of dramatic reality. This is achieved by another paradox: the novel assumes in many places the viewpoint of the hero as it lays bare the sensations of revulsion, of suffocation, of intense pain and pressure which follow in the wake of Peak's humiliations; at the same time the novel provides in its dramatic and ideologic context the machinery to ensure that Peak will be hoist with his own petard. In short, no amount of identification will save Peak from the fate he has sealed for himself, and one must come to the conclusion that Gissing had, at the age of thirty-five, sufficient detachment with which to review the rebellion of his youth. The retributive justice which provides the dialectic of the novel is strong enough to impose an order of law upon the efforts of Godwin Peak to have the best of two worlds whose reconciliation he cannot in his heart admit. Thus, one of the things which adds to the unity of the tone of the novel is the grimly oracular use of Peak's honesty as an angry young exile to foretell his doom as a temporarily successful hypocrite. Of the effort of religious liberals to wed Darwin and Genesis, Peak proclaims with an intransigence worthy of his first tutor in geology:

"The day has gone by for downright assaults on science; to be marketable, you must prove that the Origin of Species was approvingly foreseen in the first chapter of Genesis, and that the Apostle's Creed conflicts in no single point with the latest results of biblical criticism.

"How magnificent it is that so many of the solemn jackasses who brayed against Darwin from
ten to twenty years ago should live to be regarded as beneath contempt!" 23

In order to appreciate the argument that Peak's downfall results from the knowing and willful alienation from himself, one must see that here Peak is not disputing the validity of real faith (whether scientific or religious), but the hypocrisy involved in meeting the demands of liberal conformity by advocating the union of religion and science. Witness, as evidence, his later remarks:

"I wish I had been a parson. In many ways the position would have suited me very well.... I am quite serious. Well, if I were so placed, I should preach Church dogma pure and simple. I would have nothing to do with these reconciliations.... Depend upon it, let the dogmas do what they can. There's a vast police force in them at all events. A man may strongly defend himself for preaching them." 24

Peak is also a commentator upon the hypocrisy of his age; that he is corrupted by the very evil of which he is most acutely aware is at once a critique of his society and of his own character. Peak becomes a stranger in the pilgrimage of his own soul, not by succumbing to the hypocrisy, but by using it. Herein lies an important aspect of the novel: the pivot of the thematic development is at the centre a moral issue rather than a social one. The result is to emphasise the solitude of the intellectual outcast. He has chosen his own set of values, and just as his momentary triumph is sweeter for the fact that he has used society's own weapons to gain his ends, so is his chagrin more bitter when the fabric of his own deceits is shorn by the trenchant wit of his own words.
Now the critic is confronted by the major problem in the novel. Several observers have noted, as significant, that Peak uses the money from his legacy to travel to the continent after the disillusioned Sidwell refuses to marry him. While there is certainly a parallel to Gissing's own trips to Italy and Greece, the establishment of identification in this case provides only a superficial approach to the novel. On the surface Peak's withdrawal from English society constitutes a self-imposed exile, and that fact is perhaps suggestive of a neatness of resolution which may indeed appeal to some. In actuality, such a resolution is objectionable not because it is too convenient, but because it does not face with complete fairness the equivocal nature of Peak's position after his disgrace. Peak himself is not fully aware of his sentiments, and his subsequent removal (motivated in large part by Sidwell's refusal of him) and later offstage death rather leave the matter in mid-air than inter it with his distant remains. The conversation between Earwaker and Peak suggests this difficulty:

"But what I have won is won for ever. The triumph no longer rests on deceit.... I have used means, that's all. The old way of candour led me to bitterness and cursing; by dissimulation I have won something more glorious than tongue can ever tell."

It was in the endeavour to expel the subtlest enemy of his peace that Godwin dwelt so defiantly upon this view of the temptation to which he had yielded.... If only he could obtain Earwaker's assent to the plan he put forward, it would support him in disregard of idle regrets.25
Peak's self-justification is tinged with remorse, and Gissing's inevitable identification with the major figure introduces concerns which complicate as well as amplify the treatment of the basic moral issue upon which the novel depends. As a result, an uneasy relationship exists between hero and author which makes the novel not entirely successful in the presentation of its theme. To say this is not to confute Walter Allen's statement that Peak is presented with objectivity, but to stress the difficulties of even an objective identification between Gissing and Peak. Peak follows a personally oriented morality, a morality quite different from the traditional idealism of society, in order to secure ends which are not the ordinary goals of the genius in the service of a force higher than himself. His ends, however acute the need for them, however intolerable the position of the exile, are ultimately self-seeking. That he misuses his moral independence becomes clear as the motive of intellectual honesty, which initiates the young man's sensitivity and is later warped into a justification for dissimulation, returns as a spectre of vengeance. His difficulty is not in the assumed belief of the possibility of reconciliation between religion and science, but in his inability satisfactorily to evaluate the quality of his dissimulation. The effect is somehow to render indistinct the treatment of the novel's moral issue, and the removal of Peak from the scene does not simplify the failure of the novel to hold its centre. Nor does the attention to Peak's emotional attachment with Sidwell Warricome exonerate Gissing from the charge that he does not
successfully carry the novel to a conclusion which fuses artistic and thematic elements. A survey of the novel will show that this difficulty resided ultimately in Gissing himself.

Another of the causes of Peak's downfall is to be found in the fact that Gissing was not simply class-conscious, but also that he believed in class distinctions. "Gissing tends to write of the Warricombes, who are wealthy manufacturers of some culture, as though they were almost Renaissance princes."26 Peak's attempt to enter that charmed circle not on his own merits but by hypocritical means serves only to weight the balance against him. The caution must be observed that the identification with Peak is often one of emotional sympathy rather than a thorough equation of fixed attitudes. For this reason Gissing's treatment of emotions he shared is vivid and shows improvement even over the handling of Reardon. On the other hand, the presentation of Peak's intellectual rationalization, while occasionally indicating commensurate intensity, often suggests the author's antipathy:

A hypocrite was not necessarily a wrong doer; easy to picture the unbelieving priest whose influence was vastly for good.

But he who had once prided himself on his truth-fronting intellect and had freely uttered his scorn of the credulous mob! He who was his own criterion of moral right and wrong! No wonder he felt like a whipped cur. It was the ancestral vice in his blood, brought out by the over tempting circumstance. The long-line of base born predecessors, the grovelling hinds and mechanics, were responsible for this. Oh for a name wherewith honour was hereditary!27
The manner in which the uneducated are treated is further evidence of Gissing's critical temper. Peak's splenetic attacks upon the proletariat, particularly outrageous when directed against his own brother, are largely expressions of Peak's own make-up. In Gissing's careful treatment they become occasions for the illustration of the hero's overweening pride rather than, as in *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed*, for intrusive comments by the author. Against these attacks may be measured the fair, even charitable, characterization of Peak's uncle at the very occasion of his telling Godwin that he plans to open a restaurant outside the college gates. The argument that Gissing's treatment of Peak loses impetus after the latter's exposure is also supported by an analysis of the author's use of Earwaker. The slight young man, whose prize-winning works are titled "Alaric" and "Trade-Unionism" is also a facet of the author's personality, and his moderate success achieved, through honest compromise, is a better measure of the author's self-esteem than one derived by imposing upon the novel an exaggerated equation of Peak with Gissing. Earwaker is an index of sanity in the novel, and this fact makes of Peak a special case.

In sum, the failure of Gissing to fuse thematic and dramatic elements may be charged to the fact that the dialectic of the novel runs to a conclusion before the story ends. The moral theme reaches a full statement shortly after Peak is, figuratively speaking, unfrocked. The aftermath is concerned not so much with expiation and remorse as with the efforts of
Peak, first to find emotional solace in the love of Sidwell Warriccombe, for whose affection he first spins out his tangled web, and then to escape the society in whose sight he feels himself to be a hateful individual. Although Sidwell Warriccombe is not as appealing or convincing as Amy Reardon (at times she reminds one of Maud Enderby) and therefore represents an inferior characterization, she cannot be blamed in this regard. Her behaviour is consistent: Gissing's women are seldom impulsive or irrational after a critical point has been reached in a novel, and his habit of attributing to many of them classical, especially Grecian, appearances, implies a somewhat static concept of feminine character. The novel then loses dramatic force because Gissing is not equal to the task of continuing an intensive examination of Peak to a positive conclusion. The death of Peak in exile is made known by the vague report of a letter. Gissing seems, if not to have lost sympathy, at least to have lost contact with his hero. The nihilism and the denial of moral responsibility advocated by Peak are suggestive perhaps of Gissing's youthful resentments, but were not a thoroughgoing expression of his convictions when he wrote the novel. The extremes of intellectual self-sufficiency and moral dereliction, which characterize Peak, were not shared by Gissing, who, although he admired the treatment of similar themes by Turgenev and others, remained himself a moralist. When Peak most needs a voice in the novel, the author is somehow stilled; but this is an artistic failure, and we cannot, at length, complain if the artist was a better man than his hero.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

It has by now become a commonplace in the criticism of Gissing's works to conclude that they are autobiographically oriented. "His heroes, almost without exception, are people of pronounced intellectual interests, and they are his heroes because they have such interests."¹ The charge that characterization in his novels is marked by an extravagant degree of self-identification should not, however, be followed by the immediate conviction that the effect is necessarily pejorative. Although the charge is often borne out by examination of the novels, it is also true that several of them are notable examples of the successful use by Gissing of the details of his own life-story. *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile* prove that he could examine his own temperament critically and analyse his relationship with his environment with a fair measure of detachment.

Gissing's identification with his major figures, when honestly and judicially employed, provided his characterization with a quality of immediacy which is understandably deficient in the presentation of figures like Richard Mutimer, with whom he could not favorably sympathize. The extremes of self-identification in Gissing's novels are expressed by Virginia Woolf:

"To use personal suffering to rivet the reader's sympathy upon your private case is disastrous. Imagination... loses something of its sweep and power, it becomes petty and personal, when it is limited to the consideration of a particular case calling for sympathy."
At the same time the sympathy which identifies the author with his hero is a passion of greatest intensity; it makes the pages fly;...2

Although she is not herself sympathetic to the form and structure of Gissing's novels, Virginia Woolf's statement indicates that identification should be a term of analysis, not of judgment.

The foregoing study has shown that Gissing's successes and failures in characterization were often directly related to the extent of self-knowledge he had achieved at the time of writing a given novel. The failures of Workers in the Dawn show that the intensity of Gissing's desires to vindicate his own position and to point out the evils of his society were misdirected artistically. As a result the novel is marred by its tone of didacticism and Golding becomes simply the exponent of the author's own confusions. That Gissing could be thoroughly uncritical of his own methods is given significant proof in his unenlightened denials that Waymark, in The Unclassed, was his fictional counterpart.3

Some attention has been devoted to the fact that Gissing was a man of bookish tastes whose "zest" for life seldom expressed a comprehensive passion for the spectacle of human existence about him. Even the novels dealing with the evils of slum conditions, which have been praised for their stark realism, betray an aristocratic viewpoint. Although Gissing wrote convincingly of the conditions of the nether world, he had not a full sympathy for its inhabitants. For this reason the characterization of Mutimer is affected by the author's
hostility towards the uncultured proletariat.

The novels which conclude this study, New Grub Street and Born in Exile are considerably different from the earlier novels as regards success in the characterization of main figures. New Grub Street has been discussed as Gissing's view of the writer's world and, through Reardon as a focus, as a complex self-analysis. The elements of apologetic self-pity and rationalization which saturated Workers in the Dawn and The Unclassed, however, are absent in New Grub Street. The novel is indicative of Gissing's justly critical approach to the use of autobiographical detail. Born in Exile, although perhaps too ambitious an effort to present the inner life of the spiritual exile, is significant for similar reasons. One has only to compare the references to The Unclassed and to Born in Exile in Gissing's letters to conclude that Gissing had greatly matured in his understanding of and his attitude towards the relationship between himself and his characters. His recognition of the fact that Peak represented a part of himself enabled him to present that character in the light of a mellowed and patient self-knowledge.
NOTES

CHAPTER I.
INTRODUCTION

1 A.C. Ward, Gissing, 1959, Writers and their Work No.l11, p.5.


4 Gissing was not always aware of this practise and sometimes strongly denied his use of self-identification in characterization.


7 Donnelly, op.cit., p.3.

8 Ibid., p.5.


CHAPTER II.
BACKGROUND

1 Shafer, op.cit., p.xi, states that Morley Roberts "was later to write what has justly been called 'a patronizing and unsavory biography' of him under the guise of fiction." Shafer quotes The Nation, March 13, 1913.


5 The correspondence between Gissing and his brother William is informative regarding Gissing's early development. See *Letters*, p.33. William wrote on Nov. 12, 1878: "Keep your two natures wide apart. That one which loves to build an imaginary world, filling it with ideal scenes and characters and that one (and the one which is to guide you through life), which looks upon the realities of life with a clear unerring eye, estimating everything at its right value, and acting accordingly; for I really believe in writing fiction there is a danger of losing a just apprehension of practical affairs."


7 H.G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, New York, Macmillan, 1934, pp. 482-483. In speaking of this book Shafer, *op.cit.*, p.iii, says: "The account of Gissing here given should provide some value and authority because Mr. Wells and Gissing were friends. It would be wrong to say it has none, but Mr. Wells has forgotten so much that he has had to consult *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* before he wrote, and this did not save him from inaccuracy."

8 Wells, *op.cit.*, pp. 482-483.

9 Donnelly, *op.cit.*, p.32.

10 *Letters*, pp. 73-74, June 8, 1880, to Algernon.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST TWO NOVELS

1 *Workers in the Dawn*, I, 3-4.

2 That Golding's suicide may or may not have constituted, for Gissing, the end of an earlier phase of his life does little to alter the relationship of the suicide to the novel as a whole.

3 *Workers in the Dawn*, I, 96.

4 *Ibid.*., I, 158.


7 *Workers in the Dawn*, II, 410.
8 Ibid., I, 253.


11 Cited in Cazamian, op.cit., pp.304-305. The edition of 1895 was not available at the time of this writing.

12 Letters, p. 140, June 23, 1884, to Algernon.

13 Gapp, op.cit., p.9.

14 Letters, p.43, Jan. 26, 1879, to Algernon.

15 Loc.cit. On March 14, 1879, William wrote to George: "How, I repeat, do you get through so much work? and on lentils, too!... you must supplement them with other food."

16 Ibid., p.44, March 14, 1879.

17 Ibid., p.72, to Will.

18 An interesting study of this aspect of Gissing's fiction is presented by Jacob Korg, George Gissing: A Study in Conflicts, Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1953.


20 See The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, 1887-1903, Arthur C. Young, ed., New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1961. Mr. Young comments (p. xx): Then on a December morning in 1878, Gissing read an advertisement in the personal columns of a London newspaper which requested an English gentleman, eager for scholarly companionship, to reply through the paper's offices. Intrigued by the tone of the notice, Gissing answered it and received a quick reply from Eduard Bertz. Gissing seems to have reversed their roles in The Unclassed, In order to avoid confusion with Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family, referred to in subsequent entries as Letters, the present volume will hereafter be referred to as Letters to Eduard Bertz.

21 The Unclassed, I, 107.

22 Loc.cit.
23 Gissing's desire to write about things as he saw them were not always appreciated by publishers sensitive to the reactions of the buying public. See Letters, p.119; Gissing wrote to his brother Algernon on Sept. 20, 1882:

Smith and Elder write me about my novel precisely what I expected. "It exhibits a great deal of dramatic power and is certainly not wanting in vigour, but in our judgment it is too painful to please the ordinary reader and treats of scenes that can never attract the subscribers to Mr. Mudie's Library." (!!)


25 The Unclassed, II, 8. Waymark makes this statement in the course of expounding his theory of artistic detachment.

26 The notion that Gissing's attitude toward his art was hampered by a conflict of beliefs is explored at considerable length by Korg, op.cit.

27 Cf. Donnelly, op.cit., p.70: "Whereas Helen Norman and Carrie Mitchell were symbols of heaven and hell for the hero, in The Unclassed, the heroine, Ida Starr, is the first of the wonderfully credible women Gissing would portray so well, at once sensual and virtuous, worldly yet simple."

CHAPTER IV.
THE UNCERTAIN EXPERIMENT AND A RETURN TO THE PEOPLE

1 Letters, pp.80-81.


3 The novel appeared in serial form in the Cornhill Magazine from January to June of 1888. See Donnelly, op.cit., p.106.


5 A Life's Morning, p.4.

6 Ibid., p.32.

7 Ibid., p.14.

8 Ibid., p.47.

10 Cf. Ibid., p.103: "Isabel Clarendon.... is kind and gentle without being weak, a proper successor to the original 'Lady of Knightswell' after whom her estate is named, the lady for whose love a valiant knight once fought and died. (Kingcote is his foil, with some irony.)"

11 Cf. Ibid., p.104: "It is a curious irony that despite all the "realism" of the first two novels in their proletarian setting, the moral realism is less evident than it is in the "romantic" atmosphere of Isabel Clarendon."

12 Letters, pp.128-129, July 18, 1883, to Algernon.


14 Ibid., p. 139, June 12, 1884.


17 Cf. Letters, p. 172. In a letter to his brother Algernon on October 31, 1885, Gissing stated that Demos was to be "rather a savage satire on working class aims and capacities."

18 Demos, p. 27.

19 Ibid., p. 28.

20 Ibid., pp. 42, 33.

21 Donnelly, op.cit., p.110.

22 Demos, p. 72.

23 Ibid., p. 87.

24 Gapp, op.cit., p.47.

25 Ibid., p. 49.

26 Demos, p. 69.

27 Ibid., p. 70. (My Italics.)

28 Ibid., p. 77.

29 See Gapp. op.cit. for a study of the effect of Gissing's classical learning upon his art as a novelist.
30 Cf. Ibid., p. 162. Gapp applies the term index character to those individuals who represent Gissing's own convictions.

31 Letters, p. 166, to Algernon.

32 Some evidence of the recognition of this temperament is present in Waymark's statements about himself.


35 Cf. Donnelly, op.cit., p. 114: "Thyrza... moves luminously through the book and holds it together as the plot cannot do."


37 George Steiner, Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, New York, Random House, 1959, p. 196.

CHAPTER V.

THE RAZOR AND THE BREADKNIFE

1 Thomas Seccombe, op.cit., p. xiv.

2 Letters, p. 176.

3 Ibid., p. 180, May 8, 1886, to Ellen.

4 Ibid., p. 171, to Algernon.

5 Ibid., p. 172, Oct. 31, 1885, to Algernon.

6 Donnelly, op.cit., p. 109: "Although A Life's Morning was postponed by publishers from year to year, Demos was snatched hungrily by Smith, Elder and published in the winter of 1886 while all England was gossiping over the riots in Trafalgar Square."

7 Seccombe, op.cit., p. xviii, calls Thyrza Gissing's "first really notable and artistic book."

8 Letters, p. 211, March 14, 1888, to Ellen.

Of. Angus Burrell, Modern Fiction, with Dorothy Brewster, New York, Columbia University Press, 1934, p. 18: George Gissing spent most of his life writing novels... all of them present recurring themes. Some of these recurrent patterns are: first, the vicissitudes of young men with good minds and no money, their resentful attitude towards society, their eventual compromise or failure; second, either an absurdly sentimental over-evaluation of women, or the most vindictive and unjust under-evaluation; third, heroes exhibiting flights from sex adjustments (often very cleverly rationalized) or flights into sex relationships that are usually disastrous.

Isabel Clarendon, I, 230.

Letters, p. 184, July 31, 1886, to Ellen.

Ibid., p. 196, July 8, 1887, to Ellen.


Cited in Ibid., p. 209.

New Grub Street, p. 42.

Ibid., p. 91.

Ibid., p. 97.
CHAPTER VI.

PHILOSOPHY AND THE BUSINESS OF LIFE

1 Donnelly, op.cit., p. 165.

2 Letters, p. 398. Gissing died on December 28, 1903. His last words are reported in a letter written to Gissing's
sisters by Rev. Theodore Cooper, the English Chaplain at St. Jean de Luz where Gissing died.

3 Donnelly, op.cit., p. 11.


5 Seccombe, op.cit., p. viii.


7 Letters to Bertz, pp. 152-153, May 20, 1892.

8 Walter Allen, op.cit., p. 291.

9 Donnelly, op.cit., p. 31.

10 Cf. Gissing's notation in his "Commonplace Book," op.cit., p. 429, regarding "Anglo-Saxon morality, which takes very good care that its prophesies of woe to the erring person shall find fulfilment."

11 Letters, p. 69, written shortly after the death of his brother Will in April, 1880.


13 Ryecroft, op.cit., pp. 177-178.


15 Mr. Korg's Dissertation, op.cit., examines this aspect of Gissing's thought with thoroughness.

16 Ibid., pp. 57-58.

17 Letters, p. 318, April 29, 1891. Cf. Letters to Bertz, p. 120, April 8, 1891: "I have written more than half the first volume of 'Godwin Peak,' a study of a savagely aristocratic temperament."

18 Letters, p. 332, Feb. 18, 1893, to Algernon.

19 Born in Exile, pp. 436-437.
CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUSION

1 Gapp, op.cit., p. 5.


3 Letters, p. 140, June 23, 1884, to Algernon.
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Listed chronologically in order of publication. Publication details given only for those works discussed in this thesis. In parenthesis are dates of the first editions.


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(1898) *Human Odds and Ends*. Short Stories.
(1901) *By the Ionian Sea*. Travel.
(1924) *Sins of the Fathers*. Short Stories.
(1927) *A Victim of Circumstances*. Short Stories.
(1931) *Brownie*. Short Stories.

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(1929) *Selections, Autobiographical and Imaginative*.
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