



George Gissing  
New Grub Street

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## NEW GRUB STREET

GEORGE GISSING was born in Wakefield in 1857. His promising academic career was cut short when, in 1876, he was dismissed from Owens College, Manchester, after stealing money in order to help the prostitute Nell Harrison start a new life. After a month's hard labour and a year in the United States, he returned to England, married Nell, and began a life of constant literary activity. The early years were spent in poverty and domestic discord; his wife died in 1888. A series of novels, beginning with *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and culminating in *The Nether World* (1889), attracted some notice, but financial security continued to elude him. It was not until 1891, with publication of *New Grub Street*, that Gissing was acknowledged as a major writer. In the same year he married for a second time, no less disastrously than before. Many novels followed, notably *Born in Exile* (1892), *The Odd Woman* (1893), *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), and *The Crown of Life* (1899): the dominant note was one of dour pessimism. Gissing moved to France in 1899 to live with Gabrielle Fleury. Widespread acclaim greeted *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* in 1903, but at the end of that year Gissing died.

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GEORGE GISSING

*New Grub Street*



*Edited by*

KATHERINE MULLIN

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, ox2 6DP,  
United Kingdom

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It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,  
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Biographical Preface, Introduction, Note on the Text,  
Select Bibliography, and Explanatory Notes  
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First published as a World's Classics paperback 1993  
Reissued as an Oxford World's Classics paperback 1998, 2008  
New edition 2016

Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press  
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016932531

ISBN 978-0-19-872918-1

Printed in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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## BIOGRAPHICAL PREFACE

GEORGE GISSING was born on 22 November 1857 in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, the eldest of the five children of Thomas Gissing, a pharmaceutical chemist, and his wife Margaret Bedford. His father's premature death when Gissing was 13 cast his family into sudden poverty, and friends helped his mother secure scholarships for her sons to Lindow Grove School in Alderley Edge. Gissing excelled in national examinations, winning a scholarship to Owens College, now the University of Manchester. A sparkling academic career seemed certain when, in 1874, he came top in both English and Latin in the Intermediate BA examination taken at the end of his first year of undergraduate study.

Gissing's promise was, however, catastrophically derailed in 1875 when, aged 19, he began a relationship with 17-year-old Marianne Helen Harrison, known as Nell. Nell was already an established alcoholic, turning to prostitution to fund her drinking. Gissing attempted to support her, eventually stealing from fellow students when his own money ran out. After serving a short prison sentence, he was despatched by his mortified family to a new life in the United States. Failing to establish himself, he returned to London in September 1877, reuniting with Nell, with whom he had corresponded, and marrying her in 1879.

While eking out a living as a private tutor, Gissing began to write fiction. His first published novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, was issued at his own expense in 1880, funded by a small legacy. With *The Unclassed* (1884), Gissing turned a corner, impressing established novelists George Meredith and Thomas Hardy, and securing the influential patronage of leading Positivist philosopher and historian Frederic Harrison. Gissing steadily made a name for himself as a serious, though intermittently solvent, novelist of working-class London life. *Demos* (1886), *Thyrza* (1887), and *The Nether World* (1889) were published by Smith, Elder, a well-respected, though parsimonious, publishing house who never offered Gissing more than £150 for the outright copyright sale of his novels. The publication of *New Grub Street* in 1891 marked a shift in Gissing's fortunes. His financial situation markedly improved as he could both attract lucrative commissions for short magazine



fiction and command higher prices from other publishers for subsequent novels. *The Odd Women* (1893), *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), and *The Whirlpool* (1897) helped to establish him as a leading intellectual novelist. Belatedly, too, Gissing realized the importance of managing the business side of writing through literary agents.

This time of professional advancement was also one of personal sadness. Having separated from Nell in 1884, Gissing was stunned by her abject death four years later. He found some comfort through friendships with Eduard Bertz, a German socialist exile, and Morley Roberts, a prolific journalist and writer whom he had known since college. But Gissing's loneliness, he came to believe, could only be truly appeased by female companionship, and, feeling himself too poor to attract one of the cultured middle-class women who befriended him, in 1891 he entered into a second disastrous marriage. Gissing met Edith Underwood by chance one evening, possibly at a music hall or simply in the streets outside his flat. After a brief courtship and hasty marriage in early 1891, she developed mental health problems aggravated by giving birth to their two sons, Walter and Alfred. After six years, the couple separated and, by 1901, Edith's condition had deteriorated sufficiently to occasion her admission to an asylum. Gissing lived apart from his sons after separating from Edith, delegating their care first to his wife, and later to friends and his Wakefield family.

By 1897, Gissing had begun to experience lung troubles exacerbated by heavy smoking, and left for Italy, hoping to regain emotional and physical health following his separation from Edith. At Siena, he wrote a critical study of Charles Dickens. Resettling in Dorking in 1898, he was contacted by Gabrielle Fleury, a 29-year-old French translator who wished to work on *New Grub Street*. The collaboration led to a relationship, and from May 1899 Gissing lived with Gabrielle and her mother first in Paris, and later, on account of his health, in the Basque region.

The union with Gabrielle, understood by both as a marriage, provided stability and relative comfort, and Gissing continued to consolidate his reputation with *The Crown of Life* (1899) and *Our Friend the Charlatan* (1901). Ironically, however, it was *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903) which proved his greatest success during his lifetime. First serialized as 'An Author at Grass', the book took the form of a series of valedictory essays by a retired author, living in

happy rural seclusion after a legacy frees him from the pressure to write. These musings on life, mortality, and the vagaries of the creative life acted as a public epitaph. On 28 December 1903, Gissing died at Maison Elguë, Ispoure, from myocardis aggravated by pneumonia.



## INTRODUCTION

*Readers unfamiliar with the plot may prefer to treat the Introduction as an Afterword.*

*NEW GRUB STREET* (1891) was written at breakneck speed during the autumn of 1890, after a dismal ten-month period in which seven novels had been begun and abandoned. Averaging 20,000 words a week, Gissing was writing for his literary, financial, and emotional future. He needed money, fast, to marry Edith Underwood, a working-class young woman he had met by chance in late September.<sup>1</sup> Gissing believed that loneliness and sexual frustration were the root causes of his failure to write, and that there was only one plausible remedy. Writing earlier that month to his friend Eduard Bertz, Gissing explained:

Marriage, in the best sense, is impossible, owing to my insufficient income; educated English girls *will* not face poverty in marriage, & to them anything under £400 a year is serious poverty. They remain unmarried in hundreds and thousands, rather than accept poor men.<sup>2</sup>

The only solution was to ‘resume my old search for some decent work-girl who will come & live with me’.<sup>3</sup> That path had caused more problems than it had resolved fifteen years earlier when, as a 19-year-old scholarship student at Owens College, Manchester, Gissing’s desires had derailed a brilliant academic career. He met Nell Harrison, two years his junior, but already addicted to alcohol, which she funded through selling sex. Attempting to acquire funds to ‘save’ her, Gissing stole from fellow students, and was discovered, expelled, prosecuted, and briefly imprisoned, before being packed off to America by his respectable and mortified Wakefield family. Returning the following year, he was reunited with Nell, later marrying her. The marriage led to separation, then in 1888 to Nell’s pitiable, abject drunkard’s death.

<sup>1</sup> Paul Delany, *George Gissing: A Life* (London: Phoenix, 2009), 175–80.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 6 September 1890, in *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, ed. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991–7), iv. 235.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Eduard Bertz, 15 August 1890, in *Collected Letters*, iv. 232.

But it exacerbated tensions between sexuality, money, reputation, and acclaim that haunted Gissing's life, and energized his greatest novel.

*New Grub Street* was written in just under two months, sustained by Gissing's courtship of Edith, and her regular unchaperoned visits to his flat. In December, Gissing sent the manuscript to publishers Smith, Elder. In January, he accepted a meagre offer of £150 for the copyright, and within the month he and Edith were married. The marriage was a failure, but the novel was not. His biographer Paul Delany has astutely noted how Gissing did not simply make use of his past, but also used fiction to ruminate over what his future might become: 'Having written about it, he was ready to do it.'<sup>4</sup> That temporal plasticity underwrites a complex, subtle relationship between life and art. *New Grub Street* describes many potential outcomes as it analyses the literary marketplace and its emotional repercussions, weaving together the rising and falling fortunes of a large cast of labourers 'in the valley of the shadow of books' (p. 15). Did Gissing see himself in scholarly, anxious Edwin Reardon, who has just about achieved a precarious career as a writer of serious but uncommercial fiction? On the strength of critical acclaim for his fourth novel, *On Neutral Ground*—sold for £100—Reardon has persuaded one of his creator's 'educated English girls' to marry him. But will beautiful, refined Amy Yule 'face poverty in marriage', when the brilliant future she expects evades her husband? Plagued by writer's block in a cramped garret flat, haunted by the reproaches of his disappointed wife and their new baby, Reardon struggles against his 'morbid conscientiousness' (p. 44) to produce a novel 'good enough for the market' but never good enough for him.

Reardon is by no means the only character who Gissing might have seen as a projection of his future. The catastrophe of the Reardons' failing marriage is counterpointed by other plots interweaving romantic, financial, and literary fortune. Amy's uncle Alfred Yule is a bitter and struggling literary journalist who, like Gissing himself, married 'some decent work-girl' as an accessible source of comfort. In turn pompous, pedantic, brutal, vain, and tragic, Yule is a grim projection of what Gissing himself might become: a professional failure and a domestic tyrant to his uneducated but gentle and kindly wife. Their daughter Marian finds refuge from her wretched home

<sup>4</sup> Delany, *Gissing: A Life*, 260.

only in the British Museum Reading-room, where she researches and often writes the half-scholarly and obscure hack-work her father signs. There, Marian begins a tentative romance with ambitious Jasper Milvain, a friend of Reardon's without scruple, who views literary journalism as a means of social rise. As Queenie Leavis observed, when an author names a character Jasper Milvain, we are to infer that he is the villain.<sup>5</sup> Yet Jasper's charismatic dynamism is compelling to Marian, and, perhaps, to readers too? And Jasper's success, on the back of a punishingly workmanlike writing regime, bore some resemblance to Gissing's own—especially after the popularity of *New Grub Street* began to bring lucrative commissions from journals and magazines. Writing 187,000 words in barely two months, Gissing certainly resembles Milvain more than he resembles meticulous realist Harold Biffen, labouring over each word of *Mr Bailey, Grocer*, and sacrificing subsistence for experimental vision. *New Grub Street's* account of the writing life draws upon its author's own experiences, but Gissing offers no straightforward portrait of the artist. Instead, he offers a fragmented and multiple meditation, diffusing elements of his own autobiography through different characters. His youthful travails in America, desperately writing while subsisting on peanuts, are, for example, granted not to diffident Reardon but to the bumptious entrepreneur Whelpdale. The distribution of personal experience accords with a wider scattering of narrative sympathy, helping to create the novel's striking moral ambivalence.

\* \* \*

*New Grub Street* is a moving, astonishing novel about literary production, allowing late-Victorian readers a tantalizing glimpse behind the scenes. The title looks back to Samuel Johnson's disreputable London neighbourhood of impoverished garret hacks in the eighteenth century; in 1830, Grub Street was gentrified and renamed Milton Street, signifying its obsolescence. Gissing revives and reconceptualizes it as 'New', signalling his investment in the contemporary. His is the first major novel to place authorship at the heart of the plot, rather than as a lightly sketched and incidental vocation. Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849–50), William Makepeace Thackeray's *Pendennis* (1848–50), and Anthony Trollope's *The Three Clerks* (1857)

<sup>5</sup> Queenie Leavis, 'Gissing and the English Novel', *Scrutiny* 7 (June 1938), 77.

had previously offered accounts of relatively effortless, even accidental, writing careers—talent's stepping stone to reward. But Gissing was writing from a distinct and shared sense of crisis. In 1886, the *Fortnightly Review* took stock of the present state of the book market, lamenting that 'the conditions of novel-writing and novel-selling have changed altogether' now 'the question of money is at the bottom'.<sup>6</sup> It summarized a formidable set of anxieties around a shifting and pressurized publishing ecology, conceptualized as increasingly enslaving writers to unscrupulous capitalism. Novelists had long been constrained to produce novels in three volumes—the format publishers required, since they could sell the first edition to the two major circulating libraries, Mudie's and W. H. Smiths. Mudie's and Smiths, in return, demanded the fixing of the price of the three-volume first edition at an exorbitant 31s. 6d., negotiated the bulk purchase of first editions at a heavy discount, then loaned each volume out sequentially to their annual 1-guinea subscribers.<sup>7</sup> The result was a tight grip over the industry so, as the *Fortnightly* protested, 'nobody buys books nowadays', as the 'nominal cost' is 'absurd and prohibitory'—and 'purely fictitious'. The effects were conservative, resisting innovation, since writers 'dare not take a succession of liberties or make a series of mistakes', but must continue to mine a popular seam.<sup>8</sup> The three-volume format was jaded and tired, it protested, and proposed that cheap circulation—single-volume books priced at around 3s. 6d.—could revitalize the quality of fiction.

Reardon's creative troubles stem from his inability to manufacture plot enough 'to spin into three volumes' (p. 109), and the weakness of *Margaret Home* arises from a conflict between necessity and imagination. Attempting to console his friend, Jasper Milvain follows the *Fortnightly* in inveighing against 'the evils of the three-volume system', which he describes as 'A triple-headed monster, sucking the blood of English novelists' (p. 180). Yet Reardon sees through Milvain's solution of the single-volume bestseller. As he knows very well, 'an author of moderate repute' may just about live on the 'one to two hundred pounds' obtained from an annual three-volume novel, but

<sup>6</sup> Alex Innes Shand, 'The Novelists and their Patrons', *Fortnightly Review* 40 (July 1886), 24.

<sup>7</sup> See Guinevere Griest, *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> Griest, *Mudie's Circulating Library*, 26, 29.

would have ‘to produce four one-volume novels to obtain the same income; and I doubt whether he could get so many published within the twelve months’ (pp. 180–1). Reardon—like Gissing himself—relies upon the very system Milvain condemns as exploitation, even though it has brought him so little profit. *New Grub Street* is painfully explicit about the rewards available to Reardon’s ‘intellectual fervour, appetising to a small section of refined readers’ (p. 56). His debut novel, in two volumes, brought him nothing, being published ‘on the terms of half profits’ when ‘profits there were none to divide’ (p. 55). His second brought an advance of £25 and, again, a half-share of elusive projected profits. His third sold outright for £50, and his fourth—the breakthrough *On Neutral Ground*—realized only £100. Reardon’s tragedy arises partly from his mistake in assuming ‘a continuance of payments in geometrical proportion’ (p. 7), and marrying well-bred and aspirational Amy Yule on those expectations.<sup>9</sup> But it has also something to do with his abilities as a writer of fiction—and his misunderstanding of that vocation. His attempt at ‘a glaringly artificial story with a sensational title’ (p. 142) for the new single-volume market is a dismal failure, rejected out of hand when he shamefacedly submits it. Gissing does not even dignify it with a title. To Reardon, this catastrophe confirms his own understanding of the gulf between aesthetic integrity and commercial success. After a brief respite in the ‘most congenial’ world of classical scholarship—an unsaleable ‘reading of Diogenes Laertius’—he ‘put aside his purely intellectual work and began once more the search for a “plot”’ (p. 142). However, by making Reardon a spokesman, scapegoat, and symbol for literary value traduced by the marketplace, Gissing interrogates his assumptions. Is Reardon’s conception of a stark division between the authentic and the meretricious the plausible protest of a martyr to art—or merely self-protection?

The immediate critical reception of *New Grub Street* took Reardon at his word, and tended to merge him with his creator. Contemporary reviews focused on the tension between ‘literary failure on the part of

<sup>9</sup> In the mid-1880s, £300 was widely considered to be the minimum annual income which could sustain a middle-class household. In 1886, for example, *Chambers’s Journal* ran a serial story about the tribulations of a young couple who ‘had sufficient courage to marry on two hundred pounds a year in the teeth of their respectable families’ (‘A Tale of Two Knaveries’, *Chambers’s Journal* (11 September 1886), 589).



men of genuine ability and scholarly requirements', and 'pecuniary success... by a man whose style is flashy, attainments mediocre and principle conspicuous by its absence'.<sup>10</sup> To *The Spectator*, Reardon was an 'unpractical genius', and the contrast with Milvain's 'snaky wriggings' was 'master's work'.<sup>11</sup> Others disputed its accuracy. 'Are there no men poor, but young and light of heart, in the literary parish?' asked the *Saturday Review*—although, to Gissing's delight, it ran an article the next week praising the novel as 'almost terrible in its realism', giving 'a picture, cruelly precise, of every detail in this commercial age'.<sup>12</sup> (*New Grub Street* described a similar contradiction in Fadge's journal *The Study*: 'Two reviews of the same novel, eh? And diametrically opposed? Ha! ha!', p. 20.). In *The Author*—the organ of the newly professional body the Society of Authors, set up to protect writers' rights—Walter Besant and Andrew Lang disputed its realism. 'Is it real at all?' queried Lang: 'To myself it seems a perverted idealism.'<sup>13</sup> While these reviews differed about Gissing's verisimilitude, they all took the novel's apparent thesis of an inverse relationship between 'genuine ability' and 'pecuniary success' at face value.

*New Grub Street* itself, however, offers a rather more unstable and intriguing account of the relationship between merit and reward. It does so, most obviously, through its own dynamic and engaging form. At times, Gissing appears to be teasingly inviting readers to see how the sausage is made. In Chapter IX, he gives us Reardon struggling with writer's block:

Description of locality, deliberate analysis of character or motive, demanded far too great an effort for his present condition. He kept as much as possible to dialogue; the space is filled so much more quickly, and at a pinch one can make people talk about the paltriest incidents of life. (pp. 110–11)

Naturally, the passage is followed by several pages of dialogue between Reardon and Amy, which at first seems desultory padding:

'What is it?' she answered from the bedroom. 'I'm busy with Willie.'  
'Come as soon as you are free.' (p. 111)

What develops, however, is an exchange revealing, eloquently yet with a deft lightness of touch, that 'deliberate analysis of character or

<sup>10</sup> *Court Journal* (25 April 1891), 710.

<sup>11</sup> *The Spectator* (30 May 1891), 764.

<sup>12</sup> *Saturday Review* (2 May 1891), 524–5; (9 May 1891), 551.

<sup>13</sup> *The Author* (1 July 1891), 51.

motive' which lies beyond Reardon himself. Reardon wants to recapture something of their courtship by distracting Amy from domesticity and kindling their shared interest in reading the *Odyssey* together. The passage he chooses—Odysseus shipwrecked and abject, only to be rescued, nourished, and saved by the beautiful young Nausicaä, who is washing clothes with her handmaidens on the seashore—is a touchingly oblique plea to Amy to offer support and succour. But Amy's girlish idealism is behind her: she is now preoccupied with the pressing practicalities of motherhood when unable to meet her laundry bill. Her thoughts wander to Milvain:

With curious frequency she mentioned the name of Milvain. Her unconsciousness in doing so prevented Reardon from thinking about the fact; still, he had noted it. (p. 112)

Reardon's own acknowledged incapacity is followed not by the anticipated black humour of authorial padding, but instead by a movingly understated depiction of a marriage lurching towards crisis.

Gissing's skill here is one instance of a creative energy and control characterizing the whole novel. Reardon cannot reconcile 'purely intellectual work' with his genre's requirements of a dynamic plot, living characters, and a structure which deftly drives the narrative onwards. But Gissing can, and *New Grub Street* is a triumphantly readable, engaging work of fiction. When Milvain is advising Reardon on the possible placing of his doomed one-volume novel, he casually alludes to a cast of offstage characters who have made literature a lucrative concern. Miss Wilkes, author of *Mr Henderson's Wives*, is a skit on sensation novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon, married to her publisher John Maxwell as 'Miss Wilkes' is married to hers, Jedwood. Jedwood, backed by the profits of his wife's best-sellers, in turn has made the career of Markland, able to command 'two hundred pounds for a paltry little tale that would scarcely swell out to a volume' (p. 145) and 'five or six hundred pounds' in royalties for a three-decker. Markland's enviable success, far beyond the reach of the denizens of New Grub Street and underwritten by a publisher who 'Advertises hugely' (p. 145), haunts the story's margins, apparently representing commerce's facile victory over art. But the opposition is queried by the nature of Gissing's own production—and ultimately by the implications of its success. *New Grub Street*, with its sideswipe at Braddon, may ostensibly disdain the thrilling strategies with which

she wooed her readers. But Gissing himself was a lifelong admirer of Charles Dickens—scarcely coy about his appeal to a mass readership—both editing his fiction and later writing a critical survey of his work. He respected Braddon too, describing her in an 1889 letter to his struggling author brother Algernon as ‘often good enough, in her way’ and gifted at ‘handling the old themes with a great deal of literary ability’.<sup>14</sup> Dickens and Braddon both turned fiction into profit through brazenly crowd-pleasing narrative devices: interwoven plots and subplots allowing cliffhanger hiatuses to hook the serial reader, dramas of romantic betrayals, tragic suicides, destitute mothers and children, sudden inheritances, timely bereavements, and treacherous remarriages. These appeals to popular taste are reconfigured in *New Grub Street*, in ways which made it Gissing’s breakthrough success. Writing again to Algernon shortly before its appearance, Gissing observed how ‘*New Grub Street* goes through the proofs, and I am astonished to find how well it reads’.<sup>15</sup>

No Markland, Gissing had neither the commercial nous nor the backer to negotiate a royalty. Although *New Grub Street* went into a second impression within a month and achieved sales enough for Smith, Elder to bring out several cheaper editions during the 1890s, Gissing saw none of the proceeds. Yet its reception raised his market value by granting him access to where real money was to be made: short magazine fiction. Within two years of *New Grub Street*’s publication, Gissing began a profitable association with Clement Shorter, the enterprising editor of three popular journals, the *English Illustrated Magazine*, the *Illustrated London News*, and *The Sketch*. Shorter’s regular commissions of formulaic short stories, paying around 10 guineas a time, doubled Gissing’s income, raising him from genteel poverty to something like affluence. If Gissing’s past looked more like Reardon’s, his future moved closer to Milvain’s—and a glance at one of his earliest commissions reveals his recognition of the resemblance. ‘The Muse of the Halls’, published in the Christmas 1893 issue of the *English Illustrated Magazine*, reworked *New Grub Street*’s theme of the irreconcilability of art, money, and love. It begins with a conflict between Hilda, who wishes to go on the music hall stage, and her fiancé Denis, a principled but impoverished composer who cannot

<sup>14</sup> Letter of ‘July 9 or 10, 1889’, in *Collected Letters*, iv. 86.

<sup>15</sup> Letter of 17 February 1891, in *Collected Letters*, iv. 271.

afford to marry her. ‘What’s the good of talking about Art?’, Hilda demands, adding, ‘We’ll go in for Art when we have nice clothes, nice meals, and a house that wasn’t built to last only three years’.<sup>16</sup> Denis, who ‘since the rapturous moment of his betrothal’ has ‘scorned everything save the empyrean of Art’, is appalled at her bald assertion ‘Art won’t do anything for us. Above all, I want money’.<sup>17</sup> But he is also emasculated by her success in ‘the grafting of a studied vulgarity upon her natural refinement’, and resolves to do one better.<sup>18</sup> Together with a journalist friend who manages to ‘excogitate some lines’ in ten minutes flat, Denis composes a bright, jangling tune—and between them, they achieve the music hall sensation of the year, ‘My Peter’:

We’ve a nice little home at Stamford Hill,  
 With plenty of room for three.  
 My Peter’s screw is two pound two,  
 And he brings it all to me.  
 He never gets jealous  
 Of all the fellows  
 That talk of his blooming Rose.  
 I’m awful sweet  
 On dear old Pete,  
 And I don’t care a button who knows.<sup>19</sup>

Cannily, Denis refuses an offer of £5 for the copyright, holding out for the royalties which ultimately enable him and Hilda to marry into prosperity. Art means dismal celibacy, selling out brings the ‘dreamy bliss’ with which *New Grub Street* so archly closes. For Gissing himself, the story is clearly an allegory of his own creative compromise. More prosaically, it brought him 11 guineas: three months’ rent for around three days’ work.<sup>20</sup>

\* \* \*

‘The Muse of the Halls’ is a fascinating coda to *New Grub Street*, rephrasing its central preoccupation for a mass audience, and self-consciously privileging the ephemeral over the artistic. Clearly meta-fictional, the story seems to lay the ‘blame’ for the artist’s diminution firmly at the feet of the woman he desires. Hilda can only be obtained at

<sup>16</sup> ‘The Muse of the Halls’, *English Illustrated Magazine* 122 (December 1893), 314.

<sup>17</sup> ‘The Muse of the Halls’, 315.

<sup>18</sup> ‘The Muse of the Halls’, 316.

<sup>19</sup> ‘The Muse of the Halls’, 317–18.

<sup>20</sup> Delany, *Gissing: A Life*, 214.

a price—the sacrifice of ‘the empyrean of art’—just as, in *New Grub Street*, it is only those men who prioritize commerce over aesthetics who can hope for romantic happiness. Whelpdale’s successful courtship of the cultured and sympathetic Dora Milvain, achieved through his expertise in catering to a new, undemanding, and ‘quarter-educated’ readership in his magazine *Chit-Chat*, underlines a theme most obviously focused through her sister-in-law Amy. Amy is presented as a—highly ambiguous—‘reward’, through her marriages to Reardon and Milvain, and even through the hopeless passion Harold Biffen conceives for her after her widowhood. At one level, Amy personifies the degradation of Art. Something of a femme fatale, she derails the careers of the men she captivates. Reardon has done his best work—*On Neutral Ground*—before they meet, and subsides into mediocrity upon marriage. Biffen’s unrequited love only underwrites his sense of failure, as Amy’s inaccessibility converges with the lukewarm reception of *Mr Bailey, Grocer* to drive his suicide. Even Jasper’s sleek vitality seems diminished after marriage: ‘he would have been taken for five-and-thirty, though only his twenty-ninth year’, with ‘noticeably thinning’ hair and ‘a wrinkle or two’ under his eyes (p. 453). These hints that there is something vampiric about Amy, both sexually and creatively, accord with wider associations between femininity and cultural degeneration, becoming established in the late-Victorian period and persisting into Modernism. For Andreas Huyssen, a key aspect of the perceived ‘great divide’ between high and low culture emerging during this period was the personification of ‘Mass Culture as Woman’, in opposition to the virile masculinity of the self-consciously elite minority writing that would become Modernism.<sup>21</sup> Gissing appears to anticipate Huyssen’s contention as, in both *New Grub Street* and ‘The Muse of the Halls’, women and the desires they provoke lure male artists away from principled vocation towards tawdry trade. However, *New Grub Street*’s nuanced and compassionate sexual politics, evident in its thoughtful representation of women, undermines that dichotomy.

To some critics, Amy is nothing more than a grotesque, ‘a consistent (if hateful) representative in the story of solid, unfeeling respectability’.<sup>22</sup> Her marriage to Milvain is poetic justice: the two deserve

<sup>21</sup> ‘Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other’, in Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 44–64.

<sup>22</sup> John Halperin, *George Gissing: A Life in Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 146.

one another. Yet Amy is also rendered with considerable sympathy, as Gissing pushes beyond the stereotype of a vain, selfish, and snobbish woman who has married for fame and fortune, only to be bitterly disappointed when her expectations are thwarted. Love in a garret with a penniless writer is one of the foundational myths of bohemian life, romanticized in Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1851) and soon to be set to music in Giacomo Puccini's 1896 opera *La bohème*. Gissing, however, exposes the reality behind the romance to indicate bohemia's less-documented implications—particularly for women mired in domesticity. Amy's powerlessness, as Reardon's wife, to control the rudiments of her fate is painfully elaborated through small details, such as when she returns to her mother and appreciates the unfamiliar comforts of a 'cold, soft, fragrant bed' (p. 218). Living in 'a miniature flat in the heart of London', Amy lacks even the autonomy of 'A housewife who lives in the country', who might 'take her place at the wash-tub and relieve her mind on laundry matters' (p. 218). Confined to a cramped kitchenette while her husband writes in the sitting room, Amy must send washing out—and economy, Gissing delicately implies, takes the form of dirty bedsheets, underwear, and, for her infant son Willie, nappies. For Amy, her situation is 'disagreeable, if not revolting', experienced as 'degradation' (p. 218). No wonder she is relieved to escape the squalor of poverty when taking shelter in her mother's clean, orderly home. No wonder, too, she is increasingly reluctant to share 'the caresses of their ardent time' (p. 172): Reardon may chide her for unwomanly coldness, but can she risk another child? These realities puncture the bohemian myth. Characters in books, as critic Gillian Tindall observes, 'are always supposed to be prepared to sacrifice all for love, but that is a higher standard of morality than we normally require in real life'.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, though the collapse of the marriage is Reardon's tragedy, it is Amy's too. Trapped for endless days in a tiny flat with a morose, depressive husband, she is deprived even of the tinselly society of Edith Carter. As failure overwhelms Reardon, he hovers on the brink of the domestic despotism of an Alfred Yule, who expects to command, his wife to obey: 'He had but to do one thing: to seize her by the arm, drag her up from the chair, dash her back again with all his force' (p. 203). His fatherhood is practically forgotten: he refers to Willie scarcely by name but as 'the child',

<sup>23</sup> Gillian Tindall, *The Born Exile: George Gissing* (London: Temple Smith, 1974), 184.

shows no interest in maintaining contact with him after their separation—‘The child is nothing to me, compared with you’ (p. 311)—and seems relatively unmoved by his death. Gissing’s account of the collapse of the Reardons’ marriage gains power and plausibility from its balance. Amy is neither ideal nor villain; instead, she is as imperfectly real as his male characters.

Gissing’s insistence on Amy’s full if flawed humanity is a crucial aspect of his sensitivity about gender. Writing to his favourite sister Ellen a year before he began *New Grub Street*, he confided ‘My next book will probably be called “The Head Mistress”. I am reading all sorts of queer scholastic & woman’s-rights literature.’<sup>24</sup> Indeed, his scrapbook for the period contains a substantial section on ‘Woman’, including a subsection, ‘The Movement’, listing broadly feminist societies, unions, clubs, books, and journals.<sup>25</sup> His close platonic friendships with two notably independent professional women, the distinguished Royal Commissioners Clara Collett and Eliza Orme, confirmed a sympathy with women’s aspiration and achievement that colours his fiction.<sup>26</sup> Amy’s intellectual development after the collapse of her marriage is clear:

When she found herself alone and independent, her mind acted like a spring when pressure is removed. After a few weeks of *désœuvrement* she obeyed the impulse to occupy herself with a kind of reading alien to Reardon’s sympathies. The solid periodicals attracted her, and especially those articles which dealt with themes of social science. Anything that savoured of newness and boldness in philosophic thought had a charm for her palate. (p. 320)

Amy is no earnest academic, but she is an independently-minded, curious, and perceptive self-educator. The breakdown of her marriage permits an emancipation of culture and of thought elsewhere to be found in the novel’s other significant female character, her cousin Marian.

Working as her father’s research assistant and amanuensis, sometimes writing the articles he passes off as his own, Marian Yule is an unpaid, unthanked, and invisible casualty of the literary dystopia the

<sup>24</sup> Letter of 11 October 1889, in *Collected Letters*, iv. 123.

<sup>25</sup> Letter of 11 October 1889, in *Collected Letters*, iv. 123 n. 123; Bouwe Postmus, *George Gissing’s Scrapbook* (Amsterdam: Twizle Press, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> See Emma Liggins, *George Gissing, The Working Woman and Urban Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. ix–xviii.

novel describes. Yet Marian is no mere martyred drudge, but a lucid critical thinker, who, perhaps alone of all *New Grub Street's* characters, has the acuity to distinguish between gems and dross. Gissing heralds her quiet sharpness from the first chapters, when she and her father Alfred are holidaying in Wattleborough. Chapter III shows Marian spontaneously recalling Tennyson as, city-bred, she struggles to distinguish an ash from an oak:

‘Delaying, as the tender ash delays  
To clothe herself, when all the woods are green’ (p. 25)

The moment is as natural as the scene described, as Marian instinctively turns to the poetry—by a living writer—she knows by heart. In contrast, later in the chapter her father bores the Milvains—and Gissing’s readers—with ‘a laboured account’ (p. 33) of his quarrel with rival Fadge about an obscure controversy concerning the mid-seventeenth-century poets Elkanah Settle and Joseph Cottle. Alfred Yule is at home among the marginal and forgotten, his moribund pedantry geared towards the scoring of points, rather than genuine appreciation. Meanwhile, his daughter’s poetic sensibilities seem organic and unforced, as she unpretentiously quotes Tennyson to enhance an everyday experience.

Milvain immediately recognizes Marian as ‘A good example of the modern literary girl’ (p. 15), but her decency transcends the modern literary world the novel describes. Instead, she becomes a talisman of two qualities that *New Grub Street* society conspicuously lacks: sexual and literary sincerity. One of Gissing’s striking achievements—indicative of a full sympathy towards women of Marian’s gifts and thwarted aspirations—is his representation of authentic and disinterested female desire. The most compelling of the novel’s love stories is Marian and Milvain’s, compelling because of the painful mismatch between their worth. Marian, Milvain recognizes, ‘claims the new privileges of woman’ (p. 264) in her emotional life, and in a novel predating the formal naming of the New Woman by some years, this insistence upon Marian’s erotic autonomy is a radical gesture.<sup>27</sup> Unlike Amy—drawn to Milvain as a representative of the social and

<sup>27</sup> The term ‘New Woman’ was first coined by Sarah Grand in March 1894, although, as Michelle Tusan has argued, the phenomenon has been in circulation for some years beforehand. See Tusan, ‘Inventing the New Woman: Print Culture and Identity Politics During the *Fin-du-siècle*’, *Victorian Periodicals Review* 31/2 (1998), 169–83.



material success evading her first husband—Marian is attracted physically, and her longing is frankly represented. Whereas Jasper anaesthetically sees marriage as ‘the result of a mild preference, encouraged by circumstances, and deliberately heightened into strong sexual feeling’ (p. 271), Marian’s ardour is as natural as her love of poetry, restrained for the first two volumes of the novel, but overflowing when he proposes. ‘Hungry for passionate love’, Marian is inevitably disappointed by her lover’s unromantic equivocations, but she has the courage to cast aside initial ‘maidenly shame’. Her desire is electric, an ‘emotional current’ passing ‘from her flesh to his whilst their hands were linked’, as she ‘abandoned herself to the luxury of the dream’:

It was her first complete escape from the world of intellectual routine, her first taste of life. All the pedantry of her daily toil slipped away like a cumbersome garment; she was clad only in her womanhood. Once or twice a shudder of strange self-consciousness went through her, and she felt guilty, immodest; but upon that sensation followed a surge of passionate joy, obliterating memory and forethought. (pp. 294–5)

Gissing was frequently chided by contemporary reviewers for his dour pessimism. Yet his ability to describe the rapture of a young woman’s awakening—and from her own subjectivity—was overlooked. His sympathy for Marian, his admiration for her warmth and emotional generosity, extends to his granting her something of his own starved craving for conjugal comfort. A diary entry a few days before his first meeting with Edith Underwood reads: ‘Feel like a madman sometimes. I know that I shall never do any more good work till I am married.’<sup>28</sup>

If Gissing gives Marian something of his own emotional loneliness and sexual need, then he also makes her the novel’s moral touchstone, embodying the values and principles it seeks to elaborate. Marian’s recall of Tennyson is significant, since the Poet Laureate was able—like Gissing’s other enthusiasm, Dickens—to reconcile literary value and popularity. For Peter D. McDonald, the mass public event of Tennyson’s funeral—held within two years of *New Grub Street’s* publication—was a key trigger for *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about whether the

<sup>28</sup> ‘Tues. September 16 [1890], *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), 226.

democratizing of literature meant degradation.<sup>29</sup> Misgivings mounted during the 1880s and 1890s, driven by a perceived expansion of the reading public after the 1870 Education Act, which provided universal education and raised literacy. New readers were supposed to require new kinds of reading—easier, unchallenging, distracting—and popular fiction, newspapers, and magazines competed to attract them.<sup>30</sup> In *New Grub Street*, unease is dramatized in the conversation between Dora, Milvain, and Whelpdale about the latter's new venture *Chit-Chat*—a transparently fictionalized version of George Newnes's mass-circulation weekly *Tit-Bits*, launched in 1881:

I would have the paper address itself to the quarter-educated; that is to say, the great new generation that is being turned out by the Board schools, the young men and women who can just read, but are incapable of sustained attention. People of this kind want something to occupy them in trains and on 'buses and trams. As a rule they care for no newspapers except the Sunday ones; what they want is the lightest and frothiest of chit-chatty information. (pp. 407–8)

Dora—later able to marry Whelpdale on the strength of *Chit-Chat*'s success—is unsure about the ethics of the enterprise, first fretting that 'these poor, silly people oughtn't to be encouraged in their weakness', but later agreeing that 'It *might* encourage in some of them a taste for reading' (p. 408). *Chit-Chat* is at one extreme of the literary hierarchy the novel describes; at the other is Biffen's *Mr Bailey, Grocer*, received as 'A pretentious book of the *genre ennuyant*', written by a man who forgets 'that a novelist's first duty is to tell a story' (p. 431). Biffen's commitment to his art is touching, his sacrifice tragic. But black humour points up an uncomfortable disjunction between Biffen's dedication to 'an absolute realism' treating 'ordinary vulgar life with fidelity and seriousness' (p. 128), and his actual reaction to 'ordinary vulgar life' when he finds it sprawled in a drunken stupor and blocking his way to rescuing his precious manuscript from a house fire. Life as Biffen has represented it has more value to him than the life of an (admittedly unappealing) representative of the 'essentially unheroic' (p. 128) masses he seeks to describe.

<sup>29</sup> Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3–6.

<sup>30</sup> See Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880–1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

Marian's appreciation of Tennyson, however, quietly glances back at a recent past where literary value and popular taste were synthesized, and her own preference tends towards literature reconciling rather than opposing the two. Chapter VIII finds her repining 'under the great dome' (p. 17) of the British Museum Reading-room, contemplating the futility of accelerated literary production, and contrasting her own hackwork with the glories of an established canon:

She kept asking herself what was the use and purpose of such a life as she was condemned to lead. When already there was more good literature in the world than any mortal could cope with in his lifetime, here was she exhausting herself in the manufacture of printed stuff which no one even pretended to be more than a commodity for the day's market. (p. 95)

Gissing—a regular worker in the great dome himself—makes Marian his clearest mouthpiece for his own critique of an overstocked literary marketplace. To her belongs the most potent symbolic epiphany:

A few days ago her startled eye had caught an advertisement in the newspaper, headed 'Literary Machine'; had it then been invented at last, some automaton to supply the place of such poor creatures as herself, to turn out books and articles? Alas! the machine was only one for holding volumes conveniently, that the work of literary manufacture might be physically lightened. (pp. 95–6)

Marian's hope for the invention of a 'true automaton', in which 'a given number of old books' might be 'reduced, blended, modernised into a single one for to-day's consumption' (p. 96) is the most poignant articulation of *New Grub Street's* nostalgia for the past's imagined creative integrity.

\* \* \*

Marian is the most sympathetically rendered of all *New Grub Street's* characters, and her explicit, unromantic vision of literary production in the era of mass consumption summarizes its central proposition. Indeed, the 'ink-stains on her fingers' (p. 456) which Milvain patronizingly imagines in the novel's final pages could be Gissing's own, as, exhausted in early December 1890, he put the finishing touches to a novel begun only two months earlier. Gissing's portrait of the artist as a young woman is, however, complicated by Marian's implicit critique of her creator's endeavours. Her departure, at the end of the novel, to work as an assistant in 'a public library in a

provincial town' (p. 449) marks her secession from the literary grind he inhabited—particularly since late-Victorian public libraries conceived themselves as bastions of quality against a rising tide of dross.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Marian's thoughts often indict Gissing himself. Shortly before she recalls the 'Literary Machine', she thinks of her father:

To write—was not that the joy and the privilege of one who had an urgent message for the world? Her father, she knew well, had no such message; he had abandoned all thought of original production, and only wrote about writing. (p. 95)

What is *New Grub Street*, after all, but writing about writing? Gissing's self-consciousness is painful, yet intriguingly, he turns laceration into a form of self-awareness which looks to the future as much as it longs for an imagined halcyon past. His coolly pessimistic analysis of the flaws and failings of the system his fiction perpetuates amounts to a satiric experiment prefiguring Modernism.

The modernity of *New Grub Street* is clear in its sympathy for emancipated women, in its fascination with metropolitan London, in its focus on the implications of novelty and innovation. But it is also quasi-Modernist in its self-awareness, particularly in its absorption with the mechanics of its own writing practice. In his indomitable creative integrity, his self-conscious isolation, his pleasure in writing for its own sake, and his sustained refusal to allow his work to be shaped by conceptions of the readable, Biffen is a prototype of a foundational fable of Modernism. That is the vision of the solitary genius, totally committed to his art, indifferent to the advantages of success, and, in assaulting public taste, transforming it. Such a reputation would later attend the careers of James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, carefully nurtured by that 'midwife of Modernism', Ezra Pound.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Biffen's mode of realism seems to foreshadow the 'style of scrupulous meanness' identified by Joyce as a key aspect of *Dubliners*' radical project.<sup>33</sup> However, if *Mr Bailey, Grocer* anticipates *Dubliners* (1914), then *New Grub Street* foreshadows *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), written a generation later but similarly concerned with

<sup>31</sup> Alistair Black, 'Skeleton in the Cupboard: Social Class and the Public Library in Britain through 150 Years', *Library History* 16/1 (2000), 3–12.

<sup>32</sup> See Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973).

<sup>33</sup> Letter to Grant Richards, 5 May 1906, in *The Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber, 1966), ii. 134.

how an artist is created and inhibited. Joyce was no admirer of Gissing, waspishly comparing his style to the stodgy Triestine staple ‘Pastefazoi’, a pasta and bean soup.<sup>34</sup> But Joyce’s and Gissing’s representations of the writing life are similarly ironic, essentially querying the heroic mode they appear to advance. Stephen Dedalus’s ambitions are multiply punctured: by his derivative Villanelle of the Tempress, by his fellow students’ impatience with his aesthetic theories, by his dependence on the invisible exploitation of his mother and his sisters, even through his promise to emigrate in order ‘to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race’.<sup>35</sup> That grandiose statement is undercut by the adolescence of the diary form with which *A Portrait* closes, and by *Ulysses* (1922), which opens with an older Stephen still mired in Dublin obscurity. Gissing’s portrait of Biffen shares something of this wry ambiguity. Significantly, Gissing gives no example of Biffen’s prose: readers are invited to consider it bravely innovative, and to respect the moral courage of a man who chooses to live on bread and dripping rather than compromise his art. The question of literary merit is circumvented by omission, and compounded by Biffen’s tragic death. Gissing thereby sets up an argument about cultural value, critical reception, and commercial success which revolves around an absence. This is writing about writing indeed, and it dramatizes the essential blankness so vividly imagined by Marian’s sad fantasy of a Literary Machine, ‘some automaton to supply the place of such poor creatures as herself’.

Finally, *New Grub Street*’s ultimate ambivalence about the relationship between literary merit and commerce makes it an apt harbinger of one of Modernism’s most potent myths. For the novel sets up a counterpoint between the genius starving in a garret and the slick cynic exploiting a debased and distracted mass audience, which many key Modernist statements, manifestos, and practices amplified. Modernism was ostensibly characterized and facilitated by the establishment of what critic Lawrence Rainey has described as an alternative cultural economy. Coterie publishing houses and so-called ‘little magazines’ promised to liberate innovation from the struggles and

<sup>34</sup> Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (eds), *George Gissing: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1972), 518.

<sup>35</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 209.

concessions *New Grub Street* described, creating spaces wherein art might be freed from the vulgarities of the marketplace.<sup>36</sup> However, as both Rainey and Mark Morrisson have demonstrated, the apparent mutual antagonism between Modernist artists and mass consumer culture is deceptive, even performative.<sup>37</sup> Instead, both describe more-or-less covert Modernist investment in the very commercial publishing and promotional practices a minority elite supposedly disdained. A contradictory network of appropriations and disavowals characterized Modernism's encounters with the mass market, in ways Gissing himself had anticipated. *New Grub Street* sets up a powerful thesis about the irreconcilability of art and money, only to interrogate and dismantle its terms. Despite the novel's movingly sympathetic accounts of the travails of Reardon and Biffen—and despite its vivid pictures of Milvain the cynic and Whelpdale the charlatan—merit and value are never securely established. The ethics of selling out are never wholeheartedly condemned, nor is what constitutes selling out definitively asserted. Instead, Gissing's experiment in writing about writing leaves a vacuum at its heart, summarized in its provocative refusal to give examples of the 'good' or 'bad' work it describes. It is left to Marian to underline that absence by herself vanishing from literary London, a symbolic withdrawal shadowing Gissing's own ironic retreat.

<sup>36</sup> Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> Mark Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception 1905–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).



## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

*NEW GRUB STREET* was published in three volumes by Smith, Elder and Co. on 7 April 1891. The novel was written at speed, and appeared four months after submission: Gissing had neither time nor inclination to make alterations. The manuscript Gissing submitted, held in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, is a fair copy, showing very few corrections. Later in 1891, Smith, Elder reissued the novel in a single volume, which is the basis for the present text. The original divisions into three volumes occur at the start of Chapters XIII and XXV, and are marked parenthetically.

In 1898, Gissing began to revise *New Grub Street*, in preparation for its translation into French by Gabrielle Fleury, who would later become his partner. No longer constrained to fill the three volumes demanded in 1890, Gissing reduced the novel from around 187,000 to 138,000 words. He excised digressive subplots and minor characters including Edith Carter, the penniless writer Sykes, and Mrs Goby, as well as shortening descriptions of Whelpdale and John Yule. Passages of autobiographical reminiscence, notably Whelpdale's American adventures, were dropped. Authorial interventions, philosophizing, and comment were cut entirely.

*La Rue des Meurt-la-Faim: Vie littéraire à Londres (Starvation Street: Literary Life in London)* first appeared in the *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires: Revue hebdomadaire* between March and June 1901. It was published in book form by Éditions de la Revue Blanche, Paris, in 1902. However, Gissing was unable to persuade an English publisher willing to issue his revised version, relieved of the 'superfluities... partly due to their having been written at a time when English fiction was subjected to the three-volume system'.<sup>1</sup> It has subsequently appeared as *New Grub Street: The 1901 Edition* (1999), edited by Paul Delany for the English Literary Studies Monograph Series, and readers are referred to Delany's edition for a full account of the differences and their implications.

<sup>1</sup> To Henry Davray, May 1901, in *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vols. i-ix, ed. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991-7), vii. 163.





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## CHAPTER I

### A MAN OF HIS DAY

As the Milvains sat down to breakfast the clock of Wattleborough\* parish church struck eight; it was two miles away, but the strokes were borne very distinctly on the west wind this autumn morning. Jasper, listening before he cracked an egg, remarked with cheerfulness:

‘There’s a man being hanged in London at this moment.’

‘Surely it isn’t necessary to let us know that,’ said his sister Maud, coldly.

‘And in such a tone, too!’ protested his sister Dora.

‘Who is it?’ inquired Mrs Milvain, looking at her son with pained forehead.

‘I don’t know. It happened to catch my eye in the paper yesterday that someone was to be hanged at Newgate\* this morning. There’s a certain satisfaction in reflecting that it is not oneself.’

‘That’s your selfish way of looking at things,’ said Maud.

‘Well,’ returned Jasper, ‘seeing that the fact came into my head, what better use could I make of it? I could curse the brutality of an age that sanctioned such things; or I could grow doleful over the misery of the poor—fellow. But those emotions would be as little profitable to others as to myself. It just happened that I saw the thing in a light of consolation. Things are bad with me, but not so bad as *that*. I might be going out between Jack Ketch\* and the Chaplain to be hanged; instead of that, I am eating a really fresh egg, and very excellent buttered toast, with coffee as good as can be reasonably expected in this part of the world.—(Do try boiling the milk, mother.)—The tone in which I spoke was spontaneous; being so, it needs no justification.’

He was a young man of five-and-twenty, well built, though a trifle meagre, and of pale complexion. He had hair that was very nearly black, and a clean-shaven face, best described, perhaps, as of bureaucratic type. The clothes he wore were of expensive material, but had seen a good deal of service. His stand-up collar curled over at the corners, and his necktie was lilac-sprigged.

Of the two sisters, Dora, aged twenty, was the more like him in visage, but she spoke with a gentleness which seemed to indicate a different character. Maud, who was twenty-two, had bold, handsome



features, and very beautiful hair of russet tinge; hers was not a face that readily smiled. Their mother had the look and manners of an invalid, though she sat at table in the ordinary way. All were dressed as ladies, though very simply. The room, which looked upon a small patch of garden, was furnished with old-fashioned comfort, only one or two objects suggesting the decorative spirit of 1882.\*

‘A man who comes to be hanged,’ pursued Jasper, impartially, ‘has the satisfaction of knowing that he has brought society to its last resource. He is a man of such fatal importance that nothing will serve against him but the supreme effort of law. In a way, you know, that is success.’

‘In a way,’ repeated Maud, scornfully.

‘Suppose we talk of something else,’ suggested Dora, who seemed to fear a conflict between her sister and Jasper.

Almost at the same moment a diversion was afforded by the arrival of the post. There was a letter for Mrs Milvain, a letter and newspaper for her son. Whilst the girls and their mother talked of unimportant news communicated by the one correspondent, Jasper read the missive addressed to himself.

‘This is from Reardon,’ he remarked to the younger girl. ‘Things are going badly with him. He is just the kind of fellow to end by poisoning or shooting himself.’

‘But why?’

‘Can’t get anything done; and begins to be sore troubled on his wife’s account.’

‘Is he ill?’

‘Overworked, I suppose. But it’s just what I foresaw. He isn’t the kind of man to keep up literary production as a paying business. In favourable circumstances he might write a fairly good book once every two or three years.\* The failure of his last depressed him, and now he is struggling hopelessly to get another done before the winter season. Those people will come to grief.’

‘The enjoyment with which he anticipates it!’ murmured Maud, looking at her mother.

‘Not at all,’ said Jasper. ‘It’s true I envied the fellow, because he persuaded a handsome girl to believe in him and share his risks, but I shall be very sorry if he goes to the—to the dogs. He’s my one serious friend. But it irritates me to see a man making such large demands upon fortune. One must be more modest—as I am. Because one book

had a sort of success he imagined his struggles were over. He got a hundred pounds for "On Neutral Ground,"\* and at once counted on a continuance of payments in geometrical proportion. I hinted to him that he couldn't keep it up, and he smiled with tolerance, no doubt thinking "He judges me by himself." But I didn't do anything of the kind.—(Toast, please, Dora.)—I'm a stronger man than Reardon; I can keep my eyes open, and wait.'

'Is his wife the kind of person to grumble?' asked Mrs Milvain.

'Well, yes, I suspect that she is. The girl wasn't content to go into modest rooms—they must furnish a flat. I rather wonder he didn't start a carriage for her. Well, his next book brought only another hundred, and now, even if he finishes this one, it's very doubtful if he'll get as much. "The Optimist" was practically a failure.'

'Mr Yule may leave them some money,' said Dora.

'Yes. But he may live another ten years, and he would see them both in Marylebone Workhouse\* before he advanced sixpence, or I'm much mistaken in him. Her mother has only just enough to live upon; can't possibly help them. Her brother wouldn't give or lend twopence halfpenny.'

'Has Mr Reardon no relatives!'

'I never heard him make mention of a single one. No, he has done the fatal thing. A man in his position, if he marry at all, must take either a work-girl or an heiress, and in many ways the work-girl is preferable.\*'

'How can you say that?' asked Dora. 'You never cease talking about the advantages of money.'

'Oh, I don't mean that for *me* the work-girl would be preferable; by no means; but for a man like Reardon. He is absurd enough to be conscientious, likes to be called an "artist," and so on. He might possibly earn a hundred and fifty a year\* if his mind were at rest, and that would be enough if he had married a decent little dressmaker. He wouldn't desire superfluities, and the quality of his work would be its own reward. As it is, he's ruined.'

'And I repeat,' said Maud, 'that you enjoy the prospect.'

'Nothing of the kind. If I seem to speak exultantly it's only because my intellect enjoys the clear perception of a fact.—A little marmalade, Dora; the home-made, please.'

'But this is very sad, Jasper,' said Mrs Milvain, in her half-absent way. 'I suppose they can't even go for a holiday?'

‘Quite out of the question.’

‘Not even if you invited them to come here for a week?’

‘Now, mother,’ urged Maud, ‘*that’s* impossible, you know very well.’

‘I thought we might make an effort, dear. A holiday might mean everything to him.’

‘No, no,’ fell from Jasper, thoughtfully. ‘I don’t think you’d get along very well with Mrs Reardon; and then, if her uncle is coming to Mr Yule’s, you know, that would be awkward.’

‘I suppose it would; though those people would only stay a day or two, Miss Harrow said.’

‘Why can’t Mr Yule make them friends, those two lots of people?’ asked Dora. ‘You say he’s on good terms with both.’

‘I suppose he thinks it’s no business of his.’

Jasper mused over the letter from his friend.

‘Ten years hence,’ he said, ‘if Reardon is still alive, I shall be lending him five-pound notes.’

A smile of irony rose to Maud’s lips. Dora laughed.

‘To be sure! To be sure!’ exclaimed their brother. ‘You have no faith. But just understand the difference between a man like Reardon and a man like me. He is the old type of unpractical artist; I am the literary man of 1882. He won’t make concessions, or rather, he can’t make them; he can’t supply the market. I—well, you may say that at present I do nothing; but that’s a great mistake, I am learning my business. Literature nowadays is a trade. Putting aside men of genius, who may succeed by mere cosmic force, your successful man of letters is your skilful tradesman. He thinks first and foremost of the markets; when one kind of goods begins to go off slackly, he is ready with something new and appetising. He knows perfectly all the possible sources of income. Whatever he has to sell he’ll get payment for it from all sorts of various quarters; none of your unpractical selling for a lump sum to a middleman who will make six distinct profits. Now, look you: if I had been in Reardon’s place, I’d have made four hundred at least out of “The Optimist”; I should have gone shrewdly to work with magazines and newspapers and foreign publishers, and—all sorts of people. Reardon can’t do that kind of thing, he’s behind his age; he sells a manuscript as if he lived in Sam Johnson’s Grub Street.\* But our Grub Street of to-day is quite a different place: it is supplied with telegraphic communication, it knows what literary

fare is in demand in every part of the world, its inhabitants are men of business, however seedy.'

'It sounds ignoble,' said Maud.

'I have nothing to do with that, my dear girl. Now, as I tell you, I am slowly, but surely, learning the business. My line won't be novels; I have failed in that direction, I'm not cut out for the work. It's a pity, of course; there's a great deal of money in it. But I have plenty of scope. In ten years, I repeat, I shall be making my thousand a year.'

'I don't remember that you stated the exact sum before,' Maud observed.

'Let it pass. And to those who have shall be given. When I have a decent income of my own, I shall marry a woman with an income somewhat larger, so that casualties may be provided for.'

Dora exclaimed, laughing:

'It would amuse me very much if the Reardons got a lot of money at Mr Yule's death—and that can't be ten years off, I'm sure.'

'I don't see that there's any chance of their getting much,' replied Jasper, meditatively. 'Mrs Reardon is only his niece. The man's brother and sister will have the first helping, I suppose. And then, if it comes to the second generation, the literary Yule has a daughter, and by her being invited here I should think she's the favourite niece. No, no; depend upon it they won't get anything at all.'

Having finished his breakfast, he leaned back and began to unfold the London paper that had come by post.

'Had Mr Reardon any hopes of that kind at the time of his marriage, do you think?' inquired Mrs Milvain.

'Reardon? Good heavens, no! Would he were capable of such forethought!'

In a few minutes Jasper was left alone in the room. When the servant came to clear the table he strolled slowly away, humming a tune.

The house was pleasantly situated by the roadside in a little village named Finden. Opposite stood the church, a plain, low, square-towered building. As it was cattle-market to-day in the town of Wattleborough, droves of beasts and sheep occasionally went by, or the rattle of a grazier's cart sounded for a moment. On ordinary days the road saw few vehicles, and pedestrians were rare.

Mrs Milvain and her daughters had lived here for the last seven years, since the death of the father, who was a veterinary surgeon. The widow enjoyed an annuity of two hundred and forty pounds, terminable with

her life; the children had nothing of their own. Maud acted irregularly as a teacher of music; Dora had an engagement as visiting governess in a Wattleborough family. Twice a year, as a rule, Jasper came down from London to spend a fortnight with them; to-day marked the middle of his autumn visit, and the strained relations between him and his sisters which invariably made the second week rather trying for all in the house had already become noticeable.

In the course of the morning Jasper had half an hour's private talk with his mother, after which he set off to roam in the sunshine. Shortly after he had left the house, Maud, her domestic duties dismissed for the time, came into the parlour where Mrs Milvain was reclining on the sofa.

'Jasper wants more money,' said the mother, when Maud had sat in meditation for a few minutes.

'Of course. I knew that. I hope you told him he couldn't have it.'

'I really didn't know what to say,' returned Mrs Milvain, in a feeble tone of worry.

'Then you must leave the matter to me, that's all. There's no money for him, and there's an end of it.'

Maud set her features in sullen determination. There was a brief silence.

'What's he to do, Maud?'

'To do? How do other people do? What do Dora and I do?'

'You don't earn enough for your support, my dear.'

'Oh, well!' broke from the girl. 'Of course, if you grudge us our food and lodging—'

'Don't be so quick-tempered. You know very well I am far from grudging you anything, dear. But I only meant to say that Jasper does earn something, you know.'

'It's a disgraceful thing that he doesn't earn as much as he needs. We are sacrificed to him, as we always have been. Why should we be pinching and stinting to keep him in idleness?'

'But you really can't call it idleness, Maud. He is studying his profession.'

'Pray call it trade; he prefers it. How do I know that he's studying anything? What does he mean by "studying"? And to hear him speak scornfully of his friend Mr Reardon, who seems to work hard all through the year! It's disgusting, mother. At this rate he will *never* earn his own living. Who hasn't seen or heard of such men? If we had

another hundred a year, I would say nothing. But we can't live on what he leaves us, and I'm not going to let you try. I shall tell Jasper plainly that he's got to work for his own support.'

Another silence, and a longer one. Mrs Milvain furtively wiped a tear from her cheek.

'It seems very cruel to refuse,' she said at length, 'when another year may give him the opportunity he's waiting for.'

'Opportunity? What does he mean by his opportunity?'

'He says that it always comes, if a man knows how to wait.'

'And the people who support him may starve meanwhile! Now just think a bit, mother. Suppose anything were to happen to you, what becomes of Dora and me? And what becomes of Jasper, too? It's the truest kindness to him to compel him to earn a living. He gets more and more incapable of it.'

'You can't say that, Maud. He earns a little more each year. But for that, I should have my doubts. He has made thirty pounds already this year, and he only made about twenty-five the whole of last. We must be fair to him, you know. I can't help feeling that he knows what he's about. And if he does succeed, he'll pay us all back.'

Maud began to gnaw her fingers, a disagreeable habit she had in privacy.

'Then why doesn't he live more economically?'

'I really don't see how he can live on less than a hundred and fifty a year. London, you know——'

'The cheapest place in the world.'

'Nonsense, Maud!'

'But I know what I'm saying. I've read quite enough about such things. He might live very well indeed on thirty shillings a week, even buying his clothes out of it.'

'But he has told us so often that it's no *use* to him to live like that. He is obliged to go to places where he must spend a little, or he makes no progress.'

'Well, all I can say is,' exclaimed the girl impatiently, 'it's very lucky for him that he's got a mother who willingly sacrifices her daughters to him.'

'That's how you always break out. You don't care what unkindness you say!'

'It's a simple truth.'

'Dora never speaks like that.'

‘Because she’s afraid to be honest.’

‘No, because she has too much love for her mother. I can’t bear to talk to you, Maud. The older I get, and the weaker I get, the more unfeeling you are to me.’

Scenes of this kind were no uncommon thing. The clash of tempers lasted for several minutes, then Maud flung out of the room. An hour later, at dinner-time, she was rather more caustic in her remarks than usual, but this was the only sign that remained of the stormy mood.

Jasper renewed the breakfast-table conversation.

‘Look here,’ he began, ‘why don’t you girls write something? I’m convinced you could make money if you tried. There’s a tremendous sale for religious stories; why not patch one together? I am quite serious.’

‘Why don’t you do it yourself,’ retorted Maud.

‘I can’t manage stories, as I have told you; but I think you could. In your place, I’d make a speciality of Sunday-school prize-books\*; you know the kind of thing I mean. They sell like hot cakes. And there’s so deuced little enterprise in the business. If you’d give your mind to it, you might make hundreds a year.’

‘Better say “abandon your mind to it.”’

‘Why, there you are! You’re a sharp enough girl. You can quote as well as anyone I know.’

‘And please, why am I to take up an inferior kind of work?’

‘Inferior? Oh, if you can be a George Eliot,\* begin at the earliest opportunity. I merely suggested what seemed practicable. But I don’t think you have genius, Maud. People have got that ancient prejudice so firmly rooted in their heads—that one mustn’t write save at the dictation of the Holy Spirit. I tell you, writing is a business. Get together half-a-dozen fair specimens of the Sunday-school prize; study them; discover the essential points of such composition; hit upon new attractions; then go to work methodically, so many pages a day. There’s no question of the divine afflatus; that belongs to another sphere of life. We talk of literature as a trade, not of Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare. If I could only get that into poor Reardon’s head. He thinks me a gross beast, often enough. What the devil—I mean what on earth is there in typography to make everything it deals with sacred? I don’t advocate the propagation of vicious literature; I speak only of good, coarse, marketable stuff for the world’s vulgar. You just give it a thought, Maud; talk it over with Dora.’

He resumed presently:

'I maintain that we people of brains are justified in supplying the mob with the food it likes. We are not geniuses, and if we sit down in a spirit of long-eared gravity we shall produce only commonplace stuff. Let us use our wits to earn money, and make the best we can of our lives. If only I had the skill, I would produce novels out-trashing the trashiest that ever sold fifty thousand copies. But it needs skill, mind you: and to deny it is a gross error of the literary pedants. To please the vulgar you must, one way or another, incarnate the genius of vulgarity. For my own part, I shan't be able to address the bulkiest multitude; my talent doesn't lend itself to that form. I shall write for the upper middle-class of intellect, the people who like to feel that what they are reading has some special cleverness, but who can't distinguish between stones and paste. That's why I'm so slow in warming to the work. Every month I feel surer of myself, however. That last thing of mine in *The West End* distinctly hit the mark; it wasn't too flashy, it wasn't too solid. I heard fellows speak of it in the train.'

Mrs Milvain kept glancing at Maud, with eyes which desired her attention to these utterances. None the less, half an hour after dinner, Jasper found himself encountered by his sister in the garden, on her face a look which warned him of what was coming.

'I want you to tell me something, Jasper. How much longer shall you look to mother for support? I mean it literally; let me have an idea of how much longer it will be.'

He looked away and reflected.

'To leave a margin,' was his reply, 'let us say twelve months.'

'Better say your favourite "ten years" at once.'

'No. I speak by the card. In twelve months' time, if not before, I shall begin to pay my debts. My dear girl, I have the honour to be a tolerably long-headed individual. I know what I'm about.'

'And let us suppose mother were to die within half a year?'

'I should make shift to do very well.'

'You? And please—what of Dora and me?'

'You would write Sunday-school prizes.'

Maud turned away and left him.

He knocked the dust out of the pipe he had been smoking, and again set off for a stroll along the lanes. On his countenance was just a trace of solicitude, but for the most part he wore a thoughtful smile. Now and then he stroked his smoothly-shaven jaws with thumb and



fingers. Occasionally he became observant of wayside details—of the colour of a maple leaf, the shape of a tall thistle, the consistency of a fungus. At the few people who passed he looked keenly, surveying them from head to foot.

On turning, at the limit of his walk, he found himself almost face to face with two persons, who were coming along in silent companionship; their appearance interested him. The one was a man of fifty, grizzled, hard featured, slightly bowed in the shoulders; he wore a grey felt hat with a broad brim and a decent suit of broadcloth. With him was a girl of perhaps two-and-twenty, in a slate-coloured dress with very little ornament, and a yellow straw hat of the shape originally appropriated to males; her dark hair was cut short, and lay in innumerable crisp curls. Father and daughter, obviously. The girl, to a casual eye, was neither pretty nor beautiful, but she had a grave and impressive face, with a complexion of ivory tone; her walk was gracefully modest, and she seemed to be enjoying the country air.

Jasper mused concerning them. When he had walked a few yards, he looked back; at the same moment the unknown man also turned his head.

‘Where the deuce have I seen them—him and the girl too?’ Milvain asked himself.

And before he reached home the recollection he sought flashed upon his mind.

‘The Museum Reading-room,\* of course!’

## CHAPTER II

### THE HOUSE OF YULE

‘I THINK,’ said Jasper, as he entered the room where his mother and Maud were busy with plain needlework,\* ‘I must have met Alfred Yule and his daughter.’

‘How did you recognise them?’ Mrs Milvain inquired.

‘I passed an old buffer and a pale-faced girl whom I know by sight at the British Museum. It wasn’t near Yule’s house, but they were taking a walk.’

‘They may have come already. When Miss Harrow was here last, she said “in about a fortnight.”’

'No mistaking them for people of these parts, even if I hadn't remembered their faces. Both of them are obvious dwellers in the valley of the shadow of books.\*'

'Is Miss Yule such a fright then?' asked Maud.

'A fright! Not at all. A good example of the modern literary girl. I suppose you have the oddest old-fashioned ideas of such people. No, I rather like the look of her. *Simpativa*,\* I should think, as that ass Whelpdale would say. A very delicate, pure complexion, though morbid; nice eyes; figure not spoilt yet. But of course I may be wrong about their identity.'

Later in the afternoon Jasper's conjecture was rendered a certainty. Maud had walked to Wattleborough, where she would meet Dora on the latter's return from her teaching, and Mrs Milvain sat alone, in a mood of depression; there was a ring at the door-bell, and the servant admitted Miss Harrow.

This lady acted as housekeeper to Mr John Yule, a wealthy resident in this neighbourhood; she was the sister of his deceased wife\*—a thin, soft-speaking, kindly woman of forty-five. The greater part of her life she had spent as a governess; her position now was more agreeable, and the removal of her anxiety about the future had developed qualities of cheerfulness which formerly no one would have suspected her to possess. The acquaintance between Mrs Milvain and her was only of twelve months' standing; prior to that, Mr Yule had inhabited a house at the end of Wattleborough remote from Finden.

'Our London visitors came yesterday,' she began by saying.

Mrs Milvain mentioned her son's encounter an hour or two ago.

'No doubt it was they,' said the visitor. 'Mrs Yule hasn't come; I hardly expected she would, you know. So very unfortunate when there are difficulties of that kind, isn't it?'

She smiled confidentially.

'The poor girl must feel it,' said Mrs Milvain.

'I'm afraid she does. Of course it narrows the circle of her friends at home. She's a sweet girl, and I should so like you to meet her. Do come and have tea with us to-morrow afternoon, will you? Or would it be too much for you just now?'

'Will you let the girls call? And then perhaps Miss Yule will be so good as to come and see me?'

'I wonder whether Mr Milvain would like to meet her father?'

I have thought that perhaps it might be some advantage to him. Alfred is so closely connected with literary people, you know.'

'I feel sure he would be glad,' replied Mrs Milvain. 'But—what of Jasper's friendship with Mrs Edmund Yule and the Reardons? Mightn't it be a little awkward?'

'Oh, I don't think so, unless he himself felt it so. There would be no need to mention that, I should say. And, really, it would be so much better if those estrangements came to an end. John makes no scruple of speaking freely about everyone, and I don't think Alfred regards Mrs Edmund with any serious unkindness. If Mr Milvain would walk over with the young ladies to-morrow, it would be very pleasant.'

'Then I think I may promise that he will. I'm sure I don't know where he is at this moment. We don't see very much of him, except at meals.'

'He won't be with you much longer, I suppose?'

'Perhaps a week.'

Before Miss Harrow's departure Maud and Dora reached home. They were curious to see the young lady from the valley of the shadow of books, and gladly accepted the invitation offered them.

They set out on the following afternoon in their brother's company. It was only a quarter of an hour's walk to Mr Yule's habitation, a small house in a large garden. Jasper was coming hither for the first time; his sisters now and then visited Miss Harrow, but very rarely saw Mr Yule himself, who made no secret of the fact that he cared little for female society. In Wattleborough and the neighbourhood opinions varied greatly as to this gentleman's character, but women seldom spoke very favourably of him. Miss Harrow was reticent concerning her brother-in-law; no one, however, had any reason to believe that she found life under his roof disagreeable. That she lived with him at all was of course occasionally matter for comment, certain Wattleborough ladies having their doubts regarding the position of a deceased wife's sister under such circumstances; but no one was seriously exercised about the relations between this sober lady of forty-five and a man of sixty-three in broken health.

A word of the family history.

John, Alfred, and Edmund Yule were the sons of a Wattleborough stationer. Each was well educated, up to the age of seventeen, at the town's grammar school. The eldest, who was a hot-headed lad, but showed capacities for business, worked at first with his father,

endeavouring to add a book-selling department to the trade in stationery; but the life of home was not much to his taste, and at one-and-twenty he obtained a clerk's place in the office of a London newspaper. Three years after, his father died, and the small patrimony which fell to him he used in making himself practically acquainted with the details of paper manufacture, his aim being to establish himself in partnership with an acquaintance who had started a small paper-mill in Hertfordshire. His speculation succeeded, and as years went on he became a thriving manufacturer. His brother Alfred, in the meantime, had drifted from work at a London bookseller's into the modern Grub Street, his adventures in which region will concern us hereafter. Edmund carried on the Wattleborough business, but with small success. Between him and his eldest brother existed a good deal of affection, and in the end John offered him a share in his flourishing paper works; whereupon Edmund married, deeming himself well established for life. But John's temper was a difficult one; Edmund and he quarrelled, parted; and when the younger died, aged about forty, he left but moderate provision for his widow and two children.

Only when he had reached middle age did John marry; the experiment could not be called successful, and Mrs Yule died three years later, childless.

At fifty-four John Yule retired from active business; he came back to the scenes of his early life, and began to take an important part in the municipal affairs of Wattleborough. He was then a remarkably robust man, fond of out-of-door exercise; he made it one of his chief efforts to encourage the local Volunteer movement,\* the cricket and football clubs, public sports of every kind, showing no sympathy whatever with those persons who wished to establish free libraries, lectures, and the like. At his own expense he built for the Volunteers a handsome drill-shed; he founded a public gymnasium; and finally he allowed it to be rumoured that he was going to present the town with a park. But by presuming too far upon the bodily vigour which prompted these activities, he passed of a sudden into the state of a confirmed invalid. On an autumn expedition in the Hebrides he slept one night under the open sky, with the result that he had an all but fatal attack of rheumatic fever. After that, though the direction of his interests was unchanged, he could no longer set the example to Wattleborough youth of muscular manliness. The infliction did not improve his temper; for the next year or two he was constantly at warfare

with one or other of his colleagues and friends, ill brooking that the familiar control of various local interests should fall out of his hands. But before long he appeared to resign himself to his fate, and at present Wattleborough saw little of him. It seemed likely that he might still found the park which was to bear his name; but perhaps it would only be done in consequence of directions in his will. It was believed that he could not live much longer.

With his kinsfolk he held very little communication. Alfred Yule, a battered man of letters, had visited Wattleborough only twice (including the present occasion) since John's return hither. Mrs Edmund Yule, with her daughter—now Mrs Reardon—had been only once, three years ago. These two families, as you have heard, were not on terms of amity with each other, owing to difficulties between Mrs Alfred and Mrs Edmund; but John seemed to regard both impartially. Perhaps the only real warmth of feeling he had ever known was bestowed upon Edmund, and Miss Harrow had remarked that he spoke with somewhat more interest of Edmund's daughter, Amy, than of Alfred's daughter, Marian. But it was doubtful whether the sudden disappearance from the earth of all his relatives would greatly have troubled him. He lived a life of curious self-absorption, reading newspapers (little else), and talking with old friends who had stuck to him in spite of his irascibility.

Miss Harrow received her visitors in a small and soberly furnished drawing-room. She was nervous, probably because of Jasper Milvain, whom she had met but once—last spring—and who on that occasion had struck her as an alarmingly modern young man. In the shadow of a window-curtain sat a slight, simply-dressed girl, whose short curly hair and thoughtful countenance Jasper again recognised. When it was his turn to be presented to Miss Yule, he saw that she doubted for an instant whether or not to give her hand; yet she decided to do so, and there was something very pleasant to him in its warm softness. She smiled with a slight embarrassment, meeting his look only for a second.

'I have seen you several times, Miss Yule,' he said in a friendly way, 'though without knowing your name. It was under the great dome.'

She laughed, readily understanding his phrase.

'I am there very often,' was her reply.

'What great dome?' asked Miss Harrow, with surprise.

'That of the British Museum Reading-room,' explained Jasper; 'known to some of us as the valley of the shadow of books. People who