Victims of Circumstances:

Victorian Realism and the Transnational Narratives

of Dickens, Daudet, and Gissing

Tom Ue

Department of English

McGill University, Montreal

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Drawing on Hans Robert Jauss' theory of the horizon of expectations, I examine a character type that George Gissing identifies in the title of his short story "A Victim of Circumstances" (1893) as it appears in four works: Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853), Alphonse Daudet's *Jack* (1876), Gissing's *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and *Veranilda* (1903). This thesis reveals how these novelists converse about individual agency and deterministic circumstances. It argues that these three Victorian novelists repeatedly subvert simplistic readings of their characters as passive victims and, in this way, suggest the greater importance of perceptive social reading as a way of dealing with adverse circumstances. It thus illuminates Gissing's status as a reader and writer who is heavily influenced by his contemporaries, and sheds light, to a limited extent, on the impacts of both Dickens on French literature and Daudet on Victorian British literature.

Résumé

Par l'entremise du cadre théorique d'horizon des attentes développé par Hans Robert Jauss, cette thèse examine le type de personnage que George Gissing caractérise dans le titre de son conte "A Victim of Circumstances" (1893), et ce, dans quatre oeuvres: *Bleak House* (1953) de Charles Dickens, *Jack* (1876) d'Alphonse Daudet et de Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) et *Veranilda* (1903). La thèse met en évidence le discours de ces écrivains sur les choix de l'individu et les circonstances déterministes. L'argument avancé dans la thèse est que ces trois romanciers de l'époque victorienne résistent couramment à une lecture simpliste qui représenterait leurs personnages comme des victimes passives, et ainsi soulignent l'importance d'une mise en contexte social de la lecture afin de permettre la compréhension de circonstances difficiles. La thèse révèle que Gissing est à la fois un lecteur et un écrivain fortement influencé par ses contemporains. De plus, elle examine, dans un petit échantillon de textes, l'influence de Dickens sur la littérature française et celle de Daudet sur la littérature britannique de l'époque victorienne.

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Introduction

Conceptualizing the Victim of Circumstances

In 1885, Gissing wrote to his brother Algernon: "No, do not after all read Sand, but rather Daudet, whom you will relish keenly. I may as well send you at once his 'Jack,' which is in 2 Vols, – one vol. at a time. I assure you the book is delightful, & much influenced by Dickens" (2: 255). If Gissing's letter speaks to the profound influence Charles Dickens had on his contemporary French writers, it also encourages us to examine how all of these writers affect Gissing's literary project. Gissing discusses the influence Dickens had on Alphonse Daudet in greater detail in *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (1898):

> Little as he cared for foreign writers, we learn that Dickens found pleasure in a book called *Le Petit Chose*, the first novel of a very young author named Alphonse Daudet. It would have been strange indeed had he not done so; for Daudet at that time as closely resembled Dickens himself as a Frenchman possibly could. To repeated suggestions that he modelled his early work on that of his great contemporary, Daudet replied with a good-humoured shake of the head . . . . If indeed Daudet did not deceive himself, we can only wonder at the striking resemblance between his mind and that of Dickens. Not only is it a question of literary manner, and of the humour which is a leading characteristic in both; the Frenchman is penetrated with a delicate sense, a fine enjoyment, of the virtues and happiness of simple domestic life, and in a measure has done

> for France what Dickens in his larger way did for England, shaping examples of sweetness and goodness among humble folk, which have been taken to their hearts by his readers. (270-71)

This passage reflects Gissing's view that Dickens is not completely imitable, at least by a French writer, and his greater faith in influence over coincidence. More importantly, it articulates his appreciation for both Dickens' and Daudet's writing, through their abilities to move readers and, in this process, write literature of national importance.[1]

This thesis examines the dialogue that emerges in the writing of Dickens, Daudet, and Gissing by tracing the character type of the "victim of circumstances" across four novels: Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853), Daudet's *Jack* (1876), and Gissing's *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and *Veranilda* (1903). The goals of this thesis are twofold. First, it seeks to illuminate Gissing's status as a reader and writer who "was keenly conscious of his predecessors in the realist tradition . . . and was perhaps the most self-conscious English realist, or even naturalist" (Brooks 141), and also contribute to an aspect of Gissing studies that is under-examined, that is, his knowledge of seven languages and literatures and its impact on his oeuvre. Second, this thesis seeks to gesture towards the profound impacts of both Dickens on French literature, and Daudet on Victorian British literature

[1] Peter Brooks has made the interesting observation that Harold Biffen, the hardcore realist writer of Gissing's *New Grub Street*, and author of the barely-readable *Mr Bailey, Grocer*, "criticizes Dickens for his melodrama, and his humor; and Zola for writing heroic tragedies, whereas Biffen aims at tedious" (140). Gissing's and Biffen's difference in opinion helps to undermine a straightforward biographical reading of Gissing's writing.

despite the British public's ambivalent attitudes to their continental contemporaries.[2]

The novels examined in this thesis necessitate close textual analysis for a fuller appreciation of the conversations with which they are engaged. In her recent essay "Fiction," Hilary Schor succinctly sums up one line of criticism of Victorian novels: "In their very form, their forward-moving and morally progressive plots, their emphasis on individual solutions, their mirroring of a diverse but finally all-inclusive social sphere, they inscribe their readers more comfortably, and therefore more insidiously, within a master-plot of cultural control" (323). Linda M. Shires corroborates this reading when she argues: "The realist novel largely accepts middle-class ethics and mores. The emotionally complex hero or heroine is molded to the bourgeois ideal of the rational man or woman of virtue. Relying on a structure of psychological development, the classic realist novel allows lapses from a bourgeois code, but treats them as errors of judgment owing to immaturity" (65).[3] While Shires reads the novel more specifically for how Romantic emphases on self and individual are "pressured by

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[2] Brooks asserts: "[Gissing] clearly is indebted to Zola's example, at a time when Zola had been banned in England and his publisher jailed (on the occasion of the publication of the English translation of Zola's novel about peasants, *La Terre*), and his kind of deterministic and biological fiction considered offensive to English morals" (141). Such cross-fertilization is made possible, as Simon Eliot reveals in "The Business of Victorian Publishing," through a series of innovations in printing and papermaking including "the invention of the Fourdrinier papermaking machine in the 1800s; the introduction of powered presses in the 1810s; the extensive use of stereotype . . .; the development of rotary printing in the 1870s; [and] the development of hot metal type-composing machines in the 1880s and 1890s" (58). These advances, together with the lack of a copyright arrangement between Britain and the United States until the Platt-Simonds Bill in 1891 (52), contributed to an increasingly globalized publishing industry.

[3] To claim realism as a nineteenth-century writing technique is an erroneous historical generalization, as Brooks points out when he sees a kind of realistic practice at play even in writing as early as Chaucer's (7). I agree with Brooks' definition of realism as an art form that "tends to be intensely visual, concerned with seeing and registering, and therefore has a frequent recourse to the descriptive" (43). In this more limited sense, realism can be claimed as a nineteenth-century phenomenon.

increasingly powerful ideologies of capitalism" (61) in the nineteenth century, critics like Wolfgang Iser and Philip Davis persuasively argue for the need to examine closely the conflicts within novels, competing discourses that illuminate the reader's conceptions of established norms: "What was presented in the novel led to a specific effect: namely, to involve the reader in the world of the novel and so help him to understand it – and ultimately his own world – more clearly" (Iser xi). For Iser, novels have a knack for challenging the norm through the conversations in which they are engaged:

> [Novels] are set in a new context which changes their function, insofar as they no longer act as social regulations but as the subject of a discussion which, more often than not, ends in a questioning rather than a confirmation of their validity. This is frequently brought about by the varying degrees of a negation with which the norms are set up in their fictional context – a negation which impels the reader to seek a positive counterbalance elsewhere than in the world immediately familiar to him. (xii)

Davis similarly reads the Victorian novel as a battleground for competing viewpoints in his historicist approach: "Where the language of argument too often encouraged the completeness of limited men, where the explicitness of non-fictional prose had difficulty in formally signalling limits to and omissions from its own case, the realist novel at its greatest was able to shape itself onto a holding

ground for perplexity" (49).[4] The onus, then, is on the reader who must pick through narratives for a fuller appreciation.

Hans Robert Jauss acknowledges the reader's importance when he advocates, in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, a theory that takes into consideration reception and influence, two dynamics underprivileged by Marxist and Formalist theories, and that places "the reader in his genuine role, a role as unalterable for aesthetic as for historical knowledge" (19). He argues for the need to reconstruct what he terms the "horizon of expectations," that is, the readers' expectations at a given time, and that "allows one to determine [a work's] artistic character by the kind and the degree of its influence on a presupposed audience" (25). He explains: "The reconstruction of the horizon of expectations, in the face of which a work was created and received in the past, enables one on the other hand to pose questions that the text gave an answer to, and thereby to discover how the contemporary reader could have viewed and understood the work" (28). Jauss' use of the conditional verbs "could have" gestures towards both the difficulty of the critic's task in analyzing precisely how a work was received at a specific moment in history, and the generalizations that are necessarily made in our attempts to study a work's reception history. Finally, he urges the critic to position a work's reception within a comparative framework, to "insert the individual work into its 'literary series' to recognize its historical position and significance in the context of the experience of literature" (32), and, in this way, generate a new kind of history for it: "The task of literary history is thus only

[4] Yael Halevi-Wise points out the added complication of romance: "It is not uncommon for romance to peep under realism, exposing the debt that realism owes to romance" (100).

completed when literary production is not represented synchronically and diachronically in the successions of its systems, but also seen as 'special history' in its own unique relation to 'general history'" (39). Jauss' theory provides us with a vocabulary for thinking about the cross-fertilization between Victorian English and French literatures and, more specifically for this thesis, a context for approaching the character of the victim of circumstances across the writing of Dickens, Daudet, and Gissing.

Gissing's conception of the victim of circumstances appears in his 1899 introduction to the Methuen edition of Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853). Gissing complains of the novel's lack of a "leading character":

> In Richard Carstone, about whom the story may be said to circle, Dickens tried to carry out a purpose he had once entertained with regard to Walter Gay in *Dombey and Son*. That of showing a good lad at the mercy of temptations and circumstances which little by little wreck his life; but Richard has very little life to lose, and we form only a shadowy conception of his amiably futile personality. (229)

This passage is particularly telling for two reasons: Gissing's focus on the orphan Richard, a minor character who is often given a marginal role in criticism of the novel, offers an interesting angle for approaching the novel; and his acknowledgement of both the lures and the fatal forces that move Richard evoke a character type that Gissing identifies through the title of his short story "A Victim of Circumstances" (1893). In it, the painter Horace takes credit for his more

talented wife's work, and she stops painting to make him feel better. The story ends twenty-one years later, tellingly, on a New Year's Eve – a time that is traditionally shared by family members, with Horace, now a widower, telling his story and complaining in a bar to anyone who would listen: "I'm a victim of circumstances . . . if ever man was. It puzzles you, no doubt, that I should once have done great things, and yet at my age, only fifty, be nothing but an obscure drawing master. You don't understand the artist's nature. You can't imagine how completely an artist is at the mercy of circumstances" (34). Continuing to claim credit for his wife's surviving work, Horace blames his failure on his marriage, "a rash, indeed a fatal, step" (34), which circumscribed his ability to realize his full potential. Through the ironic distance between how the painter views or at least represents himself and how Gissing and the reader view him, Gissing emphasizes the greater importance of individual agency over deterministic circumstance.

While the victim of circumstances is central to all three writers' literary projects, the antagonistic circumstances that they face change across the focus texts. Dickens' *Bleak House* is an appropriate focus text to begin my thesis because of both its chronological position and Dickens' seemingly overt attribution of Richard's failure to his inability to commit. Numerous critics have examined how Dickens' idealism creeps into his realistic practice, yet, as Peter Brooks writes of Dickens' idealistic presentation of Coketown in *Hard Times*: "it would be unfair to tax Dickens for not finding the means adequately to represent Coketown and the issues it raises when his prose so often is aimed in the other direction: at non-representation of Coketown in favor of something else, a

representation of imaginative process at work, a representation of transformative style at play on the world" (52). While Brooks shifts our focus from Dickens' representation to his narrative strategy, one that he identifies as "a drama of opposed styles" (44), Gissing provides us, in *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, with another way to read Dickens despite his softened representation of Victorian Britain as I show in Chapter One. By reading Richard's story from *Bleak House* against Gissing's critical framework, I show how Dickens' idealism enables him to reach out to more readers, and make them see and care more about their immediate social issues, and how Richard problematizes a simplistic reading of individual agency and hostile circumstances. Richard reminds us of Gissing's painter, Horace; however, Richard's indecisiveness owes as much to his education as his suit. This character type recurs in each of the focus texts. In Chapter Two, for example, I analyze the conclusion of Daudet's *Jack* to show how Daudet shifts our focus from the character's death to a narrative about the event and, in this way, diminishes our focus on this character. His incorporation of multiple narratives creates a kind of aesthetic distance, which, in turn, allows us to both sympathesize with and criticize the character. Although Jack's mother's selfishness places him in adverse circumstances, his passivity as a reader plays a significant role in catalyzing his own downfall.

Gissing's two novels steer the character type to new and interesting directions. Chapter Three focuses on Gissing's first published novel, *Workers in the Dawn*. As Roland Barthes reveals in "The Reality Effect," "nothing could indicate why we should halt the details of the description here and not there; if it

were not subject to an aesthetic or rhetorical choice, any 'view' would be inexhaustible by discourse" (145). Barthes' observation is particularly telling in light of Carrie's narrative in Gissing's novel: her story is comparatively short, and spread out over the second of the two-volume novel of some eight-hundred pages. Still, Gissing's incorporation of this story subverts our reading of the protagonist, Arthur, as a passive victim. While Arthur's welfare is compromised by his guardian's selfishness and jealousy, Gissing attributes Arthur's failures to his inability to commit in an occupation and in love. Arthur's failure in his marriage, I argue, serves a more important rhetorical purpose by gesturing towards the potential of prejudice in defeating even the most promising social reform projects. For Alex Woloch, there are two seemingly contradictory impulses to the realist novel: "The novel's commitment to everyday life promotes an inclusive, extensive narrative gaze, while its empiricist aesthetics highlights the importance and authenticity of ordinary interiority" (19). These dynamics are skillfully brought together in Gissing's unfinished novel *Veranilda*, where, as I will show in Chapter Four, the more we read and learn about Gissing's sixth-century Rome, the more attuned we become to Basil's interior thoughts and his difficult position. By examining the two conclusions of Gissing's novel that have been suggested by Gissing's son Alfred and his third "wife" Gabrielle Fleury, and with particular focus on the ending that is more foreshadowed by the existing portions of the novel, I will show how he repeatedly shows the futility of Basil's actions despite his best intentions, and how his social position as an aristocrat ill-prepares him for the challenges of dealing with this political and military conflict. Across the

focus novels examined, what is common is these writers' abilities to render what Brooks describes as "a new valuation of ordinary experience and its ordinary settings and things" (7) into something extraordinary.[5] More important, however, is these Victorian writers' conversation about the dual impulses of circumstances and individual agency. Ultimately, these novels suggest the greater importance of perceptive social reading in order to appreciate how circumstances may be adverse to the individual characters' needs and desires.

[5] Brooks elaborates: "This new valuation is of course tied to the rise of the middle classes to cultural influence, and to the rise of the novel as the preeminent form of modernity. What we see at the dawn of modernity – and the age of revolution – is the struggle to emerge of imaginative forms and styles that would do greater justice to the language of ordinary men . . . and to the meaning of unexceptional human experience" (7).

Chapter One

A Poetic Shape to English Life:

Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*

and George Gissing's *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*

Dickens' *Bleak House* is an appropriate focus text with which to open my thesis because of both its chronological position and Dickens' seemingly overt attribution of Richard's failure to his inability to commit. However, as Gissing reveals, in *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, Dickens' position is far from clear. Dickens asks, in a letter to Forster, "Do you think [that an accurate representation of ordinary life] may be done, without making people angry?" (88) Gissing believes that Dickens will not displease his public. "But Richard Carstone, though he wastes his life, does not sink to 'dissipation, dishonesty, and ruin,'" observes Gissing. Referring to Dickens' question to Forster about whether he might anger his readers, Gissing continues: "The hand was stayed where the picture would have become too painful alike for author and public – always, or nearly always, in such entire sympathy. The phrase about 'making people angry' signifies much less than it would in a novelist of to-day. It might well have taken the form: 'Can I bring *myself* to do this thing?'" (88-89) Gissing spells out an opposition between the story that Dickens wrote for Richard and the one he could have written for Richard and, more importantly, between the approaches of Dickens and Gissing's late-Victorian contemporaries, realistic novelists whose writing "tends to be intensely visual, concerned with seeing and registering, and therefore has a frequent recourse to the descriptive" (Brooks 43). Gissing, who

had firmly established his reputation as the author of seventeen novels and a large number of short stories about the lower- and middle-classes by 1897, wrote *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* in the removed provincial town of Siena, Italy, and when Dickens' writing was at its lowest ebb with critics (Coustillas, *Dickens* 4).[1] If, as Aaron Matz has argued, "No serious reader of Gissing's writings has argued that the author embraced late-Victorian realism without some hesitation" (214), Gissing's work reveals his anxieties about the increasingly alienating writing of the mature Daudet, Goncourt, Flaubert, Zola, and, I argue, the importance of returning to Dickens as a more idealistic though accessible alternative.[2] In the first half of this chapter, I will read Richard's narrative against the critical framework of Gissing's work; and in the second half, I will examine how Dickens' idealism enables him to reach out to more readers, and, although he "never attained to a theory of reform" (236), how he succeeds in teaching his

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[1] Simon J. James describes the importance of geographical location to this work: "Since, as he writes, Gissing is removed from the physical context of Dickens's fictional world, the London that is described in the essay 'Dickens in Memory' . . . , his experience of reading Dickens while reproducing the *Critical Study* is one of imaginatively *re*-visiting this world. The pleasure to be gained from Dickens is in part that of rediscovery, of being reminded that which is familiar to and cherished by both the author and by his implied reader" (2). Adrian Poole has argued that Gissing's establishment of "*distance* from a literary achievement belonging to a cultural and historical period now definitely past" makes his work "one of his most important contributions to the history of Dickens criticism": "As Pierre Coustillas has pointed out, he successfully reconciled the warring claims of detractors and enthusiasts for whom up until then Dickens had been a close presence, demanding embrace or rejection" (109). John Sloan corroborates this view when he argues: "[W]hat strikes us with greater force is Gissing's grasp of the 'literariness' of Dickens's work, and particular the nature of his realism as a function of his relation with his readers and his time" (443). Sloan elaborates: "Significantly, for Gissing too, the world of Dickens was a dream, an imaginative seeing that belonged to the past. In Dickens's 'pictures of gentle and fading childhood' he recognised 'a pathos below the universal,' one that had been 'true for them and for their day'" (444).

[2] Gissing writes: "Not only does Dickens give poetic shape to the better characteristics of English life; he is also England's satirist. Often directed against abuses in their nature temporary, his satire has in some part lost its edge, and would have only historic interest but for the great preservative, humour, mingled with all his books; much of it, however, is of enduring significance . . ." (128).

readers to read their immediate social contexts more vividly "than with [their] own poor, purblind eyes" (226).[3]

A Delicate Balance

Gissing reads realistic and idealistic practices as the two ends of a spectrum between which a writer necessarily negotiates: "There are orders of imaginative work. A novel is distinct from a romance; so is a fairy tale. But there can be drawn only a misleading, futile distinction between novels realistic and idealistic. It is merely a question of degree and of the author's temperament" (*Critical* 263). For example, Gissing sets up a contrast between Dickens' more idealistic and Hogarth's more realistic aesthetic practices, and argues that, although we admire the latter for "the artist's observation, his great skill, his moral significance, even his grim humour," we are uncomfortable with what he has to show us, and "we close the book with a feeling of relief"; he explains, "With these faces who would spend hours of leisure? The thing has been supremely well done, and we are glad of it, and will praise the artist unreservedly; but his basely grinning and leering women must not hang upon the wall, to be looked at and talked of with all and sundry. Hogarth has copied – in the strict sense of the word. He gives us life – and we cannot bear it" (*Critical* 102-03). For Gissing, we are less likely to commit our time and emotions to literature that only disturbs us emotionally, but that provides us with knowledge, if not with

[3] Selig has argued that Gissing gradually breaks away from Dickens: "Gissing himself noted, nevertheless, that his great predecessor Dickens welcomed moral uplift and became its chief Victorian spokesman . . . . The didactic Dickens provided, in fact, the tradition from which Gissing started and against which he later rebelled" (20). My reading is that the late Gissing's writing achieves a kind of synthesis that welcomes Dickens' didacticism.

emotional satisfaction. By contrast, in Mrs. Gamp, Dickens succeeds in achieving a delicate balance between realism and idealism and gives us a character about whom we feel much more comfortable reading and rereading: "The Mrs. Gamp of our novel is a piece of the most delicate idealism. It is a sublimation of the essence of Gamp. No novelist (say what he will) ever gave us a picture of life which was not idealized; but there are degrees – degrees of purpose and of power" (*Critical* 103). Furthermore, Dickens' project differs from Hogarth's through his incorporation of humour: "Humour, be it remembered, is inseparable from charity. Not only did it enable [Dickens] to see this coarse creature as an amusing person; it inspired him with that large tolerance which looks through things external, gives its full weight to circumstance, and preserves a modesty, a humility, in human judgment" (*Critical* 106). Gissing' reference to circumstance links sympathy to passivity, and speaks to his recognition of Dickens' seemingly-clear emphasis on societal circumstances. Gissing's use of the term "charity" speaks to the larger social implications of the processes of reading and writing, a theme to which I will return momentarily.

Humour is central to our understanding of Richard's character, as we infer from Esther's first impression of the orphan: "The young gentleman was [Ada's] distant cousin, she told me, and his name Richard Carstone. He was a handsome youth, with an ingenuous face, and a most engaging laugh; and after she had called him up to where we sat, he stood by us, in the light of the fire too, talking gaily, like a light-hearted boy. He was very young; not more than nineteen then, if quite so much" (30). In these early chapters of the novel, Richard seems to

fulfill the promises of his physiognomy, even though our impression of him is often compromised because his story is heavily mediated by Esther's narrative voice. For example, when Richard, Esther and Ada meet Mrs. Jellyby, he contributes to Esther's story through two interjections:

> Mrs. Jellyby, whose face reflected none of the uneasiness which we could not help showing in our faces, as the dear child's head recorded its passage with a bump on every stair – Richard afterwards said he counted seven, besides one for the landing – received us with perfect equanimity. She was a pretty, very diminutive, plump woman, of from forty to fifty, with handsome eyes, though they had a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. As if – I am quoting Richard again – they could see nothing nearer than Africa! (37)

If Richard's more detailed observations frequently enrich Esther's account, they also succeed in amusing both his companions and the reader at times, as we perceive when he tells Esther and his cousin about his room arrangements in Mrs. Jellyby's home (40). Again, we get Richard's narratives second-hand; however, he succeeds, through a combination of the content of the story and the way in which he told it, in distracting his audience, making him or her forget, at least temporarily, the chaos and the very real horrors of Mrs. Jellyby's home, and in distracting from a more direct criticism of her absolute indifference towards her domestic space.

While Esther hones in on his youth, promise, and vigour, Dickens corroborates and reinforces these characteristics by drawing on folklore in his description of Richard. As Richard, Esther, and Ada make their first trip to Bleak House, Esther tells us: "It was delightful to see the green landscape before us, and the immense metropolis behind; and when a wagon with a train of beautiful horses, furnished with red trappings and clear-sounding bells, came by us with its music, I believe we could all three have sung to the bells, so cheerful were the influences around" (57). Through the combination of the image of the wagon and the sound of bells, Dickens makes an implicit reference to folktales, which Richard makes explicit when he goes on to identify his namesake: "The whole road has been reminding me of my namesake Whittington . . . and that wagon is the finishing touch" (57-58). George Ford and Sylvère Monod explain in their footnote: "Richard Whittington, a poor boy who was summoned by the sound of bells, on a road near London, to try his fortune in the city. His later financial success led to his becoming Lord Mayor" (58; n. 1). Like Richard, Dick, the hero of *The Adventures of Whittington and His Cat*, is an orphan who must make his way and, initially, relies on the kindness of others. In the Steele and Durrie 1847 edition, he goes to London to seek his fortune, and finds that the myths behind the city's legendary promises of wealth and opportunities are untrue or, at least, inaccessible to him. He finds a home in the household of a merchant and buys a cat. When his master leaves to go abroad, and every servant sends something with him to sell, Dick gives up his cat. The unhappy Dick leaves London, until he reaches Holloway where he hears the sounds of bells that he thinks speak to him,

promising that he will become the mayor for three times. His master's ship arrived in Barbary, where his cat is sold to a king who also experiences rodent troubles, and who rewards Dick generously. The boy grows up to become a merchant, and fulfills the prophecy.

However, Dickens circumvents our reading of Richard's narrative as a rewriting of the folktale by having him travel in the opposite direction and away from London, and Richard never fulfills the promise suggested by both Esther's description and his namesake. Dickens foreshadows Richard's doom, most evidently through two references to Shakespeare.[4] Dickens refers to the Ghost in *Hamlet* in a visit Woodcourt makes to Richard after learning his address from his legal adviser Mr Vholes. In this way, while Hamlet is uncertain if the Ghost "is an honest ghost" (I.v.144) or if "The spirit that I have seen / May be the devil, and the devil hath power / T'assume a pleasing shape" (II.ii.599-601), Dickens brings together both benevolent and malevolent ghosts. "Woodcourt, my dear fellow!" Richard cries when he meets his friend, "you come upon my vision like a ghost" (609). Woodcourt replies: "A friendly one, . . . and only waiting, as they say ghosts do, to be addressed. How does the mortal world go?" (609) For Valerie L. Gager, this conversation evokes Bernardo's observation to Horatio about the Ghost: "It would be spoke to" (I.i.49). While Bernardo, Marcellus, and Horatio all see the Ghost, it converses only with Hamlet. If Dickens invites us to read Richard as the Danish prince, he juxtaposes the surgeon Woodcourt, who saved many lives in a shipwreck in the East Indian seas even though "[h]e had gone out a poor ship's surgeon, and had come home nothing better" (549), with the

[4] Both examples of intertextuality are catalogued in Valerie L. Gager's *Shakespeare and Dickens*.

parasitic lawyer Mr. Vholes who strives to make a profit off others for his three daughters and father. Mr. Vholes is metaphorically a vampire, as the first letter of his name suggests, and as his physical appearance helps to reinforce: "[He is] a sallow man with pinched lips that looked as if they were cold, a red eruption here and there upon his face, tall and thin, about fifty years of age, high-shouldered, and stooping. Dressed in black, black-gloved, and buttoned to the chin, there was nothing so remarkable in him as a lifeless manner, and a slow fixed way he had of looking at Richard" (469). Esther eventually confirms this image of the vampiric Mr. Vholes as one who "speak[s] inwardly and evenly as though there were not a human passion or emotion in his nature": "So slow, so eager, so bloodless and gaunt, I felt as if Richard were wasting away beneath the eyes of this adviser, and there were something of the Vampire in him" (720). Still, for Gissing, Mr. Vholes is one of the most vivid characters not only within Dickens' novel but in all of literature:

> As a picture of actual life in a certain small world *Bleak House* is [Dickens'] greatest book; from office-boy to judge, here are all who walk in "the valley of the shadow of the Law". Impossible to run through the list, much as one would enjoy it. Think only of Mr. Vholes. In the whole range of fiction there is no character more vivid than this; exhibited so briefly yet so completely, with such rightness in every touch, such impressiveness of total effect,

> that the thing becomes a miracle. No strain of improbable intrigue can threaten the vitality of these dusty figures. (113)[5]

Gissing shifts our focus from Mr. Vholes' character to Dickens' aesthetics. Dickens' achievement lies as much in this minor character's impact on Richard's and, by consequence, Ada's narratives by fuelling his fundamentally unrealistic aspirations, as it does in showing him as a self-serving, albeit morally-ambivalent, character trying to make enough for a family of dependents.

Dickens turns to Shakespeare again in Allan's description of Richard after the settlement of the suit, when the outcome has yet to be revealed. Mr. Kenge tells the surgeon: "You are to reflect, Mr. Woodcourt . . . that this has been a great cause, that this has been a protracted cause, that this has been a complex cause. Jarndyce and Jarndyce has been termed, not inaptly, a Monument of Chancery practice" (759). In response, Allan evokes the story that Viola, under the disguise of Cesario, tells Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, in Act II scene iv of *Twelfth Night*, "And Patience has sat upon it a long time" (759). In the play, Viola tells a fictitious story about a sister who fell in love, and who "sat like Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief" (II.iv.114-15), a story that serves the dual function of showing Orsino that she understands his feelings of unrequited love, and of

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[5] In his abridged and revised version of Forster's *Life of Dickens*, Gissing repeats the metaphor of the "valley of the shadow of the law" (213). He used an analogous one in his 1891 novel *New Grub Street* when, near the beginning of the novel, Milvain explains to Miss Harrow and the reader what he means when he refers to the great dome: "That of the British Museum Reading-room . . . known to some of us as the valley of the shadow of books. People who often work there necessarily get to know each other by sight" (50). According to Brian Ború Dunne, a nineteen-year-old Irishman from Florida who met Gissing in a boarding-house in Siena while he was writing *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, and in Rome: "The only book he used apparently to assist in that splendid work on Dickens was Forster's Life of Dickens – a massive volume bound in green cloth. . . . Gissing, of course, knew a lot about Dickens before he started to eat and digest Forster's Life. And no doubt he had read every book by Dickens" (50). Dunne comments on Dickens' realistic practice: "It was disgusting – and quite unnecessary. But Dickens had that terrible gift of picturing on paper what he saw" (50).

revealing to us her love for him. We complete the image that Allan evokes, and if we are to align Richard with Viola, we know that his desires will be, at least partially, unfulfilled. Orsino's and Viola's relationship is one of very temperate love, and, indeed, the only mention we have of love from Orsino is his declaration of marriage, and not a proposal:

> Your master quits you; and for your service done him,
> So much against the mettle of your sex,
> So far beneath your soft and tender breeding,
> And since you called me master for so long,
> Here is my hand. You shall from this time be
> Your master's mistress. (V.i.321-26)

The term "since" lends to a reading of the marriage as an act of convenience. If Orsino is so reticent about or unfeeling in his love, we find an analogue in the outcome of Richard's trial, when he is left poor and deathly ill. Gissing corroborates this reading of a passive Richard when he reveals how Dickens wrote for Richard the fate he had initially conceived for Walter Gay. "Is it any better with Richard Carstone, – In whom the tragic idea was, with modification, carried through?" he asks:

> Yes, Richard is more interesting; by necessity of his fortunes, and by virtue of artistic effort. He has his place in a book pervaded with the atmosphere of doom. Vivid he never becomes; we see him as a passive victim of fate, rather than as a struggling man; if he made a better fight, or if we were allowed to see more of his

> human weakness . . . , his destiny would affect us more than it does. (119)[6]

In contrast to Mr. Vholes, Richard is never vivid for Gissing, and his argument is persuasive. The constant presentation of Richard as one of many within Esther's narrative and one of still more within the novel further marginalizes the character. In Gissing's own writing, as I will show, in Chapters Three and Four, we find struggling men who are much better defined as characters. Still, Richard's experience is an understandable one to which we can all relate even though Dickens does not draw him with so many details that we can identify with him.

Literature and Social Criticism

Dickens provides us with at least two reasons behind Richard's inability to settle and complete his training as a surgeon, a lawyer and, finally, an army ensign. Mr. Jarndyce attributes Richard's indecisive character to the false promises of the Chancery suit, which "has engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off – and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance – and dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused" (151). He continues: "The character of much older and steadier people may be

[6] Gissing read about Dickens' plans in Forster's *Life of Dickens*, and also refers to Dickens' attribution of Walter's tragic fate to Richard in "*Bleak House*" (229). Gissing is much harsher towards Ada and Esther: "[T]here is the shadowy betrothed of Richard Carstone, a good girl, to be sure, but remarkably placid. Esther Summerson cannot count, she has no existence" (*Critical* 186). Gissing elaborates on Ada in his essay "*Bleak House*," "Still less convincing is his bethrothed, Ada, whose very name one finds it difficult to remember" (229), and on Richard and Esther in Forster's *Life of Dickens*: "Richard Carstone does not greatly move us, and as for Esther Summerson, her part in the book was a mistake. The first person narrative in *Copperfield* was supremely happy, but these autobiographic chapters in *Bleak House* sin against all verisimilitude, and for the most part may be read in entire forgetfulness of the supposed writer" (213-14). Gissing criticizes Esther as a character and as a narrator in numerous places, including *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (110), "*Bleak House*" (224-25), and his unsigned review of "Mr. Swinburne on Dickens" in *The Times Literary Supplement* on 25 July 1902 (19).

even changed by the circumstances surrounding them. It would be too much to expect that a boy's, in its formation, should be the subject of such influences, and escape them" (151). Andrew Miller reminds us, in his article "Lives Unled in Realist Fiction," of the important influence the lives that we and characters in fiction do not lead continue to have in shaping our behaviours and actions and those of characters:

> Much depends, in the forming of our emotional response to the lives we are not leading, on whether those possibilities were shaped by our own agency or by the circumstances in which we found ourselves – by whether, as Hampshire pictures it, a particular alternative life lies over the right or the left margin of our actual life. I am, for instance, more inclined to the sort of resentment that Dickens indulges in his fragment if I think that a life I am not leading was foreclosed by others or by my circumstances rather than by my own choice. But it is notoriously difficult to determine degrees of activity and passivity here, to calculate whether we have ourselves foreclosed a possibility (by acting or failing to act) or whether that possibility was foreclosed for us. And there is the further uncertainty about whether a given course of action was in fact a possibility or only appears, in self-flattering and consolatory retrospect, to have been so. Perhaps I couldn't have been a contender. (121-22)

Miller's argument is particularly important because it reminds us that Richard is directly implicated in the Chancery suit because of not only his but also Ada's familial connections. To some extent, Richard's familial ties limit the choices that he has to two: he can follow the suit more passively, as Mr. Jarndyce does, or Richard can follow the suit more actively, as he tries to do. Moreover, had Richard abandoned the suit as he had been advised, he would never have stopped wondering what would have happened if he had chosen the alternative. Still, if he followed the suit passively, he could be more active in medicine, the law, or the military. Richard's mistake seems to be thinking that nothing else can be determined until the suit has been determined. By recognizing, more fully, the enormous baggage that Richard inherits, and his error in judgment, we can read his decision and its consequences in a more complex way than does Mr. Jarndyce, who has already chosen.

Meanwhile, Esther recognizes that Richard's indecisiveness owes as much to his education as the suit: "He had been eight years at a public school, and had learnt, I understood, to make Latin Verses of several sorts, in the most admirable manner" (151).[7] Esther does not go on to argue, as this statement may lead us to infer, for the irrelevance of Latin and the classics in Victorian education. Rather, she faults Richard's educational system for its inflexibility:

> But I never heard that it had been anybody's business to find out what his natural bent was, or where his failings lay, or to adapt any kind of knowledge to *him*. He had been adapted to the Verses, and

[7] See Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* for a glimpse of the education system that Esther describes.

> had learnt the art of making them to such perfection, that if he had remained at school until he was of age, I suppose he could only have gone on making them over and over again, unless he had enlarged his education by forgetting how to do it. (151)

Richard's education provides him with a lot of work that only occupies and does not even challenge him significantly. While his training in Latin language and literature carries the potential to open up opportunities for him to think about himself in relation to the past, and his residence in a public school allows him to converse with his colleagues, his education does not give him sufficient individual attention and guidance. Instead of exposing him to multiple possible careers, so that it does not become an over determining circumstance, Richard's school does not inspire him in any particular direction. He grows accustomed to his tasks, which he performs in a mechanical and never whole-hearted way, as Esther elaborates, later in the novel: "The system which had addressed him in exactly the same manner as it had addressed hundreds of other boys, all varying in character and capacity, had enabled him to dash through his tasks, always with fair credit, and often with distinction; but in a fitful, dazzling way that had confirmed his reliance on those very qualities in himself, which it had been most desirable to direct and train" (204). The system works for hundreds of boys before and after Richard, yet it does not work for him, and it alone fails to make Richard more competent in directing himself as an adult.

In his discussion of Dickens, Gissing compares him with Gissing's late-Victorian contemporaries, arguing that these writers would provoke the reader if

only to obtain his or her attention: “Fingers are pointed to this, that, and the other Continental novelist; can you imagine him in such sorry plight? Why nothing would have pleased him better than to know he was outraging public sentiment! In fact, it is only when one does so that one’s work has a chance of being good!” (*Critical* 75) While Dickens similarly aspires to gain his reader’s attention, he does so, as I have suggested above, by balancing realism and idealism, and by winning over the reader’s sympathy. Gissing writes:

> Dickens had before him no such artistic ideal [as outraging the reader]; he never desired freedom to offend his public. Sympathy with his readers was to him the very breath of life; the more complete that sympathy, the better did he esteem his work. Of the restrictions laid upon him he was perfectly aware, and there is evidence that he could see the artistic advantage which would result from a slackening of the bonds of English delicacy; but it never occurred to him to make public protest against the prejudices in force. Dickens could never have regarded it as within a storyteller’s scope to attempt the conversion of his readers to a new view of literary morals. Against a political folly, or a social injustice, he would use every resource of his art, and see no reason to hesitate; for there was the certainty of the approval of all good folk. To write a novel in a spirit of antagonism to all but a very few of his countrymen would have seemed to him a sort of practical bull; is it not the law of novel-writing, first and foremost,

> that one shall aim at pleasing as many people as possible? (*Critical* 75)

This passage is telling because it speaks to Dickens' attempt not to convert and teach the reader a new set of morals, but to draw the reader's attention to contemporary and everyday issues and, by appealing to his or her sympathies, teaches him or her to be more socially responsible. As Adrian Poole has put it, "For [Gissing], Dickens's ability simultaneously to share and to criticise the central forces shaping contemporary society represents an ideal image of the integrated, yet still independent, author" (110). Dickens' attempt to please his reader by mediating Richard's responsibilities for his wrong actions becomes, for Gissing, an ethical act that ultimately does more social good than the writer who attempts to capture his society more faithfully:

> Would he have been better occupied, had he pried into each character, revealed its vices, insisted on its sordid weaknesses, thrown bare its frequent hypocrisy, and emphasized its dreary unintelligence? Indeed I think not. I will only permit myself the regret that he who could come so near to truth, and yet so move the affections, as in Joe Gargery, was at other times content with that inferior idealism which addresses itself only to unripe minds or to transitory moods. (121)

Although Gissing realizes that Dickens' over-sentimental writing "may distress the mature mind of our later day," he argues that this trait "is not unwholesome" ("Memory" 4). Gissing recognizes that Dickens' works will pass

the test of time because of his ability to touch the reader, while Gissing's contemporaries, because of their more realistic ambitions, will have limited impact in both the present and the future:

> Dickens, who died before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, can barely have suspected the lines that literature was to follow in the next decade; to the end he represented in himself a literary force which had burst upon the world with irresistible charm, had held its way victoriously for five-and-thirty years, and seemed as far as ever from losing its dominion over English readers. The likelihood is that his unwavering consistency will stand him in better stead through the twentieth century than any amount of that artistic perfection which only a small class can appreciate and enjoy. (*Critical* 273-74)

Gissing's words are prophetic. For both Dickens's contemporary and later readers, Richard's tragedy is greatly lamentable, particularly since we are constantly reminded of his constant indulgence in romances. When Richard parts with Ada early on in the novel, Esther reveals in anaphoric lines: "I was to write to Richard once a week, making my faithful report of Ada, who was to write to him every alternate day. I was to be informed, under his own hand, of all his labours and successes; I was to observe how resolute and persevering he would be . . ." (164). Of course, what seems romantic in writing is much less so in practice, and Richard "soon failed in his letter-writing" (204). Still, when Richard is on his deathbed, we are reminded that he is consistently sincere in his love for Ada, and

that, in pursuing their interests, he had tried to enhance their circumstances: "I have done you so many wrongs, my own. I have fallen like a poor stray shadow on your way, I have married you to poverty and trouble, I have scattered your means to the winds. You will forgive me all this, my Ada, before I begin the world?" (763) Gissing concludes *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* by repeating Carlyle: "The good, the gentle, high-gifted, ever-friendly, noble Dickens – every inch of him an honest man" (293). While Gissing "knows," as Robert Selig has argued, "that novelists cannot simply photograph surrounding social life but must represent it through the words and the form of a literary genre, such as realism, satire, comedy, or romance" (107), Dickens has certainly succeeded in making his reader more caring about Richard's downfall and more sensitive towards the legal system that failed, like an indifferent lover, to reciprocate his attention.

Despite the uncomplimentary critical responses to Dickens' writing in France until 1856, when Hippolyte Taine's article in the *Revue des deux mondes* established his reputation as an important English novelist, Dickens was as important an influence to French writers as they were to him. For Joseph T. Flibbert, Dickens' affection is reflected through his letters to Forster and his contemporaries during his visits to France, where his writing was immensely popular (18-19). Flibbert attributes his lack of popularity amongst critics to the association of his writing with realism: "The term 'realism' has a complex history in nineteenth-century French criticism, reflecting differences in the nature of realistic writing by Balzac, Champfleury, Flaubert, the Goncourts, and Zola. It is frequently used interchangeably with the term 'naturalism,' at least until Zola's

work begin to appear, and, in its early use, often has a derogatory sense" (22). Nevertheless, Taine's important essay succeeds in making Dickens more critically acclaimed by arguing that his project is different, and that he does not render straight-forward representations, as continental painters have tried to do:

> Whereas early evaluation criticizes verisimilitude of external detail, Taine lauds Dickens' ability to capture the mental and emotional qualities of the environment he describes. He asserts that Dickens is not striving for precision of detail but attempting to make the environment complement the state of mind of his characters. Dickens is not a realist, then, in the same way in which the Flemish painters are, but more so in his ability to capture the temperament, the attitudes, and the ideas of his race and to reflect them in his works. (29)

Rather than attempting to give us the real thing, or a representation of it, Dickens gives us an idea of it, which nonetheless inspires us to think more critically about our societies. In the next chapter, I will examine the young Alphonse Daudet's *Jack*, a novel which makes more pronounced Dickens' legacy in the French literature, and which has, as its titular character, a victim of familial circumstances who is deluded by his heavily romanticized aspirations.

Chapter Two

La vie n'est pas un roman: Daudet's *Jack*

If Richard initially seems to be singularly responsible for his own downfall, Jack appears, by contrast, to be a victim of his mother's carelessness. However, like Dickens, Daudet invites a more complex reading. In 1888, the young Gissing describes in his diary walking to Daudet's home in 31 Rue de Bellechasse: "A large, plain, dignified stone building, with usual porte cochère; windows of first floor all shuttered; perhaps Daudet is away? Stood and looked and thought. Could Daudet know of me, assuredly I should not need to stand in the street" (47). If Gissing's pilgrimage and his pensiveness suggest his appreciation of Daudet, this admiration becomes more pronounced several years later, when we learn that the writer's portrait hangs in Gissing's home in 1894, and when he writes, two days after the French writer's death in 1897, "The Italian paper to-day tells me of the death of Alphonse Daudet, which happened yesterday. It is a most remarkable coincidence that he fell down senseless at the dinner table (7.30 p.m.) – thus completing the resemblance of his life to that of Dickens" (475). Daudet's *Jack* is based on the story of a young man named Raoul Dubief whom Daudet had met.[1] As Gissing has argued, with this novel,

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[1] All parenthetical references to *Jack* are to the 1937 Flammarion edition; Marian McIntyre's translations, from the 1900 Little, Brown, and Co. edition, are given in square brackets after quotations. One of d'Argenton's favourite refrains is "la vie n'est pas un roman" (2: 301) ["life is not a romance" (2: 349)]. Importantly, in French, "roman" can mean "novel" or "romance." Regarding these seemingly-contradictory terms, Margaret Anne Doody has argued: "Romance and the Novel are one. The separation between them is part of a problem, not part of a solution" (15). Doody advocates the need to read these categories together to generate a richer vocabulary for approaching the novel: "The Anglo-Saxon tradition in particular since the mid-eighteenth century has exhibited a constant anxiety that fiction should adhere to the criteria posed by 'realism,' and the standard of 'realism' has often prevented British and American critics from taking a good

Daudet's "resemblance to Dickens was most pronounced" (*Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* 272). Alphonse R. Favreau has made a similar suggestion when he traces the influence of *David Copperfield* on *Jack*:

> Although some brushed aside the two volumes of *Jack* by calling them 'dull and coarse,' depicting the life "of a bastard crushed by his bastardy,' others, following [Émile] About's precedence, traced the parallelism between it and *David Copperfield*. The outline of *Jack* resembled that of the English novel 'in being the history of a child devotedly fond of his mother, who makes a second marriage, or what passes for a marriage, with a man who dislikes the boy, and puts him to work in a class of life far below that in which he was brought up." (529)

Similarly, Albert Thibaudet has "noted that *Jack* had caused as many tears to be shed as had *David Copperfield*" (qtd. in Roche 56). Favreau reveals: "Throughout [Daudet's] career, whenever they liked one of his books, the reviewers praised Daudet; but let the work displease them, and they accuse its author of being a mere copyist. Thus one perceives distinct waves of commendation and censure in this similarity with Dickens, depending upon the reception of the novel in question" (534).

Nevertheless, Gissing is keen to point out Daudet's divergences from and his move away from Dickens' mixture of realism and idealism: "Jack's mother, the feather-brained Ida de Barancy, belongs to a very different order of art from

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square look at the Novel" (15). See footnote 2 for the applicability of Doody's argument on Gissing's views.

anything attained in female portraiture by the English novelist. In his men, too, this advantage is often very noticeable. Delobelle [from *Fromont jeune et Risler aine*] the illustrious, and the mouthing [d]'Argenton [whose orations go on for an hour at a time] have points of character which easily suggest persons in Dickens; but they belong to a world which has more colour, more variety, and the writer does not fear to present them completely" (272-73).[2] In this way, Gissing sees Daudet as doing something that Dickens dares not, and that is, simultaneously, different from the brutal reality that Hogarth strives to capture. Despite Dubief's story and Dickens' influence, Murray Sachs has made the case for Daudet's artistic independence: "It was Daudet alone who conceived, nurtured, and gave birth to his literary progeny. Yet, it is only fair to concede that, without the midwives who were his collaborators, Daudet's rich contributions to the great family of French literature might well have been stillborn" ("Role" 122). Still, Marian McIntyre spells out an importance difference between the two novelists' aesthetics: "The superficial points of resemblance between Daudet's work and

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[2] Gissing discusses Daudet's adaptation of Dubief's story in *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*:

> [T]elling us of the hapless lad from whom he modelled his Jack, Daudet notes points of difference between the real and the fictitious character; the Jack he knew had not altogether that refinement which heightens our interest in the hero of the novel. "Il faut dire", adds the writer, "que le peuple ignore bien des délicatesses, des susceptibilités morales." Could such a remark possibly have fallen from the pen of Dickens, even when not employed upon fiction? Of "the people" he could neither have said nor thought it; was it not to 'the people' that he turned when he wanted an example of the finest delicacy of heart, the most sensitive moral susceptibility? Perhaps it was just this lack of faith that held Daudet from fulfilling what seemed the promise of his early time. Such lack of faith in the multitude is not difficult to account for in a very acute observer. It was especially hard to maintain in face of a literary movement which devoted itself to laying bare the worst of popular life. The brothers Goncourt, Flaubert, and M. Zola were not companions likely to fortify a naïve ideal. It is just possible that they inflicted serious injury upon Daudet's work, and robbed France of a precious gift – the books he might have written but for the triumph of "realism." (273)

See McIntyre's introduction for a summary of Dubief's story.

that of Dickens are so obvious that the least observant reader must remark them; Dickens himself laughingly referred to the great Frenchman as his 'little brother'! But note the distinction and the difference. There is a moralist in Dickens that must expatiate upon the main theme, and point a moral to adorn a tale" (xxvi). She contrasts Dickens' writing of Jo's death in *Bleak House*, in which the author "mounts the pulpit, and pounds it vigorously, with that clarion," with Daudet's writing of Jack's death, where the author offers us two different ways to read it. In this chapter, I will build on McIntyre's claim by examining, more closely, *Jack*'s conclusion to show how Daudet shifts our focus from the story of the character's death to his representational strategy; and in the second half, I will go on to show how Daudet undermines our focus on this character by bringing in multiple narratives that collectively create a kind of aesthetic distance that allows us to both sympathesize with and criticize the character.

Jack begins with the sham-countess Ida refusing to let her son Jack attend the aristocratic institution of the Jesuits at Vaugirard because the rector refuses to let her mingle with other parents:

> Cette idée qu'elle ne pourrait jamais entrer au parloir, se mêler à cette charmante confusion du jeudi, où l'on se fait gloire de la beauté de son enfant, de la richesse de sa mise et du coupé qui vous attend à la porte, qu'elle ne pourrait pas dire à ses amies: «J'ai salué hier chez les pères Mme de C . . . ou Mme des V . . . ,» de vraies madames, qu'il lui faudrait venir en cachette embrasser son Jack à l'écart, tout cela la révoltait à la fin. (1: 20)

> [The thought that she would never be permitted to enter the reception-room, never mingle in the delightful confusion of those Thursday gatherings; her vanity intoxicated by the beauty of her child, the richness of her own attire, the sight of that brougham awaiting her at the door, that she would never be able to say to her friends, 'I met Madame de C– or Madame de V– yesterday at the Fathers' – but must embrace her Jack only in secret, holding aloof from others, it was too revolting! (1: 13)]

Ida's decision leads us to infer that she had selected this school initially not for the prestige that an education there would bring Jack but for the gratification of her ambitions to enter into a social class of parents to which she clearly does not belong. Jack is enrolled in the Gymnase Moronval, a school which brings together *ratés* or failures from all walks of life, and children from all corners of the world who are relegated to the care of these pretentious individuals.[3] Ida, who owes her wealth to her liaisons with a rich and older gentleman known only as *Bon ami*, falls in love with and momentarily marries the bad poet and Jack's literature teacher the viscount d'Argenton, a change that circumscribes both the level of support she can acquire from *Bon ami* and that she might contribute to the school. Moronval, the headmaster, vents the disappointment of his unrealized ambitions, which includes starting a Colonial Review for the distribution of his

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[3] I agree with McIntyre that "[w]e have in English no word quite flexible, ironic, delicate enough to suggest to our ears all that is conveyed to a Frenchman's sense in the term *un* [*r*]*até*. It quivers with suppressed irony. It may characterize anything spoilt, lost, abortive, any of life's numerous miscarriages or misfits" (xv).

bad writing, on Jack who, after one of his schoolmates dies from ill-treatment, runs away to his mother's new home in Étiolles. There, he befriends the doctor Rivals and his granddaughter Cécile. However, d'Argenton is jealous of his stepson; so he apprentices Jack, after Rivals taught him for some months and urged his mother to send him to a different school, to a blacksmith in the iron-works of Indret.[4] Jack fulfills his contractual obligations, though he has little aptitude in his craft. In an attempt to earn better wages, he becomes a stoker onboard the Cydnus until it sinks, forcing the battered workman to return to his mother's home.

By this time, Jack's stepfather and his fellow *ratés* have started a journal entitled *La Revue des Races futures* [*The Review of the Races of the Future*] and, unbeknownst to Jack, Ida gambled his entire inheritance from *Bon ami* on this unpromising venture. D'Argenton sends Jack, his one and only shareholder, back to Étiolles where, happily reunited with Rivals and Cécile, with whom Jack is attached, he begins to regain his strength. Jack learns from her grandfather that she is the daughter of a bigamist and forger of banknotes and other papers, making her a "proper" match for Jack because he is likely also an illegitimate child.[5] Hoping to have Jack succeed him in his practice and marry Cécile, Rivals convinces Jack to return to Paris to find work as a mechanic and to study at night to become a doctor, returning to Étiolles on Sundays for lessons with him and to

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[4] Jack's apprenticeship to a blacksmith could be an allusion to Pip from Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861), since Jack was published in 1876.

[5] Ida identifies Jack's father as le Comte de Barancy, and informs Jack that his father is the Marquis de l'Épan and the Baron de Bulac in different parts of the novel. Ida's inconsistency and hesitance to name Jack's father help to suggest his illegitimacy.

see his granddaughter.[6] Ida runs away from d'Argenton, after he has beaten her, and places herself in her son's care. Jack confides his aspirations and Cécile's story to his mother, who returns to her husband when she finds life with Jack dull. Jack is further disappointed and brokenhearted when Cécile breaks off their engagement after learning about her dishonorable parentage from a countrywoman and poacher who is paid by a friend of d'Argenton's. Rivals and Cécile go to Paris to clear up this misunderstanding, only to find Jack on his deathbed from illness and overwork.

Narrative Ends and Interpretative Beginnings

If Jack's name invites us to draw comparisons with the poor and homeless corner crossing sweeper Jo from Dickens' *Bleak House*, who also dies from illness, and with David Copperfield as Favreau has suggested, Jack's refusal to accost either his mother or Cécile evokes, for this reader, the unconditionally forgiving titular character of *Oliver Twist*. Indeed, locked in a cell and sentenced

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[6] Regarding the training of doctors in nineteenth-century Britain, Laurence Rothfield has revealed: "The typical student either apprenticed directly, or spent four years or so desultorily reading, attending lectures in private medical schools, and ward-walking before being crammed for an examination in which, an irate writer to *The Lancet* (1848) complained, 'Scanty physiology and pathology, decked out in respectable Latin, will stand higher than mere professional excellence, marred by a false concord, or a fault of prosody" (172). Daudet contrasts the village doctor Rivals with the *raté* doctor Hirsch, whose medical experiments with perfumes have hastened the death of at least one countryman, a contrast that speaks to a larger conflict in the nineteenth century between certified and uncertified doctors: "But even – indeed, especially – after the passage of the Medical Act, licensing was by no means rigorously enforced, leaving the average practitioner in an ongoing struggle for authority against folk healers, midwives, and other traditional providers for medical aid, as well as a slew of quacks and charlatans who now poured into the medical marketplace" (Rothfield 172). Jack's medical studies in France are thus more rigorous than they would have been in Britain: "Celebrants of progress like Macaulay may have included 'the science of healing' among the many things the Victorians had 'carried to a perfection which our ancestors would have thought magical,' but the reality was that English medicine lagged its counterparts on the Continent" (Rothfield 179). Rothfield cites Lydgate's diagnosis of Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* as an example: "Eliot highlights precisely this unevenness by having the French-trained Lydgate diagnose what the other Middlemarch physicians call Casaubon's 'fit' as 'fatty degeneration of the heart' using Laennec's recently introduced stethoscope" (180).

to death at the end of the novel, Fagin tells the angelic Oliver the location of the papers that Monks had given him for better security. Fagin could have attempted to make an offer to Oliver, or simply refused to disclose this information since Fagin is, as Mr. Brownlow has asserted, "upon the very verge of death" (356). It is only after the villain tells Oliver the truth that he attempts to appeal to the boy's mercy one last time: "Outside, outside . . . . Say I've gone to sleep – they'll believe you. You can get me out, if you take me so. Now then, now then!" (356) By appealing to Oliver, and attempting to make use of his credible appearance, Fagin inadvertently commits again the kind of crime for which he was sentenced.[7] Oliver, whether inspired by the image of Fagin "seated on his bed, rocking himself side to side, with a countenance more like that of a snared beast than the face of a man," or by this appeal, the desperation of which prohibits us from determining clearly if he shows remorse or repentance, cries tearfully: "Oh! God

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[7] Incidentally, Fagin is not unlike Ida, at the beginning of the novel in the interview at the Jesuits at Vaugirard, when she has Jack dressed in an uncomfortable English costume, a prop targeted to lend credibility to her claims that his godfather is Lord Peambock, a major-general in the Indian army:

> [F]igurez-vous un bambin de sept à huit ans, efflanqué, poussé trop vite, habillé à l'anglaise comme le voulait de *K* de son nom de Jack, les jambes à l'air, une toque à chardon d'argent et un plaid. Le costume était peut-être de son âge, mais il semblait en désaccord avec sa longue taille et son cou déjà fort. Ses mollets musclés et gelés dépassaient de chaque côté son ajustement grotesque dans un élan maladroit de croissance en révolte. Il en était embarrassé lui-même. Gauche, timide, les yeux baissés, il glissait de temps en temps sur ses jambes nues un regard désespéré, comme s'il eût maudit dans son cœur lord Peambock et toute l'armée des Indes qui lui valaient dêtre affublé ainsi. (1: 11)
>
> [[I]magine a lank boy of seven or eight years, who had grown too rapidly, and was dressed in English fashion in strict keeping with the *K* in his name. His legs were bare, but a plaid and a Scotch cap with silver thistles completed the costume, which was not perhaps too young for his years, though his tall figure and vigorous neck made it look incongruous enough. The boy's chilled, muscular calves shot beyond his grotesque attire with all the awkwardness of growing youth in revolt. They troubled him not a little. Clumsy and timid, never daring to raise his eyes, he cast from time to time a despairing glance towards his bare legs as if in his heart he cursed Lord Peambock and all the Indian army, to whom he was indebted for his absurd costume. (1: 3)]

forgive this wretched man!" (355-56) Jack too is fairly forgiving. With the exception of one letter to Rivals, Jack does not criticize Ida and d'Argenton, who do him much wrong, and when Cécile visits Jack on his deathbed, he does not reproach her: "Que vous êtes bonne d'être venue, Cécile! Maintenant je ne me plains plus. Cela ne me fait plus rien de mourir là, près de vous, réconcilié" (2: 362) ["How good of you to come, Cécile. Now I will never complain again. It seems nothing now to die, with you beside me, and reconciled" (2: 407)].

However, it is Rivals who gets the last word in the novel when he responds to Ida's cry, in a tone of horror, over her son's death from "inspiration, expiration, râles sibilants, craquements au sommet et à la base, phtisie aiguë" (2: 354) ["Inspiration, expiration, sibilant rattle, crepitating at the base and summit of the lungs" (2: 399)] in the Parvis Notre-Dame hospital.[8] Rivals tells Ida that Jack is not dead: "Non . . . non . . . DÉLIVRÉ" (2: 364) ["No . . . not death – DELIVERANCE!" (2: 409)][9] While McIntyre has argued that "[h]e too might accuse her" though "[h]e does not" (xxvii), for this reader, Rivals' comment criticizes Ida implicitly since Jack is delivered from both his filial duties to his negligent mother and a life of manual labour and physical hardships. By contrast,

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[8] Olin H. Moore writes:

> The difficulty of collecting a quantity of interesting notes on normal, everyday life led the naturalists to devote considerable attention to diseases. We thus find Daudet, as a faithful disciple of the Goncourts, carefully analyzing his own sufferings. . . . Like the Gouncourts also, he frequented the hospitals in order to collect data upon the patients. A series of four articles, entitled 'La vie à l'hôpital,' published in an ephemeral medical journal called the *Journal d'Enghien*, were sent to Daudet by Raoul D[ubief], the original of Jack. In addition to the material obtained in this way, Daudet made long observations at the beside of Raoul. (161)

[9] After Gissing's death in 1903, Theodore J. Cooper, the clergyman at St. J. de Luz, makes a similar distinction when he writes to Gissing's third "wife" Gabrielle Fleury: "You must forget all he suffered, & remember how patiently & sweetly he accepted his Father's will. You remember the close of Daudet's Jack. 'Il est mort!' 'Non! (Dr. Rivals' reply), il est [dé]livré!' Your husband's suffering was of a different sort; but like Jack he is not 'dead' but 'set free'" (9:185).

Madame Bélisaire herds Ida, who has just returned home from a concert, to the hospital, so that she is arrayed, in contrast to the humbler appearances of everyone else there, "en grande tenue, fourrures, gants clairs, velours et dentelles" (2: 360) ["in full-dress, – furs, light gloves, velvet, and laces" (2: 405)]. Despite Ida's protestations of fear at seeing her dying son, Madame Bélisaire pushes her into the room, criticizing her: "les femmes comme vous, ça ne devrait pas avoir d'enfants" (2: 363) ["Women like you ought not to have children" (2: 408)]. While Daudet ends the novel from the good doctor's perspective, we, as readers, realize that Madame Bélisaire's perspective is equally important, because, as Sachs has protested, "the most artificial character of all [in the novel] is undoubtedly Dr. Rivals, who is so much the embodiment of wisdom and generosity that he seems not to have a heartbeat, but to exist as a sort of Platonic ideal" (*Career* 100). Moreover, the narrator describes a kind of postmodern family that Jack creates with the generous Bélisaires: "Sa famille? Tenez! la voilà. Ce sont ces deux êtres, un homme [Bélisaire] et une femme, qui se tiennent au pied de son lit sans oser avancer, deux figures du peuple un peu communes et bonnes, qui lui sourient. Il n'a pas d'autres parents que ceux-là, pas d'autres amis. Ce sont les seuls qui ne lui aient jamais fait de mal" (2: 354) ["His family? There it is! That pair standing at the foot of his bedside, not daring to advance, a somewhat commonplace, vulgar-looking couple, of the people, but their faces are kindly and smiling. These are all the relatives, the friends he has. They alone have never injured him" (2: 399)]. In this way, the narrator reminds us that Rivals and Cécile have also contributed to Jack's pain, and although Cécile's presence

has helped to alleviate it, the consolation that she brings is ephemeral, as suggested by Daudet's use of a solar metaphor to describe the effect it has on the dying Jack, "il était transfiguré par cette montée de flamme, cette lueur de couchant que les existences ou les asters qui descendent projettent autour d'eux dans un dernier et splendide effort" (2: 362) ["his face was transformed by that transient flush that sunset-glow which the vanishing of a star, or a soul seems to shed around it in one final, supreme effort" (2: 407)]. Daudet's juxtaposition of Rivals' and Madame Bélisaire's perspectives not only provides us with two ways of reading Jack's tragedy, though they are both critical of Ida, but also suggests and emphasizes the possible co-existence of many different ways. Daudet's strategy is reminiscent of Dickens' in *Bleak House*, which brings together numerous storylines. By alluding to multiple novels by Dickens, and by privileging the reader with a better knowledge of Jack's history than either Rivals or Madame Bélisaire, Daudet invites us to be better readers and critics of Jack the character, and acknowledge without identifying passively with any given perspective.

Reading Jack and Jack Reading

In *The Career of Alphonse Daudet: A Critical Study*, Murray Sachs argues that one of *Jack*'s central weaknesses is its inclusion of narratives, "a certain number of episodes over which he dwelled both skillfully and lovingly [that] were quite superfluous":

> Thus the three chapters of Part One which describe the atmosphere of the Gymnase Moronval, and tell the story of the pathetic prince of Dahomey, give a fascinating glimpse into one of the more exotic corners of Paris, but do not importantly advance the main action. Similarly, the delightful description of Bélisaire's wedding in Part Three, evoking so vividly the simple joys of the poor in Ménilmontant, is an inorganic interlude which delays the story from a structural point of view. Since Daudet has chosen a chronological presentation of Jack's life to make his point, such episodic interruptions tend to prevent the building up of a cumulative impact such as the chronological presentation is designed to achieve. The reader senses – and probably not mistakenly – that such episodes represent a kind of literary hors d'oeuvre: excellent pieces of observation and evocative reporting, but at bottom unrelated to the matter at hand. (101)

While these episodes may detract from our appreciation of *Jack*'s fairly simplistic narrative, Sachs argues for their artistic value: "A final excellence worth noting is the memorable, delightful quality to be found in isolated episodes . . . . It is, of course, the practiced hand of the great short story writer which is manifest in these two episodes. Though the episodes are inorganic, so far as the novel's structure is concerned, each is a gem of vivid description . . ." (103). Meanwhile, Alphonse V. Roche advocates reading the novel for its representation of different aspects of society: "Interest, in this long two-volume work, is naturally centred on the hero[.]

However, all due consideration is given to the society he lives in, a society consisting of many groups and social types. In fact, the very subtitle of the book, *Moeurs contemporaines* (Contemporary Morals and Customs), suggests the importance attached by the author to the social element" (55). Still, despite Jack's exposure to these disparate narratives, he does not read with greater perception or sensitivity. While he was working as a stoker, Jack recollects a passage from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, when that character forgets his good resolutions when he is surrounded by drunken sailors. Although Jack remembers this novel, and is able to relate to it when faced with an analogous episode himself, Jack does not replicate Crusoe's survival, albeit morally suspect, strategies.[10] Jack succumbs to alcoholism even when he had Crusoe as a role model.

At the end of the novel, when d'Argenton attempts to reclaim Jack's mother, the poet admits: "C'est vrai, Jack, je conviens que notre situation réciproque était fausse, très fausse. Mais vous ne sauriez me render responsible d'un hazard, d'une fatalité . . . Après tout, mon cher ami, la vie n'est pas un roman . . . Il ne faut pas exiger d'elle . . ." (2: 301) ["True, Jack, I know that our relation to each other was a false one, very false. But you would not make me responsible for a chance, a fatality. And, after all, my dear friend, life is not a romance. We must not expect that it –" (2: 349)]. D'Argenton's proverbial

[10] Numerous critics have discussed this colonial aspect to Defoe's novel and its spin-offs. This reading is clearly revealed through Crusoe's view of natives: Crusoe decides that, to escape from the island, he must "get a Savage into [his] Possession" (144). Rather than desiring human companionship, he wishes for slaves, as he confides to the reader: "Besides, I fancied my self able to manage One, nay, Two or Three savages, if I had them, so as to make them entirely Slaves to me . . ." (145). Lora E. Geriguis has pointed out in a conversation that most of the animals that Crusoe calls friends wind up getting killed by him. John Sutherland reminds us, also, that "despite the matiness that develops between [Crusoe and Friday], [the latter] will ultimately be sold – business is business" (44).

words about life not being a romance is, in the view of this reader, discordant with his image as one with "l'air d'un mousquetaire malade" (1: 51) ["the appearance of a sick musketeer" (1: 43)] since musketeers were disbanded definitively in 1816, and survive only in the pages of Alexandre Dumas' romances. Jack cuts off his stepfather "au milieu de ces considérations filandreuses qui ne lui faisaient jamais défaut" (2: 301) ["in the midst of those wordy platitudes for which he was never at a loss" (2: 349)] and, significantly, repeats his own proverbial words:

> Vous avez raison, monsieur. La vie n'est pas un roman; elle est très sérieuse, au contraire, et positive. La preuve, c'est que tous mes moments, à moi, sont comptés, et qu'il m'est interdit de perdre mons temps en discussions oiseuses . . . Pendant dix ans, ma mère a été à vous, votre servant, votre chose. Ce que j'ai souffert pendant ces dix années, ma fierté d'enfant ne vous l'a jamais appris, mais passons. Ma mère est à moi, maintenant. (2: 301)
>
> [You are right, monsieur, life is not a romance. On the contrary, it is most serious and real. And, in proof, every moment of my time is employed, and I cannot lose it in idle discussions. For the last ten years my mother has belonged to you, been your servant, your creature. What I suffered during those years my childish pride never let you know, but – that aside, my mother is mine now. (2: 349)]

Jack asserts his agency in at least two respects: first, he cuts short what promises to be another one of d'Argenton's long-winded monologues, which has the potential of droning on for an hour at a time and which is often as self-contradictory as his anachronistic image; and second, he denies his stepfather the satisfaction of a more detailed account of Jack's sufferings over the past decade. However, throughout the novel, Jack does not, as he claims, reject romance. In fact, we are reminded that his romantic idealizations move him into agreeing to become a blacksmith.

Rivals warns Ida of the disparity in class between the mother and son that will arise if he is apprenticed: "Un jour viendra où vous rougirez de lui, où vous trouverez qu'il a les mains rudes, le langage grossier, des sentiments à l'envers des vôtres, un jour où il se tiendra devant vous, devant sa mère, comme devant une étrangère d'un rang plus élevé que le sien, non pas seulement humilié mais déchu" (1: 290) ["A day will come when you will blush for your son, when you will find his hands rough, his language coarse, his sentiments utterly unlike your own. The day will come when he will stand before you, his mother, as before a stranger above him in rank, and feel not merely humiliated, but disgraced" (1: 284)]. Rivals' warning does not capture the full severity of the repercussions that Jack's career move has on Ida, who is capable of seeing only the superficial. Andrew Miller writes, in his discussion of lives unled:

> That the thought of children provokes thoughts of lives unled shouldn't come as a surprise, I suppose: children are regularly thought of as sharing family likenesses, inheritances, features of

> their parents, uncanny iterations that trouble our notions of individual identities. Nailed to myself, the hope I might be someone else would seem to founder on my body, which reminds me (by providing me pains or pleasures, by delivering sensations, by not following my will exactly) that I am separate from others, bounded, with these limits. But when I am in the presence of children who have bodies like mine, my desire to inhabit another life is not obstructed but rather encouraged as I see my physical likeness (or something close enough if the desire be desperate enough) out there in little. Children can present us – with whatever truth – the hope that our futures might be different from our pasts, that indeed we might become new people, reborn, living beyond our deaths: a Paul Dombey to survive Paul Dombey. (124)

Ida does not realize that Jack's fall is as much his as it is her own. She succeeds in convincing her son when she draws a romanticized picture of the prodigal son serving his mother: "Fais cela pour moi, Jack! Veux-tu? Mets-toi vite en était de gagner ta vie. Qui sait si moi-même, quelque jour, je ne serai pas obligée d'avoir recours à toi comme à mon seul soutien, à mon unique ami?" (1: 294) ["Do this for me, Jack will you? Put yourself in a position to earn your living as soon as possible. Who knows whether I may not myself some day have to appeal to you as my only support, my one friend" (1: 289)]. While McIntyre has translated "Veux-tu?" as "will you?," I would translate this expression as "do you want to?" By appealing to Jack from a weaker position, Ida changes the tenor of her strategy

and makes it seem as though her happiness is in his hands, and contingent upon his desires. The narrator reveals how Jack immediately accepts his stepfather's terms without once questioning if his working as a blacksmith and in the iron-works is at odds with or can support his mother and her aristocratic pretensions: "L'effet fut instantané. Cette idée que sa mère pouvait avoir besoin de lui, qu'il lui viendrait en aide avec son travail le décida subitement" (1: 294) ["The effect was instantaneous. The thought that his mother might some day have need of him, that by working he might be able to come to her aid, suddenly decided him" (1: 289)]. Moreover, Jack does not attempt to envision alternative career possibilities that would quickly put him in a money-earning position other than the one that is provided for him. In this way, Jack's romanticized ambitions to support his mother overwhelm his ability to read.

Ida's treatment of Jack and her selfishness throughout the novel do not undermine his beliefs and, in fact, after she leaves her son for her husband, Jack only transfers his dependence on Ida to Cécile, as we infer from his letter to Rivals after Ida left: "Ah! mon ami, que deviendrais-je si un pareil désastre m'arrivait? Je n'ai plus qu'elle. Sa tendresse me tient lieu de tout; et dans mon grand désespoir, quand je me suis trouvé seul devant l'ironie de cette maison vide, je n'ai eu qu'une pensée, qu'un cri: «Cécile! . . .»" (2: 307) ["Ah, my friend, what would become of me if such a disaster as that were to befall me? I have only her. Her tenderness takes the place of everything else for me, and in my deep despair, when I felt myself alone, confronting the irony of that empty house, I had but one thought, one cry escaped me – 'Cécile!'" (2: 354)] Jack loses his mother and,

momentarily, Cécile, an event that is foreshadowed by Daudet's decision to end the chapter, in a foreboding way, with Jack's apprehension that she will also desert him, though she had given him no reason. Jack's final words in the novel effectively sum up his passive reliance on Cécile: "Tout ce qui me manquit dans la vie, vous me l'avez donné. Vous aurez été tout pour moi: mon amie, ma soeur, ma femme, ma mere!" (2: 362) ["All that I lacked in life you have been to me – you have been my all, my sister, my friend, wife, and mother!" (2: 407)] As readers, we realize that Jack's logic is inherently faulty since he did not know Cécile when his sufferings began, so that she cannot be his everything. His dependence and passive reliance on these women preclude their individual needs and desires. He demands, from these female characters, adherence to a homogenous model that is conspicuously and equally passive, a model of not only constancy, since Cécile *is* constant in her love when she lies to and rejects Jack, but also complete honesty. Moreover, he did not even attempt to talk to Cécile again after her rejection, and is perfectly comfortable with imagining that he knows why she did so. Although he is more than ready to provide for these women, he objectifies and compartmentalizes them, expecting them to adhere to rigid gender codes, and never, throughout the novel, does he consider or ask them what they want.[11] Life can very much be a romance, as Dickens shows when he ends *Bleak House* with the fruition of Esther's and Allan's love story; however, Jack's passivity as a reader catalyzes his own downfall just as Arthur Golding will in Gissing's first published novel *Workers in the Dawn*.

[11] See my paper "'How is she to blame?': The Woman Question and Narrative in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and George Gissing's *Eve's Ransom*" for a discussion of how Hilliard, the protagonist of the latter, similarly reduces, at the level of narrative, and judges Eve.

Chapter Three

Perception and Reformation in Gissing's *Workers in the Dawn*

Gissing contributes to Dickens' and Daudet's conversation about victims of circumstances in interesting ways, as I will show through analysis of his first published novel *Workers in the Dawn* in this chapter and his unfinished novel *Veranilda* in the next.[1] In 1876, as a fourth-year undergraduate at Owens College, Manchester, Gissing was caught stealing from a fellow student to give to the clothes-manufacturing worker and prostitute Nell (Marianne Helen) Harrison, after exhausting his own funds. He was convicted, sentenced to one month of hard labour, and expelled in disgrace.[2] After his sentence, he traveled to America, and returned to London in autumn 1877 when he married Nell, whom he tried to reform, unsuccessfully. This period in Gissing's life has a profound impact on *Workers in the Dawn*. Published in 1880, the novel tells the story of Arthur Golding, who is discovered and adopted by his father's friend Mr. Norman, after his father's death in poverty. In his new home, Arthur meets Norman's daughter Helen; yet this relocation into a middle-class home makes Arthur home-sick, and

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[1] All parenthetical references to *Workers in the Dawn* are to the 1985 Harvester edition.

[2] Paul Delany describes Gissing's prison experience: "Gissing was one of nearly twelve thousand prisoners who served in Bellevue during 1876. Victorian Britain believed in sending great numbers to prison, and treating them very harshly: penitence and punishment were expected to reinforce each other" (18). He goes on to describe how this sentence combines physical and mental torture:

> On arrival [Gissing] was bathed, had his head shaved, and was put in a prison uniform with its 'chicken track' pattern. Hard labour, at Bellevue, meant walking on a treadmill. Prisoners had to climb the equivalent of more than ten thousand vertical feet a day. Their diet (for the first month of their sentence) was about twenty ounces of bread, nine ounces of potatoes, an ounce of meat, two ounces of gruel, and three ounces of soup (made from one ox-head for a hundred servings). This gave about 2,500 calories, a third or a quarter of what a manual worker normally ate. Anyone on this regime was being deliberately starved; Oscar Wilde lost twenty-two pounds in the first few weeks of his imprisonment. For the first month, hard-labour prisoners typically had to sleep on bare boards, with a block of wood for a pillow. (18)

so he runs away and returns to the slums where his father had died. After some adventures, Arthur becomes apprenticed to the poor but generous printer Mr. Tollady. Meanwhile, Norman, after failing to find Arthur himself, entrusts, before his death from consumption, his executor and Helen's new guardian Mr. Gresham with the task of finding Arthur; Norman leaves Arthur an inheritance of £5,000 which will be his when he turns twenty-one, should he be discovered. Some years later, Gresham finds Arthur and, seeing his potential as an artist, decides to tutor him. However, this relationship ends prematurely when Gresham, who has developed a romantic interest in Helen, becomes jealous of the blooming friendship between Helen and Arthur. Gresham repeatedly slights Arthur, and eventually refuses to give him an advance upon the interest of his inheritance to settle a debt that would otherwise drive Tollady out of house and home. Shortly thereafter, the printer dies, and Arthur abandons art to work for his living. Arthur meets, rescues, and marries Carrie, a fallen woman who had been seduced and abandoned. He tries, unsuccessfully, to educate Carrie and end her alcoholism, and his efforts are cut short when she runs away with her seducer. Arthur reunites and falls in love with Helen, renewing, also, his artistic ambitions; yet she terminates this romance when she discovers that he is married. Arthur finds Carrie, who has now become even more downtrodden, and finally settles down with her. Failing repeatedly to reform his wife, Arthur leaves her with an allowance and departs for America. After spending a year there, he learns from a correspondent that Carrie has died from illnesses caused by her circumstances,

and that Helen has died from consumption. Upon receiving this news, Arthur plunges into the Niagara Falls.[3]

Gissing's marital experience with Nell resonates strongly with Arthur's, and as John Halperin has argued, the wall between Gissing's life and his writing seems, at times, porous: "[Gissing's books] reveal Gissing even more clearly than do his letters, in which there is some measure of self-dramatization. Fiction, after all, is likely to be much more revealing than conscious autobiography, in which there is often some holding back" (192). For this reader, fiction demands as much perceptive reading and nuanced reflection as biography, even if Golding's name differs from his author's by only three letters (Selig 21), and as David Grylls has pointed out, "Few critics of Gissing would wish to assert the absolute irrelevance of his life to his work, yet the sheer persistence of the biographical perspective requires explanation and analysis" ("Teller" 454). Grylls warns us that the biographical method can circumscribe our appreciation and understanding of the complexity of Gissing's aesthetic practice, making us less attuned "to continuity of plot, to characterisation, to variety of tone – indeed to the whole notion of fiction as art": "We are right to read novels as self-expression but not as direct autobiography. Above all, we should put the work first and foremost" (466-68). With *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing can be seen as participating in a revisionary

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[3] Stanley Alden has argued that the endings of Gissing's novels are monotonous:

> Especially in [Gissing's] earlier work is it observable that Gissing permits a flat and uninteresting ending, strongly suggestive of the Russians, rather than by any artificial heightening, an ending of the sort nine-tenths of all English and American fiction has led us to expect, and which even so veracious a writer as Dickens (as Gissing points out) was almost always guilty of. . . . In no case, even where there is comparative happiness at the end, does the outcome seem other than the logical one, or the story fail of being a faithful presentation of life. (368-69)

For this reader, Arthur's suicide makes the novel's conclusion rather sensational.

programme that departs from Dickens. In *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, Gissing protests about the fate Dickens wrote for Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House*:

> Lady Dedlock, having sinned in a manner peculiarly unpardonable, is driven by remorse from her luxurious home, and expires in one of the foulest corners of London. Remorse alone, however poignant and enduring, would not seem an adequate penalty; we must see the proud lady, the sinful woman, literally brought low, down to the level of the poor wretch who was her accomplice. Ill-doers less conspicuous are let off with a punishment which can be viewed facetiously, but punished they are. It is all so satisfying; it so rounds off our conception of life. Nothing so abhorred by the multitude as a lack of finality in stories, a vagueness of conclusion which gives them the trouble of forming surmises. (92-93)

In the words of George Saintsbury, a Victorian critic and historian who reviewed *Workers in the Dawn* for the *Academy*: "Nearly all his people of the upper class are foolish or wicked, and nearly all those of the lower are wretched and wronged. Yet, oddly enough, the bad ends to which nearly all, rich and poor, come are occasioned almost in every single instance by some personal error or folly which it is difficult to connect with the social system at all" (56). Gissing leaves unpunished not only Whiffle, who ruins Carrie twice, and finally elopes with Gresham's daughter Maud, but also Gresham, and Maud's brutish, gambling, and licentious husband John Waghorn. Still, the tragic outcomes for most of the novel's other characters invite us to examine more closely how these are caused

by their individual actions. *Workers in the Dawn* moves away from *Bleak House* by emphasizing on individual actions over the social system.

Much has been written about Gissing's early novels, few critics have analyzed Carrie's narrative, one that is comparatively short, and that is spread out over the second of the novel's two volumes, comprising some eight-hundred pages. While Esther narrates part of her own story, Carrie never acquires the rhetorical strategies to write her own narrative.[4] Yet, just as Hilary M. Schor has read Esther as "indirectly, a party in the [Jarndyce and Jarndyce] suit" (*Dickens* 102) so that the novel's two narrative approaches, "however circuitously, are 'In Chancery'" (103), Carrie *is* Arthur's reformation project, and his failed marriage *is* his failure to make a social difference. In both novels, the romance plot is inextricably intertwined with the social problem plot. In this way, Gissing brings together what Jacob Korg identifies as a "Division of Purpose in George Gissing."[5] Korg argues: "There may be frequent reversions to 'problems' and these may have some effect on the action, but a dénouement that fails to correspond with the social theme, or even contradicts it, makes it apparent that the novel of plot and character has usurped the place of them" (323). As I will show in this chapter, the novel's story is directly related to its social theme. In the first half of this chapter, I will examine, in some detail, Carrie's narrative, with particular focus on how it contributes to our understanding of Arthur. In the

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[4] Hilary M. Schor has argued for Esther from *Bleak House*, "*Bleak House* is the novel the orphan daughter [Esther] writes to reclaim her property; more than that, it is the autobiographical fiction the bastard daughter writes to ask, 'who killed my mother?" (*Dickens* 101)

[5] Diana Maltz corroborates this view when she argues, "Gissing despaired at the way in which the mass culture of the 1890s seemed to render Ruskinian ethical and aesthetic ideals of social responsibility and sympathy impracticable. Ultimately, he retreats into a decadent, Paterian subjectivity in which aesthetic appreciation is contingent on individual memory and fantasy and divorced from social exchange" (57).

second half, I will show how *Workers in the Dawn* succeeds as both a novel of plot and of social protest, and how Gissing utilizes Dickens' realist narrative strategy by creating sympathy for Carrie and uses her narrative to raise questions about Arthur's social reform project.

Diffused Narratives

After Tollady's death, Arthur moves into a lodging-house, where he meets Carrie, a fellow resident. He learns more about her from a letter from her seducer Augustus Whiffle, that she had dropped and that his friend and neighbor had found. "I have done all I mean to do for you, and now you will have to look out for yourself," Whiffle writes:

> You needn't expect I shall stump up anything even if you have a child, as you say you are going to. If you try to force it out of me, it's the easiest thing in the world for me to prove that you're nothing but a common girl of the town, and then you have no remedy. Do just take this hint, and leave me alone in future; if you don't, I shall have to do something I shouldn't much care to. (2: 56)

This letter reveals not only Whiffle's neglect, but also his threat further to dishonor Carrie, who has, because of her socially-disenfranchised position as unmarried mother, as little credibility as Jo, the crossing sweeper of *Bleak House*.[6]

[6] In *Bleak House*, the Coroner refuses to admit Jo's evidence about the law-writer, who is later revealed to be Captain Hawdon, in court because of his lack of knowledge about the *Bible*. Ironically, the hearing takes place at the Sol's Arms tavern, a setting that detracts from the court's credibility more than Jo, who is one of the novel's most honest characters.

Arthur, who knows only that Carrie is related to his landlady's family and a mantle-hand, reads the note with "pained astonishment" (2: 56), and he is moved by a strong desire to act on her behalf: "But what a rascal this fellow is! . . . . What a cold-blooded villain! I declare, if there was only an address on it, I would seek the fellow out and tell him what I thought of him" (2: 56-57). Arthur learns from his friend, through a delayed decoding, that she is as much a victim of her few remaining relations as she is to the caddish Whiffle: "It seems that Carrie Mitchell is [their landlady] Mrs. Pettindund's niece. Her father and mother died not long since, and the girl then came here to earn her living. She pays no end of money for her board and lodging, and she certainly can't get more than fifteen shillings a week – poor creature" (2: 57).[7] Despite this knowledge, Arthur realizes that he cannot help her without affronting her feelings, and yet the narrator already foregrounds the limitations of Arthur's viewpoint when he intrudes into the diegesis to describe Arthur's reactions to his discovery: "Throughout the day his thoughts were busy with this discovery. It did not occur to him for a moment that the girl herself might possibly be to blame. He could feel nothing but tender pity for her, passionate indignation against the heartless

[7] We might compare Whiffle, the student of divinity who "precisely resembled the typical counter-man out for a holiday" (1: 187) with the unnamed middle-class and married gentleman who courts Eve in *Eve's Ransom*. See my essay "'How is she to blame?': The Woman Question and Narrative in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and George Gissing's *Eve's Ransom*." Gissing may have been inspired by the unpleasant Madame Vauquer's boarding-house in Honoré de Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*. After the titular character's death, the greedy landlady even tries to rob him of a gold locket with his beloved though selfish daughters' hair. Gissing writes to his brother Algernon in 1887: "I shall ever deplore your hesitation before the world's greatest novelists, Balzac & George Sand" (3: 120). Later that year, Gissing describes his debt to Balzac in another letter to Algernon: "It is very certain that I myself learnt my methods from the study of other people, but it came so unconsciously that, beyond the sense of a vast debt to George Sand, Balzac, Tourguéneff & one or two others, I could not indicate the steps of study" (3: 169).

brute who had cast her off when she most needed his help" (2: 57-58).[8] As much as Gissing invites compassion for Carrie, he also reveals the importance of acknowledging Arthur's inattention to her very real desires. The narrator's acknowledgement of her individual agency calls into question Arthur's overemphasis on circumstances.

Mrs. Pettindund *knows* that Carrie is pregnant and waits until she can no longer work and pay rent before deciding to turn her out:

> And so you can't go to work, eh? . . . And d'ye think I didn't know all about it long since? . . . Well, all I've got to say is you've made yer bed and you must lay in it. How d'ye think ye're goin' to live if you don't go to work, eh? . . . Yer don't think I'm, sich a fool as to keep yer, eh? . . . An' lose the good name o' th'ouse an' all? If you do, you're mistaken, that's all as I've got to say t'yer. (2: 59-60)

The landlady's actual indifference to the respectability of her home is suggested when she goes on to tell Carrie that she must leave if she is unable to pay her rent, and confirmed when she accepts Arthur's offer to pay Carrie's rent without her knowledge, inferring from his kindness that he must be the baby's father. Carrie finally leaves her aunt's home when she can no longer tolerate her unkindness, as she confesses to Arthur in a letter: "My aunt and my cousin are too cruel to me;

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[8] Comparing Arthur's sentiments towards Carrie and Helen, Maltz points out: "While Gissing characterizes Arthur's initial compassion for Carrie in physical terms as 'blood cours[ing] hot through his veins; his pulses throb[bing],' in Helen's presence Arthur feels only vague, disembodied obeisance, 'a pure devotion of the spirit . . . called into play the highest energies of his intellect' (2: 58; ch. 11). Gissing's vague references to 'higher life' and his heavy-handed religiosity . . . draw upon the rhetoric of Ruskinian missionary aestheticism" (58).

they are always telling me of my fault. I couldn't go without thanking you; I don't know why you did the kindness for me; no one else has any pity. Please excuse my writing. I never had enough schooling to learn to spell properly" (2: 66). The narrator confides in us and intrudes into the diegesis a second time: "The hand-writing was extremely bad, so bad in places as to be almost undecipherable, and the orthographical errors were very abundant. I have chosen to correct the latter fault, lest the letter should excite amusement" (2: 67). If the narrator provides us with a guide as to how we should not be reading Carrie's narrative, Gissing excites even more compassion for her by juxtaposing, on Christmas Eve, the Pettindunds' indulgence in gluttony and revelry using money procured through pawning and taking on another mortgage, and the Madonna-like mother holding on to a child in the cold, and begging her own relative for shelter in the kitchen. Still, this image of Carrie and her baby are insufficient to move her drunken aunt, who "never blest with a very good temper, became a fiend when under the influence of drink": "Laying a rude hand upon her niece's shoulder, she pushed her violently into the street, and slammed the door fiercely directly behind her" (2: 76). Arthur finds her several pages later, begging for money for a night's lodging, with the dead child in her arms, her face "in an unutterable expression of pain" (2: 84). With time, Carrie recovers physically, though her sufferings, as Debbie Harrison has convincingly argued, mark her: "Carrie is a palimpsest and not the tabula rasa on which Arthur assumes he can sketch an impression of his ideal woman: the scars of her past are too deep and cannot be erased or overwritten" (x).

Arthur is pained by Carrie's desire for independence, a feeling that she regains with her health, when she tells him that the landlady's eldest daughter can find her a place to work: "Arthur fumed in his heart. Carrie seemed already quite changed from what she had been on Saturday. She was making friends already, and plans in which *he* had no part. He had never suffered so acutely in his life" (2: 99). Arthur's vanity is only gratified by Carrie's confession that she has no other choice. Worse still, he finds her disobeying him and going out at night; he spies on her, catches her lying, and learns from her that she has gone to the Oxford Music Hall. What escapes Arthur is that, through her dishonesty, Carrie tries very hard to make him feel better. After he marries her, their relations scarcely improve, partially because of his desire to contain her. "Carrie was now his," the narrator tells us, using colonialism rhetoric, "his to guard, to foster, to cherish; his, moreover, to lead into higher paths than her feet had yet known, to develop, in short, into the ideal woman that his imagination had for years loved to depict" (2: 143). With each clause, Arthur's ambitions intensify; and if we are disturbed by his desire to possess her body and soul, Gissing's use of the term "imagination" further gestures towards Carrie's inability to live up to Arthur's romanticized expectations.

Reformation Projects

Arthur's married life includes attempting to educate Carrie, teaching her to read, write, and speak without grammatical mistakes, as the narrator tells us: "There were a few words of which the spelling was to be learnt, half a page to

write in a copy-book, and a short piece of poetry to get by heart" (2: 145). The marriage fails because of both Carrie's failure to perform her tasks, and Arthur's persistence in finding fault with the flesh-and-blood woman he has married. He grows increasingly irritated with aspects of Carrie that she cannot change, as the narrator reveals: "Carrie had a slow, sidling way of walking which was never very agreeable to see, and the ungracious way in which she now obeyed his request [to sit by him] gave Arthur acute pain" (2: 147). Needless to say, Arthur must know of her inability to walk in a more agreeable way, and that her habits are potentially unchangeable, before he married her. More importantly, his decision to begin her education by making her learn the first three verses from Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is motivated by more than his desire to share with her his literary interests. In the poem, a Wedding Guest is detained by the Ancient Mariner, who tells his story with the aim of teaching him. As Maggie Kilgour has persuasively argued, the poem tells "a moral cautionary tale, in which the author tells a story to prevent the hearer (or reader) from repeating an earlier error" (214), and its titular character is a storyteller who is "trapped in a never-ending story" (108).[9] Coleridge's focus on the guest's resistance to this tale in the

[9] For Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano, Coleridge's revisions to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" have changed its meaning substantially: "The revised versions transformed the poem of 1798 from one that emphasized crime, punishment, and supernatural terror expressed by reveries and nightmares to one that, in the light of the epigraph from Burnet and the gloss, speculates on a spiritual and moral universe" (56). In his formalist approach, Robert Penn Warren has made the case that its meaning is expressed through two themes, the primary being "the outcome of the fable taken at its face value as a story of crime and punishment and reconciliation," and the secondary being "the theme of the imagination" (671). Frances Ferguson, in her deconstructive textual analysis, unpacks Warren's reading not by denying that "morals are at issue in the poem," but by arguing that all meaning is contingent upon what the reader brings to the text: "Coleridgean morality seems to me consistently more problematic than [Warren] suggests. For the difficulty of the poem is that the possibility of learning from the Mariner's experience depends upon sorting that experience into a more linear and complete pattern than the poem ever agrees to do" (698). Ferguson concludes: "For Coleridge, as for the Ancient Mariner,

poem's framing narrative parallels Carrie's experience. Arthur's selection of this poem, one that is about morals and not forgiveness, reveals to the informed reader that his intent to teach her to read is not subordinate to his inability to forgive her for her past, and as Harrison has put it, "Arthur saves her and tries to reclaim her in ways that are as brutal and selfish as they are ostensibly altruistic and kind" (xi). In this context, Arthur may remind us of Jack, whose reliance on Ida and Cécile preclude their individual needs and desires, and who demands, from these female characters, adherence to a homogenous model that is passive.

Arthur's inability to settle in the Normans' home when he was a boy at the start of the novel does not make him more perceptive of the domestic colonialism he exercises on Carrie. The city can be a particularly intimidating experience for one who is, like Carrie, not a native, and who, importantly, goes to London only to be closer to her more familiar relations, as Arlene Young has argued: "To be an urban dweller requires an ongoing accommodation to the ephemeral life and to the demands and opportunities it presents, an accommodation to the nineteenth-century version of 'future shock.' Living in the city, with the city, constantly tests the urban dweller's ingenuity, intelligence, and adaptability" (49). In her examination of the interface between characters and the city, Young goes on to reveal that there are few traditionally proper places and opportunities for young, lower-middle class, people to meet and court:

> The office workers and shop assistants who live and work in urban environments, and certainly those represented in the fiction of the

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the problem is that one cannot know better even about whether or not one is knowing better" (709). What all of these critics agree on is the poem's focus on morals, and the narrative's educative function.

> period, tend to be young and unattached. Typically they live alone in small rooms in shabby boarding houses where privacy could only mean isolation. Without space and without chaperones, the dictates of propriety leave young men and women with no option but to conduct personal relations in public venues, which in turn leaves them open to moral censure. (52)

Even after courtship is successfully negotiated, urban isolation can remain a problem during marriage. Adrian Poole describes the eerie nature of single rooms: "It is the scene of those characteristic dramas of married hell, in which all human energies are narrowed down to the bitterest confrontations. In Gissing's first novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), Arthur finds that marriage has trapped him in just this way. . . . The presence of another person complicates without relieving the essential loneliness of this single room" (45). Yet Arthur is not the only one trapped in an unhappy marriage and he is not confined to his home as Carrie is. Arthur's persistent attempts to educate Carrie only drive her to leave it for her seducer Whiffle.

When Arthur reunites with his wife later in the novel, he initially resumes his artistic ambitions: "He had recommenced his work, too, and was constantly engaged in making studies for what he meant should be a great picture, the subject to be the Pleading of Portia. As was always the case when a new and strong idea suddenly possessed itself of his mind, Arthur worked with the utmost enthusiasm for several weeks" (2: 387).[10] Nevertheless, he becomes listless as his relations

[10] See Chapter Two of my HBA thesis for a discussion of Gissing's allusion to Shakespeare in this painting.

with Carrie deteriorate. As David Grylls has argued, Arthur's inability to find happiness, that is, by marrying Helen Norman, is attributable to his character: "Arthur is a weak-willed idealist, the first of many in Gissing. 'The secret of his life', we are told, 'lay in the fact that his was an ill-balanced nature, lacking that element of a firm and independent will.' As a result, Arthur has been vulnerable to the pressure of adverse circumstances" (*Paradox* 13). Grylls concludes, "His weakness of will reveals itself not so much as a deficiency of application as a fundamental uncertainty about his ultimate goals" (13).

Arthur is not very weak, as we may infer from his assertiveness when he denies Carrie free will. Still, he is at least partially responsible for his own doomed marriage and reformation project, and Gissing attributes to Carrie a kind of heroism, even when she has separated from her husband. When she meets Arthur again, she tells him of her attempt to conceal the marriage and, thus, not to bring dishonor to his already dishonored name: "[Y]ou won't believe me, Arthur. It was my only comfort all through my wretchedness that I had never said a word of you. My God! How I wish I was dead!" (2: 330)[11] When Arthur reunites with his wife, the narrator, from Arthur's perspective, blames her alcoholism for Arthur's inability to create art by revealing that "things had become steadily

[11] Arthur's father died in poverty, and as his landlady tells Norman early on in the novel: "We've done what we could for him, I'm sure sir; but, you see, being that he was so fond of liquor like, and being that he owes us near on a month's rent a'ready, sir, you see it warn't to be expected as we could do as much as we might a' done if he'd been a better lodger, you see, sir" (1: 11). While the woman is motivated by greed, for "the fire of greed flashed from her green eyes" (1: 11) even as she speaks, her narrative is what Dorrit Cohn would term a discordant one. Such a story is told by "a narrator who is biased or confused, inducing one to look, behind the story he or she tells, for a different meaning from the one he himself or she herself provides" (307). The narrator corroborates the landlady's account if physiognomy is an index to one's moral character. Norman sees that "want, sickness and vice had wrought such effects upon [Arthur's father's face] as almost entirely to destroy the agreeable character which the physiognomy must once have possessed" (1: 12).

worse" (2: 396), and proceeding to describe Carrie's alcoholism. Still, the narrator undermines this reading by gesturing towards Arthur's responsibility in causing her jealousy. In his picture of Portia, Arthur turns to Helen for inspiration: "Unable to wait for the completion of the subsidiary details of the picture, as soon as he had designed the main groups he threw himself upon the canvas with a desperate ardour, and scarcely laid down his pallet till, as it were, the ghost of Portia looked out upon him from the midst of still more ghostlike shapes" (2: 388). Yet, as readers, we are reminded that it is one of Arthur's drawings of Helen that made Carrie intensely unhappy in their first attempt at marriage. By revealing that Carrie sees "something of the commanding shape" (2: 388) in the painting, we are led to infer that she also recognizes Helen, or at least that the figure portrayed is not herself. Significantly, as John Sloan has pointed out, "the hero's cherished portrait of his pure ideal woman, the middle-class Helen Norman, is a source of humiliation to his rebellious working-class wife not because it reminds her of her defilement as a former girl of the street, but because it confronts her with her social and cultural inferiority" (446). If Carrie is led to suspect that Arthur is unfaithful to her in his thoughts, this suspicion is further justified by his growing neglect:

> At first he had always taken Carrie with him when he went on these evening walks, but by degrees her commonplace chatter, her vulgarisms of thought and language, her utter insensibility to the impressions of the season and the hour, rendered her company at such times intolerable to him. He could not bear that the deepest

> joys of which his nature was capable should be vexed and sullied by these wretched admixtures of vulgar inappreciativeness. (2: 389)

Focalized from Arthur's perspective, this passage is particularly telling because it reflects not only Arthur's abandonment of Carrie in his walks, but also his growing dislike of her, which must have had an impact on her turn to alcohol. As Arlene Young has argued for Virginia Madden from Gissing's *The Odd Women*: "Virginia can negotiate the city physically – she can use public transport and find suitable lodgings – but not emotionally. She is, in the words of Sally Ledger, 'swallowed up by the anonymous city.' Urban isolation as well as financial insecurity, produces her alcoholism" (53). The same could be said for Carrie, who faces physical isolation in her own home, even if she is no longer forced to read "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and psychological isolation from her painful memories, that are repressed and never talked about.

For Adrian Poole, Arthur "reproduces, even at the most humane and generous extreme of compassion, exactly the same patterns of [class] division and dependence as dominate society in general": "In his attempts to educate Carrie, we recognize the issues of control inherent in a situation in which one partner gives and the other is expected passively to receive. . . . No wonder that Carrie goes back to her drink – though for Arthur and Gissing, this is seen as confirming her innate hopelessness" (63).[12] As their marriage becomes bitterer again, Carrie

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[12] Grylls corroborates this view in his description of how Golding shrinks away from what he finds repulsive, including, we infer, Carrie:

> There are two distinct ways in which art might be seen as an idealistic refuge from everyday life. The first is through restriction of its subject matter, allowing

reunites with Polly Hemp, another prostitute. When Polly tries to make Carrie drunk to tempt her to murder Arthur, and secure the fortune he inherits from Norman, we read:

> For a moment Carrie turned her head away, as if to think over what had been said, then, with a movement as sudden as unexpected, she dashed the contents of her glass full in the eyes of her tempter, exclaiming as she did so—
>
> "Not so bad as that neither. Take that, Polly Hemp, and a good-night to you!" (2: 402)[13]

Carrie's refusal to be complicit in her husband's murder signals that she has changed for the better: not only does she refuse to harm Arthur, despite the promise of monetary gain Arthur's death ensures, but she engages in this act of defiance that is potentially dangerous, considering that Polly has "greenish eyes, out of which gleamed malice, and cunning, and lust, and every bad passion which could be imagined as lurking in a woman's heart" (2: 281). Nevertheless, when

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> it to treat only of the virtuous, the beautiful, the golden. The second is through the psychology of the artist, who in the act of aesthetic creation is able to transcend mundane concerns. In *Workers in the Dawn* both doors are opened. Golding achieves his greatest liberation through conceiving and executing his work, but he also shrinks from 'hideous' subjects such as those portrayed by Hogarth. After completing *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing retreated from this latter conception. In a sense, he could hardly do otherwise, given the material in the novel itself – his own art could hardly be more at variance with the art of his artist hero. Nevertheless, he surrendered it reluctantly, and would sometimes revert to the notion that art could confine itself to the intrinsically attractive. (*Paradox* 70)

In his future writing, Gissing can be seen as turning back to Dickens. See Gissing's *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* and Chapter One for how Dickens' literary project departs from Hogarth's.

[13] I therefore disagree with Halperin, who claims: "[Gissing's] novels tend naïvely to equate good manners and breeding with moral worthiness, while the poor and uneducated are usually rated at face value" (194). As I have shown above, Gissing reveals the potential of anyone, including Carrie, who had only two years of school and who speaks in bad grammar even here, to do good.

Arthur sees his wife later that night, he reads her behaviour in a dismissive and inattentive way, when, clearly, she must be more intoxicated than usual because of Polly's encouragement.[14] In his parting letter, Arthur asks her to "see the miserable folly of [her] life and carry out some of those good resolves [she has] so often made in vain" (2: 425) and, as the narrator reveals, he denies Carrie even "a last glance" (2: 425). By writing the story so that we read of Arthur's hating, blaming, and finally ignoring and abandoning Carrie, on the same day as her severance from Polly, Gissing prompts us not to side with Arthur's decision passively, or to merely judge him, but perhaps, read his decision for its fuller implications for Carrie, who abuses him only when he shuns her. By leaving Carrie, chiding her for her behaviour, and providing her with money, Arthur ensures that she never changes for the better, and that she has no choice but to return to her former vices, even if the very fact of her existence comes with the hope, the fragile possibility that she will improve.

In "The Spiritual Theme of '*Born in Exile*,'" Jacob Korg places *Workers in the Dawn* in the context of a series of novels "of explorations, each coming closer to the central issue underlying their situation": "Arthur Golding . . . has no doubt that he wants to serve his fellow man; the question that occupies him is whether he can serve him best directly, through active political reform, or indirectly, through art" (132-33). Writing shortly after the First World War, Stanley Alden argues for Gissing's essentially humanistic literary project: "Now

[14] Gissing continues: "Carrie was in a mood of maudlin affection to-night, and, as she reeled into the room, threw her arms round Arthur's neck. With a gesture of disgust and loathing he forced her away from him. He did not speak a word, knowing that at such times it was useless; but his action had changed the current of the girl's humour, and she at once broke out into the coarsest reviling and abuse" (2: 423-24).

although Gissing's preoccupation is with the individual, especially in his later work, he sees that the individual is valuable only as he is limited by human law: as a member of society" (375). David Grylls corroborates this reading when he describes a pattern that he perceives in Gissing's writing, one that brings together pessimism and will power:

> The salient features of the pattern are these: a weakness of will in one of the protagonists that makes him or her excessively reliant on other people or on circumstances; a compensatory determination to resist the ensuing disadvantages; and a stage of mind in which this resistance, taking the form of strenuous activity, is fuelled by both a conscious acceptance of suffering and the persistence of an almost unconscious hope. Will power is exerted, then, to rectify adversity; the adversity has often been brought about by initial lack of will power. (*Paradox* 14)

My analysis of will and circumstance adds to Grylls' by suggesting that Arthur is not entirely weak-willed. Rather, he is imperceptive as a reader. While Grylls acknowledges that these workers "are variously seen as both victims and criminals, objects of compassion, deserving aid, and objects of physical and moral abhorrence, who spurn all the aid that is offered" (28), there is a kind of vitality in their perseverance, and perhaps Arthur could have accomplished something had he better luck, and stronger personal will. Still, with Arthur's death, Gissing shows us that there is something lost and, in a Victorian England that shelters the

sufferings of some seventy thousand paupers, will power and better reading skills are far more important than disgust.

Indeed, for Adrian Poole, Gissing's narrative actively involves the reader right from the start of the novel:

> [I]f the idiom of generalised indignation and repulsion [early on in the novel] seems easily inherited, there is at the same time an urgency of narrative involvement that belies the traditional *security* from which the movement of protest proceeds. 'Walk with me, reader, into Whitecross Street . . .' That is familiar enough, the idiom of courteous invitation – let 'us' prepare to go and observe 'them'. But it is not long before this 'we' is suffering anxieties not normally associated with the magical immunity of the descending spectator. (60)

As Poole has pointed out, Gissing's novel actively invites the reader's identification, and yet as the novel unfolds, we discover that, despite the rise of philanthropy in the nineteenth century, the "combination of religiosity and rationality that informed the social consciousness of the late Victorians," who "were avowedly, unashamedly, incorrigibly moralists" (Himmelfarb, "Philanthropy" 51, 55) circumscribes the level of support that socially-disenfranchised individuals like Carrie receive. As Poole puts it, "It is the failure of this concept of Charity and of social change as directed *by* one class or one individual *for* another, that provides the clue to the novel's central ambiguity. For Gissing, although he shows with a deep instinctive knowledge the fallacy of any

notion of moral or social improvement that relies solely on an external shaping or teaching, still *wants* to believe in it" (63). By giving us virtually everything we need to know about Carrie in a novel that should focus on her husband and his failed romance with Helen, Gissing shows us that social reform must begin within the home and, more specifically, with the individual, and that he or she needs to be much more perceptive. By revealing Arthur to be a flawed reader, *Workers in the Dawn* differs from the combination of will and circumstance that we see in *Bleak House* and *Jack*. Reflecting on the realist fiction for which Gissing is known, J. D. Thomas protests, "Exactly as the novels of Gissing (apart from the unfinished historical romance, *Veranilda*) are deficient in conventional heroes and villains, just so they do not exhibit characters 'right' or 'wrong' in opinion" (118). *Veranilda* is, as I will show in the next chapter, one of Gissing's most complex novels, and its protagonist Basil begins as a victim of circumstances and develops free will.

Chapter Four

Romance and Public Politics in Gissing's *Veranilda*

Gissing's death in 1903, at the age of 46, "from congested lungs and myocarditis" (Selig 18) left his final novel *Veranilda* with five remaining chapters to be written (Fleury 277). For Robert Selig, the novel "smells of the sickroom," and he attributes its being "filled with illness" with "the dying Maximus, the hero's uncle; the plague-stricken Petronilla, the hero's aunt; and the fever-ravaged hero himself" to Gissing's declining health (93). Selig's observation is particularly telling, and, for this reader, the novel's recurring motif of illness is a metaphor for a larger state of paralysis that haunts the novel. I will begin by analyzing, in the first half of this chapter, the two conclusions that have been suggested by Gissing's son Alfred and his third "wife" Gabrielle Fleury, with particular focus on the ending that is foreshadowed by the existing portions of the novel: one that repeatedly shows the futility of an individual's actions despite his or her best intentions. As David Grylls has argued, "Resignation, too, became a favourite theme (most obviously in *Isabel Clarendon*), while renunciation of normal society is yearningly portrayed in *Henry Ryecroft* and temptingly in *Veranilda*" (*Paradox* 116). I will go on to examine, in the second half, the protagonist Basil's social position as an aristocrat, arguing that its attendant qualities in class and bearing could not have prepared him for the challenges of dealing with this political and military conflict. Basil begins as a very real victim of circumstance and develops independence and free will as the novel progresses.

Irreconcilable Endings

Set in sixth-century Rome, and against the historical backdrop of warfare between the Roman emperor Justinian and the Gothic king Totila, the novel tells the love story of the Roman Basil and the Gothic Veranilda. While this novel seems markedly different from the realist fiction of Dickens, Daudet, and Gissing that I have examined in previous chapters, this romance converses, I argue, with the other novels in interesting ways. When the titular heroine is kidnapped, her lover attempts, unsuccessfully, to find her, as do both the Roman emperor and Totila for their independent political motives. Basil's friend Marcian, who serves both the Roman and the Gothic courts, eventually finds and begins to fall in love with Veranilda, and becomes jealous of Basil. Basil, who was feverish after a raid when he attempts to join Totila, learns from Marcian's deceptive servant Sagaris of his friend's betrayal, and suspects that Veranilda has become unfaithful. Arriving at Marcian's villa, Basil kills his friend, and then falls ill himself. Sent to Benedict's monastery where he regains his health and learns of his wrongs, he eventually joins forces with Totila, and becomes promised to Veranilda. Gissing's writing stops with the imminent raid of Rome.

A number of conclusions have been suggested for the novel. By the end of the completed portion of the novel, Heliodora is captured by the Roman leader and her lover Bessas, and it is likely that she can influence him to exercise her revenge upon Basil and her rival. Here, the novel's possible endings diverge: Gissing's son Alfred suggests that his father had aimed, "as far at any rate as the affairs of Basil and Veranilda are concerned, to make the story end happily"

(Coustillas, *Veranilda* xvii). W. L. Courtney's 1904 review of the novel in the *Daily Telegraph* reveals that Gissing's friend and fellow-novelist H. G. Wells would have corroborated Alfred's ending: "We want to hear of the sack of Rome by the Goths; we miss the final scene, as Mr Wells suggests it would have been, a sunlit silence upon the empty Forum in Rome, shattered but unruined, and the hero, Basil, and the heroine, Veranilda, at last joined in happy union" (441). However, Coustillas informed me in an e-mail message: "It is clear that Gabrielle, because she wished to keep for emotional reasons the last lines of the novel written by Gissing[,] misled Alfred."[1] Fleury suggests, in a letter to Clara Collet, it might have remained "in Gissing's mind to have Basil be killed and Veranilda enter a convent" (Coustillas, *Veranilda* xviii). Fleury describes a dystopian conclusion to the novel, one that is reminiscent of Mary Shelley's in *The Last Man*:

> The last [chapter] was to be at Rome, & to describe this city absolutely deserted, without a living creature, human or animal, as it was during 40 days after Totila had entered it, everybody having been driven out of the town, every animal having been devoured during the long siege. That unique spectacle of the still magnificent town without a soul, with that absolute silence over it, had taken a strong hold on G.'s imagination. He often spoke of that, & pictured so vividly in his mind the impression it ought to

[1] Coustillas reveals in a personal e-mail exchange that, for his editorial work for the Harvester edition, he "had consulted absolutely all the material that was available," and that he "ha[d] nothing to add." He trusts also that "no more unpublished manuscripts [are] likely to emerge from oblivion."

> have made. And he often said: "I feel I can make a strong chapter with it; it will be very striking." — He was very glad to have found such [an] end for his beloved romance. (277)

Still, Fleury admits that Gissing does not write with a plan:

> It was all in his head. He then wrote with more or less rapidity, sometimes only a few lines in a sitting of 2 or 3 hours, sometimes much more. Corrected his pages, very often rewriting them. Made many corrections on the typoscript [sic], & some again on the proofs, was most careful & fastidious about style & beauty & perfection of language. — G. often said that a book had its growth just like a plant. One felt it grow, slowly grow, develop in the mind — & sometimes it is growing quite unconsciously, — after you have been working at it very hard in your head, & let it rest for a time — then if you try to hurry its natural growth, instead of waiting the right moment, instantly you begin to try & write, you feel it is immature. (284)

Finally, she reveals that Gissing never confided to her because it was not his practice to talk about a novel's ending in substantial detail:

> G. could never talk & tell about a book he had read in his mind, or was actually writing. Said he cld not understand the authors who cld do so. For him, it wld simply mean to ruin the subject, to take all the freshness & savour out of it. So it is, that he never told me in detail what were to be his last chapters of "Veranilda." – "You

> will see, you will see," he said, "I can tell you I have got a strong last Chapt. I may be mistaken, but I think it will be very striking." (290)

David Grylls tells me in a personal e-mail exchange that it is difficult to ascertain Fleury's reliability: "I think Gabrielle is likely to be reliable on most points of observation, though you obviously need to make allowance for her particular interests and limitations . . . . I think she is less likely to be reliable on literary than on personal matters, but of course it's difficult to be sure."

According to Pierre Coustillas' introduction to the novel, Gissing's notes reveal his intention to have Basil marry Veranilda; yet, because of the betrayal of Heliodora, the highly influential courtesan whose lovers once included Basil, and who loves him still, he is arrested as a traitor by Bessas; Sagaris kills Heliodora, whom he loves though mistrusts; and Basil's servant Felix and Veranilda search for him, after learning his whereabouts from Sagaris (xviii). This ending is foreshadowed through a comparison that Gissing draws between Heliodora, a very interesting character who has not done very much despite her threats, and one of the witches from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Dutch scholar P. F. Kropholler, notes a reference to Act I scene iii of *Macbeth*, and also reveals the misprint of the word "peck" as "peak," in Gissing's novel: Heliodora childes Basil for devoting all his energy in his search for Veranilda after her disappearance, claiming, "you began to peck and pine for this little Hun" (Gissing 141; Kropholler 16). As readers, we may recall how, in *Macbeth*, the First Witch describes having been denied chestnuts by a sailor's wife, and how the witches plan on causing a storm

and making the sailor "dwindle, peak, and pine" (I. iii. 23) at sea. Indeed, it is this very incident that alerts us that these witches are not indifferent agents that prophesy but forces with agency. Based on what we know about Heliodora from the portion that Gissing finished writing, this allusion does not lead us to a direct analogy. While the witch condemns the sailor and his wife by punishing the sailor, superficially, Heliodora seems to have little power over Veranilda's absence. Yet Heliodora can be, as she promises to Basil, "an enemy more to be dreaded than all the rest" (142), thus revealing that her threats are not empty. At the start of the novel, Basil learns that her husband had died from unknown causes, an event for which she may be responsible, considering that her first and only message to her beloved Basil after this event is "I am free" (15), and that rumours abound about her complicity in this tragedy.

Based on the material that Gissing did complete, what is most striking, for this reader, is Gissing's staging of not a comic or tragic end, but one that is much less "easy," as we may infer, on a micro level, from Basil's relations with Totila. The tension remains in both endings suggested, and neither Basil's marriage nor his arrest as a traitor eases the social questions that the novel asks. The narrator reveals the Roman noble's romanticized views of the Gothic king after a short interview, one that left him "bewildered, aware of nothing, his eyes turned vacantly upon some one who addressed him": "He had ever worshipped the man of heroic virtues; once upon a time it was Belisarius who fired his zeal; now his eyes dazzled with the glory of Totila; he burned to devote a loyal service to this brave and noble king" (313). The narrator's use of the term "worshipped" is

particularly telling. By suggesting that Basil is devoted, unconditionally and uncritically, to a set of heroes that now includes Totila, the narrator places emphasis on Basil's blind trust. In their conversation, Totila questions Basil about his killing Marcian, an act about which Totila clearly expresses concern, possibly only because Marcian serves him. The Roman noble confesses the truth, and views his friend at his best: "Gracious lord, that I accused him falsely, I no longer doubt, having had time to reflect upon many things, and to repent of my evil haste. But I am still ignorant of the cause which led him to think ill of me, and so to speak and act in a way which could not but make my heart burn against him" (310-11). The king takes advantage of Basil's optimistic view of his friend and his deep regret, and redirects the king's interest from Marcian to Basil. Gissing calls attention to this change through a kind of stage direction.

> "Strangely, it must be confessed," said the king. His eyes were again fixed upon Basil with a look of pleasant interest. "Some day, perchance, you may learn how that came about; meanwhile, you do well to think good rather than evil. In truth, it would be difficult to do otherwise in this dwelling of piety and peace. Is there imposed upon you some term of penance? I scarce think you have in mind to turn monk?" (312)

If the glitter in Totila's eyes betrays a change in his interest, Gissing reveals, through the reference to Basil turning to a monk, the Gothic king's thought-process. Basil's feelings are not reciprocated by the king, who immediately begins to plan for him, and who preys on Basil's conscience by referring to his

need for "penance." We infer, further, that Totila has no right to punish Basil. The king views Basil as little more than a vehicle that might be useful in furthering his own military and political aspirations, as the narrator reveals, from Totila's perspective: "Meanwhile, having spoken with the young Roman whom Veranilda loved, he saw in Basil a useful instrument, and resolved, if his loyalty to the Goths bore every test, to reward him with Veranilda's hand. The marriage would be of good example and might, if the Gothic arms remained triumphant, lead to other such" (338). Marriages have a knack for functioning as social and formal "solutions" to larger social problems in the social problem novel, and as Gertrude Himmelfarb has persuasively argued, marriages serve the important function of affirming the "moral institutes" ("Marriage" 22) that are missing as Victorian society becomes increasingly secular.[2] Indeed, we might compare the more moral marriage between Basil and Veranilda with the much less moral liaisons between Basil and Heliodora. Still, the king's identification of Basil as an "instrument," which comes with the suggestion that he is replaceable, the king's use of Veranilda as bait for procuring and retaining Basil's loyalty, and finally, the king's translation of Basil's sacred trust to an "example" of reconciliation between warring factions all taint what might have been a moral union and call

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[2] Himmelfarb writes:

> [Marriage] was the common denominator, the common faith, of these Victorians. The duty to be moral, they believed (or wanted desperately to believe), was not God-given but man-made, and it was the more "peremptory and absolute" for that. If there is any message to be found in these Victorian marriages [discussed in Phyllis Rose's *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages*], it is not in the realm of 'sexual politics,' in the struggle for domination or liberation, equality or individuality, but in the realm of morality, the struggle to preserve the sanctity of marriage, as of all, moral institutes, even when the form and substance were wanting. ("Marriage" 21-22)

See Chapter Three for my reading of how Arthur's marriage with Carrie becomes his reformation project.

attention to the difference between Basil's worshipful stance towards Totila and the king's actual feelings. His indifference and his fundamentally selfish goals in retaining control and expanding his realm invite us to read the novel's ending as strongly problematic, whether it ends comically in marriage, or tragically in death, for Basil.[3]

Moreover, in the second last chapter that he wrote, Gissing gives us a markedly different Totila. The narrator describes, through gossip, how Totila shows neither mercy nor justice: "A justice from a neighbouring farm declared that all the people in Tibur, men, women, and children, had perished under the Gothic sword, not even ministers of religion found mercy. And very soon this report, at first doubted, was fully confirmed. The event excited no less astonishment than horror, contrasting as it did with Totila's humanity throughout the war" (334). The narrator concludes by revealing that this military's move, this massacre's "effect upon the Romans was unfavourable to the Gothic cause" (334). This massacre is so violent that it is sufficient to deprive the Goths of the Romans' support, making them willing to turn back to their extremely corrupt governor rather than accept this invasion. The informed narrative voice confides to us one possible reason for Totila's giving the green-flag to this massacre, through free indirect discourse:

> Wearied by marchings and counter-marchings, the Gothic warriors were more disposed to rest awhile after their easy conquests than to make a vigorous effort for the capture of Rome. Totila himself,

[3] Totila's indifference to Marcian's death leads us to infer that, even if the king achieves greater prosperity and power, he will not be a more humane ruler to his subjects.

> heroic redeemer of his nation, turned anxious glances towards Ravenna, hoping, rather than resolving, to hold his state upon the Palatine before Belisarius could advance against him. He felt the fatigue of those about him, and it was doubtless under the stress of such a situation, bearing himself the whole burden of the war, that he had ordered, or permitted, barbarous revenge upon the city of Tibur. (336-37)

The truth is that "[t]he Imperial troops scattered about Italy, ill-paid, and [the] often starving mercenaries from a score of Oriental countries [that make up the troops], saw no one ready to lead them to battle, and the one Byzantine general capable of command called vainly for an army" (336). Totila allows this massacre because his soldiers are increasingly bored from inactivity and he wants an easy victory. His imminent triumph becomes even more terrifying for the Romans, for anyone who does not openly support Totila, and for those who become useless to him. Fleury reveals another possible reason for this violence: "Talking once about the unusual cruel treatment of Tivoli by Totila, [Gissing] expressed the opinion that the explanation of it might be in the fact of the piece being perhaps a Gothic settlement. In which case this Gothic unfaithfulness & treachery could very well have appeared to him as requiring an exceptional vengeance, in order to make an example" (278). The "example" motif would certainly corroborate Totila's attempted conversion of the Roman Basil for his Gothic ends. Whether or not Basil and Veranilda become married and live

happily ever after, the outcome of this personal romance cannot efface the political and military problems that Gissing's novel betrays.

Romance and Individualism

In this context of a war of attrition, and positioned so that one "can only choose between [the] evils" (155) of a corrupt governor and the merciless Totila who intends "by patient blockade to starve the Romans into surrender" (336), it is unsurprising that many of the novel's characters, including Basil and his friend Marcian, suffer from indecision. Regarding the corrupt Roman government, Fleury has revealed: "[Gissing] told me he had been reflecting on the ways by which Bessas managed to live in such luxury while Rome was besieged by Totila, & he said he had got an idea which seemed to have never occurred to anyone else, tho' very good & plausible, he thought. It was that of Bessas getting fishes from the Tiber, fishes that had escaped the nets put of course by the Goths in the river" (278). While his city slowly perishes from starvation, Bessas continues to live in comparable luxury. In fact, shortly before he captures Heliodora, she reflects: "True, she had objects of value, such as were daily accepted by Bessas in exchange for corn and pork . . ." (342). Heliodora's reflection provides us with an insider's perspective of the corruption that goes on under the commander's rule, despite the prevailing absence of food, particularly since even the fishes will become scarce with time, and we infer that his stocks will eventually run out with so many soldiers to feed. Ultimately it is the Romans who suffer, and Basil's decision, one that requires him to align if not wholly identify with Totila and fight

against his people, is a difficult one. It takes a lot of strength and courage for Basil to confront Totila and to assert: "I honour the Goth, even as I love my country" (312). After his unsuccessful search for Veranilda, Basil becomes increasingly lax, as the narrator, like a stage director, signals through his costume and behaviour when he enters his library: "He was carelessly clad, walked with head bent, and had the look of one who spends his life in wearisome idleness. Without speaking, however, he threw himself upon a couch and lay staring with vacant eye at the bronze panels of the vaulted ceiling" (149). The image of the pained lover may invite a contrast with another, also lying upon a sofa and with whom we have met in Chapter One. After the settlement of the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit in *Bleak House*, Esther finds Richard on his deathbed: "Richard smiled; and lifted up his arm to touch [Mr. Jarndyce], as he stood behind the head of his couch" (762). Unlike Richard who, aims "to begin the world" (762), Basil is helpless and undecided; he finds his Mr. Jarndyce in his bookish or, more accurately, roll-ish kinsman, Decius. Basil tells him: "I am hateful to myself. For though born to do something worthy of a man, I am now not only incapable of action, but even of thought" (149). Decius tells the undecided lover to leave Rome.

Basil's indecision, spurred by both the disappearance of Veranilda, and the fate of his country, is shared by Marcian, particularly when he experiences a division "between spiritual fervour and passions of the flesh" (226) after securing Veranilda. He is divided between the homosocial affection he bears towards Basil, and jealousy over his love for Veranilda: "With his aspiration to saintliness

blended that love of his friend which was the purest affection he had known in all the years of manhood; yet this very love became, through evil thoughts, an instrument against him, being sullied, poisoned by the basest spirit of jealousy, until it seemed all but to have turned to hate" (226). The narrator carefully traces Marcian's shift in thinking as he turns from his personal duty of friendship to Basil to his duty to Totila: "One moment he felt . . . he would guard Veranilda secretly until he could lay her hand in that of Basil. The next, he saw only danger, impossibility, in such a purpose, and was anxious to deliver the beautiful maiden to the king of her own race as soon as it might be – lest worse befell" (226). Marcian's conflict becomes still more complex when he betrays both parties by being "traitor now for his own ends" (255) and loving Veranilda himself. Through Marcian's indecision, Gissing maps out the conflicting relations among individual will, personal duty, and public duty that we see in Basil and, in fact, in all of victims of circumstances that we see across this thesis. Gissing attributes as much psychological complexity to his two characters, as he does to *New Grub Street*'s Reardon and Milvain. More importantly, however, the trainings of Marcian and Basil do not help them cope with their circumstances.

In his description of Basil's training, one that helps to explain his wasted potential, Gissing provides a possible explanation for the character's indecisiveness about love and political power:

> At root, Basil's was a healthy and vigorous nature. Sound of body, he needed to put forth his physical energies, yet had never found more scope for them than in the exercise of the gymnasium, or the

> fatigue of travel; mentally well-balanced, he would have made an excellent administrator, such as his life had furnished in profusion, but that career was no longer open. Of Marcian's ascetic gloom he knew nothing: not all the misery he had undergone in these last six months could so warp his wholesome instincts. (149-50)

Basil does not turn his training toward a more outward-directed goal. In a similar way, his mental well-being is constrained and never challenged sufficiently, as Basil recognizes when he confesses to Decius: "When I was young – how old I feel! – I looked forward to a life full of achievements. I felt capable of great things. But in our time, what can we do, we who are born Romans, yet have never learnt to lead an army or to govern a state?" (149) As an aristocrat, Basil is educated for things other than being a soldier or a politician. His schooldays, which recall those of *Bleak House*'s Richard, are spent "in the practice of sophistic argument, and the delivery of harangues on traditional subjects":

> Other youths had shown greater aptitude for this kind of eloquence; he did not often carry off a prize; but among his proud recollections was a success he had achieved in the form of a rebuke to an impious voluptuary who set up a statue of Diana in the room which beheld his debauches. Here was the nemesis of a system of education which had aimed solely at the practical, the useful; having always laboured to produce the man perfectly equipped for public affairs, and nothing else whatever. (150)

The school prizes that he earns are few and far between, and he is not even all that studious, suggesting a failure of individual will: "Long ago he had forgotten his 'grammatical' learning – except, of course, a few important matters known to all educated men, such as the fact that the alphabet was invented by Mercury . . . . Though so ardent a lover, he had composed no lyric or elegy in Veranilda's honour; his last poetical effort was made in his sixteenth year . . ." (150-51). In short, his familial circumstances entitle him to a comfortable lifestyle in which, under non-war conditions, he would not have to do much except revel in his fairly substantial inheritance. Furthermore, Basil's indifference to scholarly endeavours – which almost always has repercussions in the scholarly Gissing's writing – speaks to his uncompetitive nature, one that is challenged when he has to make monumental choices and take sides in love and in politics. Basil's vitality and his retention of imaginative stories, which prevail over the seemingly-contagious gloom that envelops his friend, are central in this diegesis, which is bereft of these very things.

In this context, illness is an important metaphor that indicates the emotional and psychological states of paralysis experienced by many of the novel's characters, and that provides them with an opportunity to reflect more deeply about themselves. In his trip to the Gothic camps, Basil and his men are attacked:

> It was the young Roman's first experience of combat. For this he had been preparing himself during the past months, exercising his body and striving to invigorate his mind, little apt for warlike

> enterprise. When the trial came, his courage did not fail, but the violent emotions of that day left him so exhausted, so shaken in nerve, that he could scarce continue his journey. He had come out of the fight unwounded, but at nightfall fever fell upon him, and he found no rest. The loss of some half dozen men grieved him to the heart; had the brave fellows fallen in battle with the Greeks, he would have thought less of it; to see them slain, or captured, by mere brigands was more than he could bear. When at length he reached Aesernia, and there unexpectedly met with Venantius, he fell from his horse like a dying man. (246)

Both the narrator's juxtaposition of the battle scene with a clearer manifestation of Basil's illness, and his demonstrated grief over fallen comrades reveal that the violence and the illness are not mutually exclusive and, more importantly, they humanize Basil, revealing his sensitivity towards not only Veranilda but his fellow man. Still, Basil retains his former romantic disposition by imagining that there is a distinction between dying in the hands of brigands, and dying in war, and he does not seem to realize that war is sordid and, in fact, paves the way for the emergence of brigands. It is only after he kills Marcian, thinking correctly, though he does not know it, that his friend is attempting to steal Veranilda away from him, that Basil falls ill again, though he has previously asserted that he is "quite restored" and that his "fever has passed" (243). In his sickness, "Basil lost consciousness of present things; and many days went by before he again spoke as a sane man" (279), yet this illness and his experiences in the monastery of

Benedict provide him with the opportunity to learn in more profound ways than had the raid.[4]

Within the walls of the monastery, Basil has the time and space to learn about his misdeeds. The narrator describes Basil's feelings after his confession to Benedict:

> The telling of his story was to Basil like waking from a state of imperfect consciousness in which dream and reality had indistinguishably mingled. Since the fight with the brigands he had never been himself; the fever in his blood made him incapable of wonted thought or action; restored to health, he looked back upon those days with such an alien sense that he could scarce believe he had done the things he related. Only now did there move in him a natural horror when he thought of the death of Marcian, a natural distress when he remembered his bearing to Veranilda. Only now could he see in the light of reason all that had happened between his talk with Sagaris at Aesernia and his riding away with Venantius from the villa on the island. As he unfolded the story, he marvelled at himself, and was overcome with woe. (298)

[4] David Grylls calls attention to the masculine-dominated space of the monastery which moves Basil's thoughts away from the women that occupy them for much of the novel: "[I]n the uncompleted *Veranilda*, the winsome heroine with her 'watchet eyes' is contrasted with a shrill-voiced woman called Muscula and a slinky courtesan called Heliodora, whose lustful wiles the hero must elude. Moreover, in the Abbey of Montecassino, Basil suddenly perceives the explanation of the peace and serenity all around him: 'Here entered no woman'" (*Paradox* 151).

The time and distance between his actual experience and the time of narration help pave the way for Basil's awakening and catharsis, and the intrusion of time and "reason" empowers him with a bifocal perspective with which he can view his friend and beloved more critically and objectively. Even if Marcian had betrayed him, Basil realizes that he had acted rashly, and unreasonably, suggesting that inaction is still preferable to rash action and that proper action remains, however distant, a possibility. Gissing repeatedly reminds us that this learning process is gradual, as we might infer from Basil's behaviour in the company of the other members of the monastery: "he could not meet their eyes for shame, and such humiliation must needs be salutary" (299). Although Basil should feel shame for his behaviour, the narrator's repeated references to Basil's "shame" and "humiliation" suggest his selfishly-inclined feelings, and not his actual remorse over the tragedy he had caused. Basil's early education in Christianity does not help him become more selfless: "Owning himself, in the phrases he had repeated from childhood, a miserable sinner, a vile clot of animated dust, at heart he felt himself one with all the beautiful and joyous things that the sun illumined. With pleasure and sympathy he looked upon an ancient statue of god or hero; only a sense of duty turned his eyes upon the images of Christian art" (150). The words that Basil is made to learn are both empty and at odds with his pre-Christian spirit, which is contrasted with and fundamentally challenges what he is forced to remember. However, Basil achieves another level of self-knowledge through his reading of appointed psalms, a practice that we can contrast with his empty repetition of self-deprecating remarks that he had learned

as a child: "One day, as he closed the book, his heart was so full of a strange, half-hopeful, half-fearful longing, that it over-flowed in tears; and amid his weeping came a memory of Marcian, a tender memory of the days of their friendship: for the first time he bewailed the dead man as one whom he had dearly loved" (306). While Gissing does not dismiss Christian teachings as irrelevant, the wholesale import of this learning on Basil is shown to be useless. Rather, more nuanced reflection over fewer and more meaningful passages has the capacity to make Basil more perceptive. Basil's learning enables him to face his love and political choices with newfound sensibilities.

What is most important here is not only Basil's remembrance of his friend at his best, and his active display of remorse over his actions, but Gissing's use of the past tense to describe Basil's affection towards his friend, which comes with the suggestion and the acceptance that feelings can change. In this way, he has shown that he learned much more than did Jack from *Jack* and Arthur Golding from *Workers in the Dawn*, who, in their respective ways, attempt to read and understand their beloved in the most reductive senses: while the former tries to make his mother and Cécile confirm to submissive types for whom he can make a living, Arthur desires to contain Carrie physically and emotionally. Basil's learning makes him a markedly different Roman from the one who had entered the abbey, and a more humane leader than the merciless Totila, who knows only to value people in accordance to what they can bring him. Within the monastery, Basil sees monks who "busied themselves in reproducing not only religious works but also the writings of authors who had lived in pagan times" (305). The narrator

reveals how this observation fundamentally changes Basil's views about the monastery, and simultaneously reveals to the reader the importance of the distribution of literature as a vehicle for instigating larger social changes: "All at once the life of this cloister [Benedict] appeared before him in a wider and nobler aspect. In the silent monks bent over their desks he saw much more than piety and learning. They rose to a dignity surpassing that of consul or praefect. With their pens they warred against the powers of darkness, a grander conflict than any in which men drew sword" (306). The copying of both sacred and secular texts, and his recognition that the significance of this act of copying is greater than displays of devotion and knowledge, prompt us to read the copying of literature beyond the scope of religious practice. Instead, we might read the monks as actively consolidating and passing on knowledge and culture. In this novel set in the context of a war, the narrator's use of a military metaphor to accentuate the importance of the monks' work suggests, further, the urgency of keeping art alive at a time when literature so often becomes lost. Nevertheless, as Adrian Poole has suggested: "In his unfinished novel *Veranilda,* the refuge of the main character Basil at the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino produces a response that seems close to Gissing's own. Basil, and Gissing, admire this enclave of calm unworldliness, but cannot suppress their own instinctual need for continued engagement with 'the world'" (205). David Grylls corroborates this reading when he points out, "But Basil discovers that he lacks the constitution to commit himself to ascetic life. He leaves the monastery, re-enters the world and is reconciled with Veranilda – the perfect heroine, the feminine ideal" (*Paradox*

151). Finally, Basil must bring what he learns from the monastery in a desperate desire to make a difference in a world where he is as unimportant as a Richard, as a Jack, and as an Arthur. While Basil's unconditional trust of Totila is troubling for this reader, it nevertheless contributes something positive to the novel's diegesis, where friendship, love, and trust are equally absent, and makes his society, if only temporarily, a better place. Basil's learning helps him to negotiate the conflicts among individual will, personal friendship and romance, public politics, and "circumstance." Early on in *Veranilda*, Basil asks his lover: "Had I been the enemy of Totila . . . could you still have loved me as a wife should love?" (76) By the end of the novel, we are not so different from his beloved and we, too, are touched by his sincerity to see beyond his race and his political allegiance: "I had not asked myself . . . for it was needless. When I look on you, I think neither of Roman nor of Goth" (77).

Conclusion

Victim of Circumstances

Virginia Woolf writes, in *The Second Common Reader*, "For Gissing is one of those imperfect novelists through whose books one sees the life of the author faintly covered by the lives of fictitious people" (220). She quickly complicates this biographical equation by showing how his writing has much to teach us about his world: "Hence when we have finished one of Gissing's novels we have taken away not a character, nor an incident, but the comment of a thoughtful man upon life as life seemed to him" (223-24). Woolf concludes her essay by examining Gissing's fascination with Greece and Rome despite his writing about Victorian England:

> Life was changing round him; his comment upon life was changing too. Perhaps the old sordidity, the fog and the paraffin, and the drunken landlady, was not the only reality; ugliness is not the whole truth; there is an element of beauty in the world. The past, with its literature and its civilisation, solidifies the present. At any rate his books in future were to be about Rome in the time of Totila, not about Islington in the time of Queen Victoria. (225)[1]

For Woolf, the past lends greater intellectual weight and nuance to Gissing's present experiences. As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, Gissing is heavily influenced by his contemporaries, and just as Dickens had a substantial impact on Daudet, so too do the two writers shape Gissing's oeuvre.

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[1] Woolf's reasoning likely stems from the setting in Italy of both Gissing's travel book *By the Ionian Sea*, published in 1901, and his unfinished novel *Veranilda*.

Reception and influence are central to a fuller understanding of Gissing's aesthetics. With his model of the horizon of expectations, one which incorporates the toolboxes of Formalist and Marxist schools of criticism, Jauss acknowledges reception and influence and places "the reader in his genuine role, a role as unalterable for aesthetic as for historical knowledge" (19). In his *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* he urges the critic to position a work's reception within a comparative framework, to "insert the individual work into its 'literary series' to recognize its historical position and significance in the context of the experience of literature" (32), and generate a new kind of history for it. Jauss' theory provides us with a vocabulary for thinking about the cross-fertilization between Victorian English and French literatures and, more specifically for this thesis, a context for approaching the character of the victim of circumstances across the writing of Dickens, Daudet, and Gissing. In Chapter One, I read Richard's story from *Bleak House* against Gissing's *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* to show how Dickens' idealism conceals faults he could have written for Richard, and how this strategy enables him to reach out to more readers, and make them see and care more about their immediate social issues. In Chapter Two, I analyzed the conclusion of Daudet's *Jack* to show how Daudet diminishes our focus on this character, a narrative strategy that distances and allows us to both to sympathize with and to criticize the character. In Chapter Three, I focused on Carrie's narrative in Gissing's *Workers in the Dawn* to show how it subverts our reading of Arthur. Gissing's distancing technique in that novel is reminiscent of Daudet's

in *Jack*. In Chapter Four, I showed how Gissing sensitizes us to Basil's difficult position, just as Dickens had in his sympathetic treatment of Richard.

The four novels examined across this thesis all explore the formation of identities in the context of social circumstances that are inhospitable to the individual's needs and desires. These novels reveal the need to acknowledge and represent aspects of Victorianism that remain unaddressed. While historian Gertrude Himmelfarb has argued for the rise of philanthropy through both social and individual charitable acts in the nineteenth century, Dickens, in *Bleak House*, and Gissing, in *Workers in the Dawn*, reveal that these changes come too slowly, and the "combination of religiosity and rationality that informed the social consciousness of the late Victorians," who "were avowedly, unashamedly, incorrigibly moralists" (Himmelfarb, "Philanthropy" 51, 55), circumscribe the levels and the kinds of support they render their disadvantaged contemporaries who resemble Jo and Carrie.[2] More importantly, however, by undermining a simplistic reading of Richard, Jack, Arthur, and Basil as victims, these novelists, I argue, suggest the greater importance of perceptive social reading as a better way of negotiating with circumstances that are adverse to the individual's needs and desires. This process of reading applies as much to our reading of the Victorians'

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[2] Himmelfarb reveals how Victorians strive to disguise their "notorious 'irregularities'":

> Those caught up in an irregular situation of this kind [extramarital, unconsummated, or homosexual relationships] tried, as far as they possibly could, to 'regularize' it, to contain it within its conventional form, to domesticate it and normalize it. And when they could not do so (or even when they did), they agonize over it in diaries and letters – which they carefully preserved, and which is why we now know so much about these scandals. ("Defense" 92)

This need for concealment is especially cruel for individuals like Carrie, who is socially censured because she cannot disguise her status as an unwed mother, and, to a lesser extent, individuals like Jo, whose parentage remains unknown, and Arthur, whose father dies in ruin.

social conditions as the characters' experience of and their attempts to deal with them.

In his discussion of Flaubert's and James' "weak young man" (157), Philip Horne leads us to infer that the conversation in which Dickens, Daudet, and Gissing are engaged extends across other Victorian works.[3] Yet as Hilary Schor reminds us, it is impossible to conceptualize what fiction meant for Victorians:

> While many contemporary editions attempt to create some conditions of Victorian reading . . . it is difficult to disrupt the homogeneity of late-twentieth-century publishing practices. It is even more difficult to disrupt the homogeneity of literary inheritance and pedigree with which we approach the Victorian novel, one of the central factors convincing us (wrongly, I would argue) that we understand what we are holding in our hands. (324-25)

As my analyses have shown, novelists like Dickens, Daudet, and Gissing repeatedly draw on the works of folktales and writers including Shakespeare and Coleridge, and thus subvert a linear concept of influence. Gissing's knowledge of seven languages and literatures further enriches our understandings of both the cross-fertilization between cultures in the nineteenth century, and his individual aesthetics. In this context, the embracive nature of Jauss' metaphor of a horizon

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[3] Horne writes: "In his weak young man, Merton Densher, James could be said to come as close as he ever does to Flaubert's Frédéric Moreau . . . . James takes pains to make Densher engaging despite his passivity, and to convey the pleasures of the situation which edges him into conspiracy; but one critic bluntly referred to him as 'the villain,' while another harshly put it that 'for Merton Densher's fascination we have only the author's rather anxiously reiterated word'" (157).

makes it a particularly effective strategy for mapping out the sheer volume and depth of Gissing's reading and writing.

If the horizon of expectations helps us to understand the social, historical, and literary imperatives for reading these Victorian novels, Wolfgang Iser's theory of reader response argues for literature's importance for what it imparts to its later readers: "The reader discovers the meaning of the text, taking negation as his starting-point; he discovers a new reality through a fiction which, at least in part, is different from the world he himself is used to; and he discovers the deficiencies inherent in prevalent norms and in his own restricted behavior" (xiii). He puns on the metaphor of discovery to describe another kind of discovery, making the process of reading one of both introspection and extrospection:

> In the nineteenth century the attention of the 'discoverers' was turned to subjectivity – first to its social role and then to its overall structure. In the one case, discovery meant a critical opposition to conventions; in the other, an attack on the prevailing myth of the self-sufficiency of the individual, and finally – building the transition to modern times – a fundamental questioning of identity itself. (xiii)

While this second dynamic is clear across the thesis, the first merits further discussion. None of the four novels advocate the need for self-sufficiency: Richard has Ada to count on, Jack has Ida and Cécile, Arthur has Helen and Carrie, and Basil has Marcian and Veranilda. Still, through these romantic plots, the novelists reveal the need and imagine possibilities for these male characters to

balance their reliance on their lovers with perceptive reading of them. Individual and society need not be in opposition, and these novelists show us how their characters can effect, in the process of enhancing their individual circumstances, larger social changes.

Appendix

Fig. 1. Image from *Jack* by Adrien Moreau (Paris: Flammarion, 1937; print; frontispiece).

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