An Exile's Cunning: Some Private Papers of George Gissing
Postmus, B.P.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Notes
Translation of "Epithalamium" (1657-1665), The Brides of Epicurus

Not so of any guileful, froward, suspicious,
Thick saw the noble bridge of happy fate;
And a carven column o'er the count'ly
When was the fairest fair, or any fairer than this, to me,
Laying down were common, and manned of all that
Head in the papal or a couple ager.
Some longer, and after Echon. There still our
Shaded the balest, yet a shining head.
And joined the holy or other, or thy holy,
And cause the sight of others in thine heart,
And power of both, or thyself, and ground and passion.

O that the law should hold in the court of the lord. Libens sic...

The world of arrows.

This day go on, day the heart.

The light and the dark.

He that is a friend, and for his sake,

On the good, since man's reparation

The light and the dark.

The light and the dark.

The light and the dark.
It is remarkable that Cervantes’ Don Quixote, who makes his first appearance in this, the earliest of Gissing’s poems, was to remain a lifelong favourite of the poet. In a letter (August 2, 1885) to his sister Ellen in which he urges her to read and study the great classical authors, he lists Cervantes among “the indispensables”, adding: “I rejoice to say I can read them all in the original, except Cervantes, & I hope to take up Spanish next year, just for that purpose.” However, it was not until a year before his death, when his friend, the writer-naturalist W. H. Hudson sent him a Spanish dictionary and Grammar, that he started to teach himself Spanish. On the day these books arrived (July 13th, 1902) he records in his diary: “in the evening read a page of Don Quixote”. Three weeks later he has made such rapid progress that he writes: “Done 17 chapters of Don Quixote, which I now read very easily”.

Was it Don Quixote the “brave defender of the oppressed” that fired Gissing’s imagination? It is tempting to regard his love of Quixote as, at least, partially due to his identification with Cervantes’ sad, eccentric, yet supremely amiable idealist, who hopes to convert the world. Gissing’s disastrous attempt to redeem from a life of prostitution Marianne Helen Harrison, whom he regarded as a victim of society,


17 Diary, 548.
affords a prime example of his ineradicably quixotic idealism.

In the Lilly collection (Miscellaneous Manuscripts Gissing, 194 and 195) there are two autograph copies of the poem, one of which—apart from one minor spelling detail—is identical with this version, the other containing a few revisions which primarily serve to improve the metrical regularity. In another hand a more exact date for the poem, viz. April 17, 1869, has been added.

Translation of the first of Virgil’s Pastorals – p. 191.

Between 1865 and 1870 Gissing attended the school of Rev. Joseph Harrison in Wakefield, who introduced him to Latin and Greek. This fluent translation by the young scholar into English heroic couplets may well have been stimulated by Gissing’s first Latin master.

A near contemporary of Gissing, Charles Stuart Calverley (1831–84), in his Verses and Translations (1862) included a translation of Virgil’s “Eclogue (Pastoral) I” in blank verse, which we reproduce here for the sake of comparison.

ECLOGUE I

MELIBOEUS

TITYRUS

Meliboeus:
Stretched in the shadow of the broad beech, thou
Rehearsest, Tityrus, on the slender pipe
Thy woodland music. We our fatherland
Are leaving, we must shun the fields we love:
While, Tityrus, thou, at ease amid the shade,
Bidd’st answering woods call Amaryllis “fair”.

Tityrus:
O Meliboeus! ’Tis a god that made
For me this holiday: for god I’ll aye
Account him; many a young lamb from my fold
Shall stain his altar. Thanks to him, my kine
Range, as thou seest them; thanks to him, I play
What songs I list upon my shepherd’s pipe.
Meliboeus:
For me, I grudge thee not; I marvel much:
So sore a trouble is in all the land.
Lo! feeble I am driving hence my goats—
Nay dragging, Tityrus, one, and that with pain.
For, yeaning here amidst the hazel-stems,
She left her twin kids—on the naked flint
She left them, and I lost my promised flock.
This evil, I remember, oftentimes,
(Had not my wits been wandering), oaks foretold
By heaven’s hand smitten: off the wicked crow
Croaked the same message from the rifted holm.
—Yet tell me, Tityrus, of this “God” of thine.

Tityrus:
The city men call Rome my folly deemed
Was e’en like this of ours, where week by week
We shepherds journey with our weanling flocks.
So whelp to dog, so kid (I knew) to dam
Was likest: and I judged great things by small.
But o’er all cities this so lifts her head,
As doth o’er osiers lithe the cypress tree.

Meliboeus:
What made thee then so keen to look on Rome?

Tityrus:
Freedom: who marked, at last, my helpless state:
Now that a whiter beard than that of yore
Fell from my razor: still she marked, and came
(All late) to help me—now that all my thought
Is Amaryllis, Galatea gone.
While Galatea’s, I despaired, I own,
Of freedom, and of thrift. Though from my farm
Full many a victim stepd, though rich the cheese
Pressed for yon thankless city: still my hand
Returned not, heavy with brass pieces, home.

Meliboeus:
I wondered, Amaryllis, whence that woe,
And those appeals to heav’n: for whom that peach
Hung undisturbed upon the parent tree.
Tityrus was gone! Why, Tityrus, pine and rill,
And all these copses, cried to thee, “Come home!”

Tityrus:
What could I do? I could not step from out
My bonds; nor meet, save there, with Pow’rs so kind
There, Meliboeus, I beheld that youth
For whom each year twelve days my altars smoke.
Thus answered he my yet unanswered prayer;
“Feed still, my lads, your kine, and yoke your bulls.”

Meliboeus:

Happy old man! Thy lands are yet thine own!
Lands broad enough for thee, although bare stones
And marsh choke every field with reedy mud.
Strange pastures shall not vex thy teeming ewes,
Nor neighbouring flocks shed o’er them rank disease.

Happy old man! Here, by familiar streams
And holy springs, thou’lt catch the leafy cool.

Meliboeus: Here, as of old, yon hedge, thy boundary line,
Its willow-buds a feast for Hybla’s bees,
Shall with soft whisperings woo thee to thy sleep.
Here, near the tall cliff, shall the vintager
Sing carols to the winds: while all the time
Thy pets, the stockdoves, make
Incessantly their moan from aery elms.

Tityrus:

Aye, and for this shall slim stags graze in air,
And ocean cast on shore the shrinking fish;
For this, each realm by either wandered o’er,
Parthians shall Arar drink, or Tigris Gauls;
Ere from this memory shall fade that face!

Meliboeus:

And we the while must thirst on Lybia’s sands,
O’er Scythia roam, and where the Cretan stems
The swift Oaxes; or, with Britons, live
Shut out from all the world. Shall e’er I see,
In far-off years my fatherland? the turf
That roofs my meagre hut? see, wondering, last,
Those few scant cornblades that are realms to me?
What! must rude soldiers hold these fallows trim?
That corn barbarians? See what comes of strife,
Poor people—where we sowed, what hands shall reap?
Now, Meliboeus, pr’ythee graft thy pears,
And range thy vines! Nay on, my she-goats, on,
Once happy flock! For never more must I,
Outstretched in some green hollow, watch you hang
From tufted crags, far up: no carols more
I’ll sing: nor, shepherded by me, shall ye
Crop the tart willow and the clover-bloom.

Tityrus:
Yet here, this one night, thou may'st rest with me,
Thy bed green branches. Chestnuts soft have I
And mealy apples, and our fill of cheese.
Already, see, the far-off chimneys smoke,
And deeper grow the shadows of the hills.

In the Lilly collection [Miscellaneous Manuscripts Gissing, 189.] there is an undated autograph MS with the slightly different title: Virgil's Bucolics, Ecol I, Tityrus. Meliboeus. Some corrections in a strange hand (his teacher's?) have been added and these were incorporated into the notebook version. Apart from some minor details of spelling and punctuation the Lilly MS is identical with the one that Gissing copied into his notebook Verses by G.R. Gissing 1869 to [1882]. It seems reasonable therefore to ascribe the Lilly MS to the same period as that given in the notebook, viz. ca. May 1869.


In a letter to his father, while staying at Seascale on the Cumbrian coast, Gissing writes: "To morrow if it is fine Mr Tyson is going to drive us to Wastwater", adding in a postscript: "Just off to Wastwater ..." There appears to be some uncertainty about the dating of this letter. Algernon and Ellen Gissing the editors of Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family date it tentatively to January 17th, 1869 (?), but later suggest that it might belong to the next year, when George and his mother travelled up to Seascale to join Algernon who was staying by the seaside on his own for health reasons. This would help to explain the visit to Wast Water in winter, at a time when winter holidays were a luxury only the privileged and wealthy could afford. That Gissing had visited Seascale in the summer of 1869 becomes clear from remarks in other letters dating from this period ("The place is not altered a bit indeed for my

part I like it just as well now as I do in summer," and "I am so pleased for it is so nice here and I like it as well as summer."

Given its place in the manuscript, following upon the “Translation of the first of Virgil’s Pastorals” that is dated May/69, there seems to be a good case for changing the date of “Wast Water” to 1870. Coustillas, in his article “Some Early Letters Re-dated,” arrived at the same conclusion, which has been adopted by the editors of Gissing’s correspondence also.

The tone of youthful excitement and eager empathy evident in the opening lines of the poem would seem to suggest that it records Gissing’s very first view of the darkly desolate lake, thus providing an early illustration perhaps of the propensity of his imagination to be stirred and inspired by darker emotions and settings rather than by more light-hearted feelings and more brilliant landscapes.

Wast Water and its surrounding countryside were to remain a source of inspiration for Gissing the novelist as well. He used the setting in a memorable description of the courtship of Everard Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn in The Odd Women.

There is an undated autograph MS of the poem in the Lilly collection, which is identical, apart from a few minor details of punctuation. [Miscellaneous Manuscripts Gissing, 188].

The Theatre - p. 196.

After the Battle of Hastings – p. 198.

Korg also published the final stanza of this poem in his biography of Gissing (1963) 71.


Ravenna – p. 201.

For this poem Gissing was awarded the English Poem Prize at Owens College in Manchester in 1873. It was first published in The Owens College Magazine in February 1874, and included in Manchester University Verses (1913), in which it is printed with the Latin motto: “Quis talia fando, Temperet a lacrimis?”

The version from the Verses notebook that we print, apart from a few minor details of diction and punctuation, is substantially the same as the poem published in 1874 and 1913. The one major difference being the addition of stanza XI (“Say what is earthly power but vanity?”).


A poem with the same title was submitted by Oscar Wilde in March 1878 as his entry for the Newdigate Prize, an annual poetry competition at Oxford. In June 1877 candidates for the prize had been invited to send in their entries on the subject of Ravenna, consisting of at least 50 heroic couplets. The subject might have been specifically selected for Wilde, who had returned in April 1877 from his trip to Greece and Italy, where he had also spent a few days in Ravenna. It is not impossible that the choice of subject for the Newdigate was influenced by Gissing’s “Ravenna”. But, if Wilde’s “Ravenna” is evidently the product of his recent visit, Gissing’s poem owed

---

23 Manchester University Verses (1868 – 1912), eds., Oliver Ellis and Henry B. Charlton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913) 22-28.

24 The motto is taken from Virgil’s Æneid, II, 6-8; translation: Who could refrain from tears in telling such things?
its existence to an imaginative reworking and digestion of bookish sources.\textsuperscript{25} Richard Ellmann, Wilde’s latest biographer, summarizes Wilde’s “Ravenna” as follows: “the young man recalls his journey there the year before, and muses elegiacally upon its fallen greatness. Collapse was always one of Wilde’s themes.”\textsuperscript{26} Without any doubt it was Gissing’s too: there is an almost obsessive sense of mutability that pervades his verse.

For the adoption of the Spenserian stanza Gissing may have been indebted to Tennyson’s use of the same form in his “The Lotos-Eaters”, whose diction and imagery may also have served as an inspiration to Gissing in this poem. Tennyson always was one of his favourite poets\textsuperscript{27} and one of his earliest memories was of his father reciting the Christmas cantos from In Memoriam.

The Spenserian stanza is well suited to detailed narration and description, but it involved him first, in the great difficulty of finding, again and again, four words of b- and three of c-rhyme, and second, the difficulty of shaping a thought or image of sufficient magnitude to make the extra length of the ninth line seem justified. The prize-winning result, however, abundantly illustrates the technical skill and accomplishment of the 15-year old Gissing.

The public recognition of his poetic achievement came in the shape of a five-volume set of The Works of Edmund Spenser, edited by J. Payne Collier, S.F.A. (London: Bell and Daldry, 1862), being the prize awarded to him for “Ravenna”. Nothing could have been more appropriate, in view of Gissing’s adoption of the Spenserian stanza as the most suitable vehicle for his verse. The label stuck on the front endpaper of this edition read: “Owens College/Manchester/Session 1872-3/To George Robert Gissing/This Book was adjudged as/the English Poem Prize by/A.W. Ward Professor.”\textsuperscript{28}

To his friend Arthur Bowes Gissing had promised to give a fair copy of the poem, in case he should win the prize. That copy has survived and it is now held by the

\textsuperscript{25} Cf. Miscellaneous juvenile notes c. 1869-71, including notes on Ravenna, in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

\textsuperscript{26} Richard Ellmann, Oscar Wilde (New York: Knopf, 1988) 91.


\textsuperscript{28} Pierre Coustillas and Patrick Bridgwater, eds., George Gissing at Work: A Study of His Notebook Extracts from my Reading (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1988) 103.
Beinecke Library of Rare Books and Manuscripts at Yale University. This is how Bowes remembered the time of its composition:

He (Gissing) had entered as a competitor in some open scholarship—I forget exactly what it was, but the principal feature was the composition of a poem on the subject of Ravenna. George was enthusiastic on this subject, as on most others, and many a night I remember him waking me up to hear him declaim in the darkness of the bedroom the new stanzas he had just evolved in his study down below. Only half awake I was supposed to exercise a critical judgement on the workmanship. It was agreed between us that if he succeeded in carrying off the prize he would write me out a copy of this wonderful poem as a reward for my patience under tribulation. He did succeed, and before me now lie the two hundred lines in the neat and scholarly writing of George Gissing.29

The Last Sigh of the Moor – p. 214.

The pervasive influence of Tennyson upon Gissing’s poetry may be demonstrated by the echoes from Tennyson’s The Dying Swan and Tithonus in 11. 103-4 of The Last Sigh of the Moor.

Having won the English Poem Prize in 1873, Gissing tried again the next year. The Last Sigh of the Moor30 was his entry for the 1874 Poetry Prize. This time, however, it was Edward Crabb31 who came first, the same student whom Gissing at Owens College engaged in lively debates about themes in Shakespeare.32 We give the text of Crabb’s winning entry as it appeared in Manchester University Verses.33

31 Crabb, Edward (CB 1910), b. 16.6.1853 d. 16.12.1914; Educated: Manchester Grammar School. Appointed Clerk in the secretary’s office General Post Office, 1876; Second Secretary 1911; retired 1914.
33 Manchester University Verses (1868–1912), eds., Oliver Ellis and Henry B. Charlton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913) 28-33.
The editors must have made a mistake in labelling it the Prize Poem for 1875. Gissing’s unequivocal dating of *The Last Sigh of the Moor* to March 1874 must be conclusive in dating Crabb’s Prize Poem to the same year.

**El Ultimo Sospiro del Moro**

A rocky platform, and behind, a pass  
Fretted with jagged rocks along the base;  
Above, o’erhanging cliffs, that reached across  
To touch each other like two stooping giants.  
Below, the plain, from whence a thin white track  
Wound up towards the pass, and in the plain—  
An island, golden-shored in emerald sea—  
Granada with her minarets and towers,  
The tallest points ablaze with eastern light.  
Up the white track, through the soft morning haze,  
He came, the luckless king, and after him  
A train of weeping women: only one,  
His mother, rode before, nor wept nor cried,  
But looked on all around with stern, hard eyes.  
He reached the path head and reined in his horse,  
And gazing on his city murmured low,  
Indistinct, speaking half to his own heart.

“All this but yesterday was mine, and now  
Is passed from me, and lo! my doom is come.  
And in my day my kingdom sees its end;  
As they foretold, what time when I was born,  
They called me the Ill-starred: and all my life  
The Ill-starred have I been, and full unfit  
To rule this rugged people whose wild heart  
Holds not with mine; and so my realm is gone;  
And I, deserted by my traitor folk,  
Cast out and beggared, am a king no more,  
Having no home nor country till I die.”  
And therewithal welled from some inmost depth  
Of hidden sorrow, bitter tears, and fell  
In slow, big drops upon his horse’s neck,  
The while his mother scornful looked and cold,  
Watched him, and then spake clear and tauntingly:

“Ay weep: it fits thy nature. Weep thy fill.  
Who manlike cannot die should weep like maid.  
Callest thy people traitor? Base! thou hadst  
A dearer traitor nestling close to thee,  
Even thy own weak heart, irresolute,
Empty of constancy or strength. Thou, none but thou,
Hast lost thy kingdom: lay it on none else.
Oh! hadst thou been El Zagal: yet again
(By grace of Allah who still helps the brave)
We might have turned the Christian dogs to flight,
As when he drove the mincing Marquis down
These mountain glens, and filled our towns with slaves
To hew and draw, and underneath the cliffs
The eagles screamed and fought about their prey.
Or had we him they called Granada's lion,
Abdallah, him that feared not mortal man,
Nor would have feared dark Eblis in his power—
Or Ali Atar, who could chase yon king,
With all his gaudy knights from Loxa's hill—
Dead now—all dead—and have left nought behind
Save thee, the worst and weakest of them all.
Cursed be my womb that e'er it brought thee forth!
Surely some fell Afrit or Eblis' self
Risen from deepest hell on Granada
To work her sorrow, swayed us in that hour
When Muley Hassan would not let thee die,
But saved thee for his ruin and thine own.
Why stayest thou here? Thy kingdom comes not back
With woman's weeping. Cease thy tears, and on.”

As one that had not heard, or heard in part,
He answered her in slow tones, wearily:
“Rail not: I come. Go thou a little on
And I will follow.”

So they went from him
With clink of horse and mule hoof up the pass
And disappeared: and still he sat and gazed,
And yearned with mighty yearning o'er his land.
Then spake again:
“It boots not to delay.
I will not stay to look upon my loss
Or see the triumph of yon crafty king
Whose treachery hath won my realm from me.
Yet whither can I flee? Will not my eyes,
Where'er I am, for ever see the same?
Will they not still, whether their outward sense
Beholds or sea or mountain, desert plain,
Green valley or precipitous abyss,
Yet image inwardly Granada fallen,
These mountains' purple tops, the Vega green,
And gleam of Christian armour from the walls?
Yet must I go; to see my lands no more;
To wander on throughout this weary world
Like a poor bird driven out to sea
That finds no place to rest its tired foot,
But struggling on and on with slackening wing
Sinks lower, lower, till it drops and dies.
No rest, no peace; but storm and fiery war
Through all my life, and storm and war beyond:
Cursed of my people even from my birth,
Ay, even of my own kin who sought my life,
Hated of her who held me at her breast,
Now at the end unheeded to go down
Into the dark, and like a quenched flame,
Leave nought behind! And yet why should my fame
Fall utterly? Still many years of life
Remain, ere rest shall come, even though my days
Outmeasure in the weighing of their woe
The burden borne by many a snowy head.
I fall not yet. My name in time to come
Shall yet be common on the tongues of men,
And all shall wonder, even as when a star,
Sliding across the silence of the night,
Drops in the bosom of a gloomy cloud:
Then suddenly when all had thought it gone,
Breaks forth again, outrivalling the moon,
And silvers even the blackness whence it came.
Oh fool! thrice-fooled; wilt still be self-deceived?
How often have I soothed my soul with hopes,
With mighty schemes and world overturning plan
That should hereafter lift my name to greatness,
And write it on the starry vault of heaven
In lines of fire for future time to read!
And still they all like wavering mirage
Reeling athwart the burning desert-haze,
Vanished as I came near: and so will this.
Methinks my nature is not hot enough,
Not lightning swift to follow thought with act;
Even as my people say, I am no Moor,
But some cold Christian, and so love me not.
They that see much fit not in troubled times;
To weigh and to consider overmuch,
Discern conditions, follow no hot sect—
These win not greatness: but the spirits that love
The glory of contention, set themselves
In daring pride as their own aid and fortune.
Had I been so, or as yon traitor king,
Smooth, treacherous, relentless, cold and keen,
Hiding an iron will with an easy face,
It might have been—it boots not to think how.
The days of a man's life come not again,
Nor, once unkinged, is any king once more.

Farewell! Granada! Now at last I go,
To Africa, unto my kingdom there,
And something tells me I shall not return,
But shall find there my grave and rest and peace.
May the good Allah now but grant it me
To finish like a king—that, and to rest,
I ask no other boon: that which is fixed
Is fixed: no man may win, striving with fate,
Nor will I any longer fight my doom,
Whatever it be. And ye, my fickle people,
Ye that have hated and have warred against me,
Fare ye well now; I would have ruled you well,
But fate, and your wild wills still set against me,
And mine own weakness still have hindered me.
And now I see with the prophetic eye
Of mine adversity woe coming on you;
The iron hand of your new Christian king
Laid heavy on your bowed and patient necks;
Yet fare ye well: my soul breeds not revenge;
Your path and mine are set, we may not pass
Beyond the bourn that fate hath marked for us,
Or alter what is written in the book."

So spake he, and his head upon his breast
Declined awhile, and statue-like remained;
Then raised his eyes and cast one longing look
O'er the whole scene, as one about to part
Gazes on some dear face he would not leave;
Then, with head sunk, once more he turned his horse,
And riding forth in the defile was lost,
And passed away, and came again no more.

Edward Crabb.
On a dead Primrose, plucked in early Spring – p. 222.

The Sky at Sunset – p. 223.

After the death of their father in December 1870, Gissing and his two brothers were sent to Lindow Grove School, a boarding school run by Quakers at Alderley Edge in Cheshire, a village some 14 miles south of Manchester. This location explains why Gissing continued to board at Alderley during his first two years as a student at Owens College in Manchester. In return for the hospitality at Lindow Grove, Gissing, according to his classmates Bowes and Sykes, acted as an assistant master and “frequently took the more advanced classes in such subjects as Greek, Latin, French, German and higher mathematics.”

It is from Lindow Grove School, appended to the following letter, addressed to his mother, that he sends her these two poems:

Alderley
Ap. 5th [1874]

My Dear Mother,

I thought you would perhaps like to see two little pieces I have lately written, which I have just copied into my book. The first was suggested by a bunch of glorious primroses which I brought home the other day. They were laid on the table and died. The other I wrote last night, after looking at one of the finest sunsets I ever saw.

Yours affectionately
G R G


36 Manuscript notebook Verses 1869 to [1882], Beinecke Library.
On completing the Perusal of the *Aeneid* – p. 225.

Among the 13 prize volumes Gissing won at Owens College in June 1874 was a three-volume edition of the works of Virgil as first prize in Higher Junior Latin.

On an Autumn Morning – p. 226.

There is an autograph poem entitled “The Coming of Autumn” and dated September 1874 in the Beinecke Rare Books and MSS Library at Yale that is identical to “On an Autumn Morning.”

Ode to Truth – p. 230.

The poem was first published in the Owens College Magazine (Manchester) January 1875, with the slightly modified title “To Truth.” It was reprinted in *Manchester University Verses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913) 175-76 and in the *Gissing Newsletter*, volume V, 2 (April 1969) 9-10.


Gissing’s love of Heine surfaced again in the earliest days of his year in America. On October 5, 1876 he wrote to his brother William: “... I have just written an essay on Burns & Heine as song-writers ... I have translated a great part of Heine’s poems into verse, & I think it would be worth while to go on & translate the whole & then publish it.”

Ten years later, in a letter to his sister Ellen, he expresses his keen love of Heine again: “... I sent you Heine’s *Buch der Lieder*, one of my most precious possessions. Poor Heine! I made a pilgrimage to his grave in Paris. In all literature he is one of the men most akin to me.”


For some of the formal features of Narcissus Gissing is clearly indebted to the most illustrious of English pastoral elegies, Milton’s “Lycidas”. The verse paragraph as the major ordering principle is such a direct imitation, including the occurrence of nine six-syllable lines, each rhyming with the decasyllable preceding it. Also the inclusion of a limited number of unrhymed lines is a metrical variation that figures prominently in “Lycidas”. Stylistically too, there are obvious parallels between the two poems: e.g.

Milton: Gissing:

And with forced fingers Nor yet repell’d with
rude (4) sound or gesture rude (119)

We drove afield (27) are driven forth afield (7)

Meanwhile the rural dit-
ties were not mute (32) And sat and piped sad dit-
ties all the day. (111)

With nectar pure his oozy Where his delighted senses
locks he laves (175) he e’er laves (132)

The most striking thematic borrowing occurs when Gissing introduces the Christian consolation of life in heaven in the Ovidian narrative. The familiar exhortation to the mourning shepherds to “weep no more,/For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead”, though it remains unspoken in “Narcissus”, may explain the return of the wood-nymphs’ merriment at the end of the poem. Through this significant departure from Ovid’s version, in which Narcissus ends up in the underworld, Gissing provides his poem with an unexpectedly positive ending.

In view of the frequency and the nature of the echoes and analogies from earlier English elegies, we may conclude that Gissing consciously sought to “continue the moods and cadences of these works”. 39

These sonnets were first published in George Gissing: Six Sonnets on Shakespearean Heroines, with an introductory note by Pierre Coustillas (London: Eric & Joan Stevens, 1982).

The reference to Nantasket in the Miranda sonnet finds an echo in Gissing's first letter from America (October 5, 1876) to his brother William: "I went in a steamer the other day across the harbour [Boston harbour] & a little way down the coast to a place called the Nantasket Beach...."\footnote{\textit{The Collected Letters of George Gissing}, vol.I, 1863-1880, eds., Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, Pierre Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1990) 48.}

\textbf{A Farewell} – p. 249.


\textbf{On a bunch of hot-house flowers} – p. 255.


"Robert Petremant was the American who had custody of the belongings Gissing had stored in America to secure a loan. In his American Notebook, Gissing gives his address as 'Petremant/White, Payson & Co/Bedford St./Boston.' The City Directory lists him as a designer boarding at 71 Bartlett Street (Gissing's own address while living in Boston) and White, Payson, and Lecompte as commission merchants with two addresses: 43 Avon and 30 Bedford Street."

The Bird’s Nest – p. 265.

MS in Gissing collection, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA.


Gissing collection, Lilly Library.

The Refugee – p. 270.

Gissing collection, Lilly Library.

The Death of Dido – p. 273.

Gissing collection, Lilly Library.

Magua – p. 277.

Gissing collection, Lilly Library.

A....n G....g’s Life – p. 280.

The poem was first published in Blackwood’s, May 1929, p. 658. The MS is in the Beinecke Library at Yale.

W....m G....g’s Life – p. 281.

First published in Blackwood’s, May 1929, p. 658. MS in Beinecke Library.
Battle of Roncesvalles – p. 282.

MS in Beinecke Library.

For the last six months of his life (from July 1, 1903) Gissing lived in St Jean Pied de Port (Basses Pyrénées). Less than 12 miles to the south-west was Roncesvalles just across the border with Spain. That he returned to the scene of the historic battle of Roncesvalles [August 15, 1903], which he had described more than thirty years before, is apparent from his very last letter to Eduard Bertz, his longstanding German correspondent and friend, dated October 4, 1903: "... By the bye, I never told you of a four days’ excursion we made not long ago into Spain, by way of Roncesvalles. We got as far as Pamplona. It was delightful ...."41 This may be taken as proof of one of Gissing’s most characteristic traits: an abiding loyalty to old loves, be they personal, imaginative, poetical, historical, or geographical.

Angelica – p. 296.

That Gissing did not eschew formal experimentation is proved by the following variant of (part of) the poem, written in stanzas of six lines or sestets. Both MSS are in the Gissing collection of the Beinecke Library at Yale.

Angelica

It was the month of May, and jousting kept
By Charlemagne at Paris; from all round
The knights came, there was Ferragus yclept
The eagle-eyed, there Astolfo was found,
Rinaldo and Orlando feasted there,
And every one from their mind banished care.

There Malagigi the enchanter stayed,
And there with all his followers was Gan;
There Charlemagne sat ‘neath a canopy, made
Of finest silks, they then the feast began.
The Saracens at table never sat,
But on the floor they ate, on a large mat.

The tables were at three sides of the hall,  
The crowned heads the first table ate at;  
And down the table at the right, sat all  
The Dukes and Marquises, the left thereat,  
Were Counts and Cavaliers. Charles viewed with pride  
His Paladins, who ate close by his side.

To each lord when they drank he presents sent,  
Of cups enamelled and superbly cut;  
By pages as they round the table went,  
And to each one some mark of favour put,  
They sat and listened, as the music rolled  
Through the large hall, and ate off the plates of gold.

Just at this time the feast was at its height,  
When suddenly there strode into the hall,  
Four giants, towering high and armed for fight,  
With them a lady, and more fair than all  
There at that time, a cavalier with spear,  
Full armed, he looked like one who knew not fear.

She then to Charlemagne began to speak:—  
"High minded lord! report of your good deeds,  
And valour of these knights, drive all the weak,  
And any one oppres't that succour needs,  
To you, so that I hope 'tis not in vain,  
We pilgrims have come here, across the main."

"This knight Uberto of the Lion named,  
Also renowned for his own mighty works,  
And for his deeds at tournaments much famed,  
An enemy within his kingdom lurks.  
He drove my brother out and I beside,  
And hearing of this joust, we here did ride."

"Angelica my name is you must know,  
Hearing your generous natures, did not care  
For golden prizes, in the fight to go,  
But only for a red rose wreath to wear.  
My brother challenges all of your guests,  
To meet him one by one, with lance in rests."

"The place shall be the mead without the walls,  
The rules on which they enter on the fight;  
Are that whoever of the knights first falls,  
Shall not withdraw from it nor take to flight,
But remain prisoner in my brother's tent,  
And remain there till he away is sent."

"But if he's thrown he agrees to depart,  
And take his giants with him far way;  
And then without his sister he will start,  
Whom he leaves governed by the victor's sway."

Having said this she knelt down at his feet,  
Asking his answer when it should be meet.

All with amazement gazed on her sweet face,  
Orlando felt himself towards her drawn;  
He trembled and his heart with hurried pace  
Beat in his breast, he ne'er before had worn  
That look, that then spread itself o'er his face;  
"Nor all advice nor courage nor my force,  
I see the best part but cleave to the worse."

Thus secretly lamented he o'er his new love,  
No wonder that, for every knight then there  
Was made for her, their voices swelled above  
The music. All praised loveliness so rare;  
The enchanter Malagigi, by his art  
Discovered she was false, then drew apart.

He muttered softly, "O false creature, thou  
Shalt not have cause this trick to boast about;  
For this I will play thee such a trick now,  
Thy false charms, and thy plots I'll put to rout."  
This said he went away unto his books,  
Her plots to vanquish with joy in his looks.

As long as possible her there to keep,  
The emperor answered her with a long speech;  
The challenge was accepted, now they leap  
Onto their steeds, the conjuror then did reach  
The plot; he called up of his demons three,  
The better that he might her falseness see.

But how his soul within him shook with fear,  
And how his look turned when from them he found,  
Angelica the maiden then so near  
A beauty for enchantment famed around,  
Uberto just about to fight that day,  
The son of Galapon king of Cathay.
His father to him ere he went away,
A horse had given, one whose pace the wind
Ne'er equalled, and a ring that did allay,
All enchantment, and all witchcraft did bind;
When on the finger drawn, the man did waste
As into air, when in the mouth 'twas placed.

A sword and golden lance enchanted too,
Whoe'er the lance touched from his seat he fell,
His sister with him came, whose charms could do
More than all else, for when they heard her tell
King Charles the rules, he would bring them away,
All helpless prisoners, into Cathay.

Meantime Uberto at the fixed place stayed,
'Tneath a pavilion he lay down to rest,
Angelica beneath a pine tree lay,
The giants watched, 'gainst thieves who do infest
That country, as she lay the flowers around,
Spread o'er her breast from the delightful ground.

By this time Malagigi borne through air
By demons, landed safely at the place
Where slept Angelica, her beauty rare,
Shone with the sun which shed upon her face,
Its radiant beams and to 't a lustre gave,
As she lay midst the flowers where lilies wave.

n.d. [1871?]

Another undated autograph MS of the poem is held by the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana (Miscellaneous Manuscripts Gissing, 200). Gissing’s original “wondrous North” in line 3 has been corrected by another hand to “ice-bound North”. Apart from a few minor details of punctuation this copy is identical to the version held by the Beinecke Library and dated July 13th, 1872, printed by us.


The poem was Gissing’s contribution to Mary Hick’s album in 1876. She was a sister of Henry Hick, who was at school with Gissing. The MS of “Dialogue” is now in the collection of Pierre Coustillas, Lille, France.

Burns’s Measure (l. 20) or Burns Stanza (also called “Scottish stanza” or “Standart Habbie,”) is a 6-line stanza rhyming aabab, lines 1, 2, 3, and 5 being tetrameter and lines 4 and 6 dimeter. It takes its name from the use made of it by Burns in “To a Louse,” “Holy Willie’s Prayer,” and in many of his other vernacular poems.

The Knight of Toggenburg – p. 308.

This translation was first published anonymously in The Owens College Magazine, vol. VIII, No.2, March 1876: 39-41. Its authorship was established by M. Xavier Pétremand, who owns Gissing’s copy of the magazine, and who discovered that he had pencilled his initials GRG at the bottom of p. 41.

Friedrich Schiller’s original ballad, “Ritter Toggenburg” (1797), may be found in Schillers Werke, Nationalausgabe, Zweiter Band, Teil I, Herausgegeben von Norbert Oellers (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1983) 272-74. The lexical and metrical faithfulness of Gissing’s translation are remarkable.

Beauty’s Exile – p. 312.

Like the preceding poem this was first published, also anonymously, in the March 1876 issue of The Owens College Magazine: 60-1. We owe its discovery to M. Xavier Pétremand, the son of Gissing’s granddaughter. The initials GRG were added in
pencil in Gissing’s hand to the text as it was printed in his copy of The Owens College Magazine now in the possession of M. Pétremand. The present editor is indebted to Pierre Coustillas for drawing his attention to the existence of this and the preceding poem.


The autograph MS is in the Beinecke Library at Yale.

Ever since he was first introduced to the languages and civilization of Antiquity in Joseph Harrison’s Back Lane School at Wakefield, Gissing “like an exile ... pining for his home” had dreamed of visiting the “promised land of Italy” and Greece so dear and familiar to his imagination. The letters and Diary entries recording his visits to Italy (October 1888 to March 1889 and September 1897 to April 1898) and Greece (November 1889 to February 1890) express an almost euphoric sense of excitement and unadulterated delight in walking where “Vergil & Horace & Cicero have many a time walked” and seeing things “Horace saw just as I see them.”42 His travel book By the Ionian Sea (1901) testifies to the never ending and nostalgic fascination with Italy as the cradle of classical civilization, in passages of haunting, lyrical power: “The stillness of a dead world laid its spell on all that lived. To-day seemed an unreality, an idle impertinence; the real was that long-buried past which gave its meaning to all about me, touching the night with infinite pathos. Best of all, one’s own being became lost to consciousness; the mind knew only the phantasmal forms it shaped, and was at peace in vision.”43 And: “Alone and quiet, I heard the washing of the waves; I saw the evening fall on cloud-wreathed Etna, the twinkling lights come forth upon Scylla and Charybdis; and as I looked my last towards the Ionian Sea, I wished it were mine to wander endlessly amid the silence of the ancient world, to-day and all its sounds forgotten.”44


44 By the Ionian Sea, 156.
To My Friend Eduard Bertz – p. 316.

MS in the Beinecke Library (Yale). Arthur C. Young first published it in Nineteenth Century Fiction, XIII (1958) 228-29.

Eduard Bertz (1853-1931) was the German exile and man of letters who in December 1878 had advertised for intellectual companionship in a London newspaper; Gissing answered the advertisement and on their first meeting the two men quickly realized they had the same backgrounds and interests. This was the beginning of a friendship that lasted until Gissing’s death in 1903. The friendship is recorded in detail in Arthur C. Young, The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, 1887-1903 (1961).

Carlyle’s Statue – p. 318.


In a letter to his brother Algernon dated May 3, 1883, Gissing writes: “... You got the Carlyle Sonnet? I believe it to be one of the best things I have yet written. I am penning a good deal of verse just now, & shall doubtless some day alarm the country with a volume of very heterodox description.”

Three years later Gissing used the same corner of London as the inspiration for the opening paragraphs in volume II, chapter VI, of Isabel Clarendon (1886); the parallels are striking:

Thomas Meres and his two daughters occupied a house in Chelsea, a small house in a little square, between which and the river is a portion of Cheyne Walk. Three minutes’ walk brings you to the Albert Bridge, which leads over to Battersea Park. In that part of Cheyne Walk which is close at hand stands the house where for many years Rossetti painted and wrote; not many doors away is that in which George Eliot died; and that which was Carlyle’s home for half a century is scarcely more distant, in the shadow of old Chelsea Church. It is pleasant to breathe the air of this corner of London.

Literally the air is pleasant; the flowing breadth of stream and the green extent of the opposite Park, the spacious Embankment with its patches of tree-planted garden, make a perceptible freshness. On a sunny morning the river dances and gleams with wind-stirred wavelets, and the free expanse of sky gives the spirit soaring-room. Standing on the...

Suspension Bridge, one lets the eye rest on a scene far from unlovely; the old houses of Cheyne Walk are abundantly picturesque, so is Battersea Bridge, the last remaining (perhaps already gone) of the wooden bridges over the Thames. The great Queen Anne dwellings on the Embankment have their charm, and just beyond them one sees the gardens of Chelsea Hospital, adjoining those which were once called Ranelagh. Heavy-laden barges go up or down stream, as the tide may be, sometimes hoisting a ruddy sail; men toil at the long barge oars. Steamers fret their way from pier to pier, rather suggestive of pleasure than business. Very little traffic is within sight or hearing; when the church clock strikes it is not drowned by the uproar of streets, but comes clearly on the wind with old-world melody. There is peace to be found here in morning hours, with pleasant haunting thought of great names and days gone by.46

Towards the very end of his career, Gissing returned to this delightful part of London, in chapter XXIX of his posthumously published (1905) novel, Will Warburton:

Turning to the west, they passed along Cheyne Walk, and paused awhile by old Chelsea Church. The associations of the neighbourhood moved Miss Elvan to a characteristic display of enthusiasm. Delightful to live here! A joy to work amid such memories, of ancient and of latter time!

In 1882 a bronze statue of Carlyle by Sir Joseph Boehm was erected on Chelsea Embankment. Carlyle sits in an armchair in his long overcoat. The statue is a replica of one owned by Lord Rosebery. It was this latest addition to the wealth of London’s statues that inspired Gissing’s sonnet.

To A.F.G. – p. 319.


Hope in Vain – p. 320.


Song (“O Maiden, simple, sweet and pale”) – p. 322.

First published in Temple Bar, November 1883, p. 379. Gissing was paid a guinea for it, which he thought ample payment, as he claimed to have finished the poem in seven minutes. MS has not been located. Reprinted in Notes and Queries (1960), and Collected Letters of George Gissing, vol. II, eds., Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, Pierre Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1991) 167-68.

A Sonnet (“The flowers are such as English gardens bear”) – p. 323.

MS sent by Gissing to Mrs Elizabeth Sarah Gaussen (1846-1942), 18 September 1884. First published by Anthony Curtis, who acquired the MS from James Robert Gaussen, in the Gissing Newsletter, 12, 4 (October 1976) 3. Gissing tutored James Gaussen, who lived with him in the flat at 7 K Cornwall Residences. The occasion for the sonnet was Gissing’s move to the Cornwall Residences, which had been prompted and organized by Mrs Gaussen. Once he was installed there she sent via her son a bunch of flowers from Broughton Hall, Lechlade, in Gloucestershire. Gissing’s thank-you letter took the form of this sonnet.48


The Death of the Children – p. 324.

This sonnet was first published in the English Review, volume XVII, April 1914, 1, whose editor, Austin Harrison, had been tutored by Gissing from 1880–1884. According to Harrison, Gissing sent the poem to his mother, Mrs Frederic Harrison, at the time of its composition. Oddly, only six years later Austin Harrison chose to publish it again in the English Review, volume XXX, January 1920, 10, blithely adding in a footnote: “It [the poem] has not been printed before.” Strictly speaking, that was true, because the version he printed in 1914 differed in important details from the later version, which we take to be the correct and original one.

Here is the sonnet as it was printed in 1914:

**The Death of the Children**

*Burnt in a Workhouse fire at Christmas Festivities, June 16th, 1883 (sent to Mrs Frederic Harrison)*

O Children, Death in kindness bade you rise,
And quit the game, while life was yet but play;
Though sad to us the closing summer day
That quench’d the gleam of laughter in your eyes.

What though the anguish of the dread surprise
Marr’d the young faces when at rest they lay?
One moment summ’d the sorrow-laden way
We weary o’er in growing old and wise.

Mourn not the children. If we needs must mourn,
Be it for those their loss leaves desolate,
While death withholds his oft-entreated boon.
And should they sorrow, that, by toil unworn,
Their dear ones rest so early, and kind fate
Spare them the heat and burden of the noon?

On 18th December 1884 the St John’s Home for Children, a Catholic orphan asylum in Brooklyn, New York was burnt down.49 Nearly 800 inmates were lodged in the asylum. The majority of these escaped with difficulty through the exertions of the sisters and the firemen. At first it was supposed that all were saved, but the next morning a search in the ruins of the orphanage resulted in the discovery of the bodies.
of twenty children and two adults. The New York Times in its extensive report on the fire mentioned that "the class rooms seemed to be the only ones that escaped a drenching. The blackboards were covered with chalk mottoes of "Merry Christmas" and "A happy new year." Santa Claus was pictured skimming over the roofs of the Brooklyn houses to the burned asylum labelled as "Remembering the orphans."

The confusion about the correct date of composition must be due to Austin Harrison's misreading of June for Jan. and 1883 for 1885. Gissing must have been moved by the newspaper reports of this tragic event to write the sonnet in December 1884 or early in the new year (1885) and sent it to Mrs Harrison on January 15th, 1885. In defense of Austin Harrison we may add that it is not always easy to distinguish between Gissing's threes and his fives.

Harrison in an article for the Nineteenth Century, LX, September 1906, pp. 453-63, entitled "George Gissing", may have referred to the sonnet in a paragraph dealing with Gissing's poetic efforts:

"When Grim [Gissing's tom-cat] one day went the way of other Toms, Gissing quite broke down, and he wrote an elegy to its memory. Gissing was no mean poet. In the summer of 1883, when my grandmother lived at Sutton Place, he used to come down three times a week to teach us in the mornings, and sometimes after luncheon he would stay and sit in the punt on the river and write poems. One of these was called "Only a Cigarette." It was a dainty ode to a girl he had seen smoking, lazily reclining on the river-bank. He wrote too, a powerful poem to "The Little Children" [editor's italics]-both of which, unfortunately, I have lost."

The sonnet was reprinted in The Literary Digest, Vol. 64, 13 March 1920, p. 41. In July 1969 Jacob Korg published the original text of the sonnet in the Gissing Newsletter, volume V, 3, 13-14.


MS in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library (probably the MS sent to Morley Roberts). 51 Roberts modified the title to "The Humble Aspiration of H.M.,


In chapter 15 of Gissing's novel New Grub Street the names of Coleridge and Gillman are similarly linked by Edwin Reardon, the author's alter ego, in the following exchange with his wife:

"'I suppose there must be some rich man somewhere who has read one or two of my books with a certain interest. If only I could encounter him and tell him plainly what a cursed state I am in, perhaps he would help me to some means of earning a couple of pounds a week. One has heard of such things.'

'In the old days.'

'Yes. I doubt if it ever happens now. Coleridge wouldn't so easily meet with his Gillman nowadays. Well, I am not a Coleridge, and I don't ask to be lodged under any man's roof; but if I could earn money enough to leave me good long evenings unspoilt by fear of the workhouse.'"

The motto Hoc erat in votis was taken from Horace (Satires, II. vi. 1: "This was amongst my wishes.") and it was also used as the epigraph for The Private Papers of Henry Ryecraft (1904).

1. 1: Gillman; Dr James Gillman, surgeon at Highgate, accepted Samuel Taylor Coleridge as patient and housemate in 1816.
1. 25: Bradlaugh; Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891), social reformer, champion of women's suffrage and of birth control. Elected MP for Northampton in 1880, but was unseated having been refused the right to make affirmation of allegiance instead of taking the parliamentary oath.
1. 28: Mrs Besant; Mrs Annie Besant (1847-1933), a secularist and trade-union organizer, and an enthusiast for birth-control, in association with Bradlaugh. Later she became a theososophist and pupil of Mme Blavatzky.
1. 30: Cunninghame Graham; R.B. Cunninghame Graham (1852-1936), writer, anti-imperialist, social reformer and outspoken MP, who was imprisoned after the Bloody Sunday riot in Trafalgar Square, 1887.
1. 30: Burns; John Burns (1858-1943), trade-unionist and politician. Member of the Social Democratic Federation.
The “Lotus” on a sunny reach – p. 327.


52 Cf. London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978) 375: “... On Saturday we sailed in Clodd’s boat, the “Lotus”, to Orford, and had our lunch in the banqueting room of the Castle. Splendid view from the top; Sunday we boated to Iken, up the river, and ate there on the cliff; perfect weather. On Monday morning we sailed up and down for a couple of hours, returning for lunch. This being our last day, I was asked to write some verses to celebrate the holiday. They were copied seven times, and each copy signed by all of us.”
