CHAPTER – V

THE LATER NOVELS

Gissing in presentation of science, its social and moral values is essentially a realist. He depicted the stark and seamy realities of science in his novels. His working class novels approach the type of naturalism that Zola made famous in France. In his later novels viz *The New Grub Street* (1891), *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), *The Whirlpool* (1897) and *The Crown of Life* (1899) he revealed the evils of industrialization and urbanization as none else had done before him. He dealt realistically with the sufferings and frustrations caused by the poverty. The indignities, which slum conditions inflicted on human spirit and their deleterious effect on character and moral, have been realistically presented. Gissing’s realism may be understood better in his own:

Realism signifies nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life it merely contrasts with the habit of mind which assumes that a novel is written to please the people, that disagreeable facts must always be kept out of sight that the human nature must be systematically flattered, that the book must have a plot that the story should end on a cheerful note, and all the rest of it. (Gissing, 14-16)

However, except in his earlier novels what John Sloan calls Hogarthian beginnings, Gissing’s realism varied slightly. He wrote to Hardy on June 30 1886, “In literature my interests begin and end; I hope to make my life and all its acquirements subservient to my ideal of artistic creation.” *(ELT)* In later novels Gissing revised both his theme and style.
He is more analytical, critical and artistic. He does not show the direct influence of Hogarth and Zola as we see in his earlier novels.

Towards the end of the century when *The Emancipated, The New Grub Street, Born in Exile, The Whirlpool* was written as a reaction to the rigid Puritanism of the mid-century was underway, though there had been no change in the underlying emotional and economic facts of bourgeois civilization. The mid-Victorian society had been proud of the independence and thirst, but its counterpart in eighties started displaying wealth. The children who had earlier sought edification in prayers, church going and sentiments turned to art galleries, concerts, and theatres. They turned too less respectable indulgences in search for adventure and enlightenment. Puritanism began to fade. Harvey Rolf (*The Whirlpool*) shows moral obligation of parents to children. He is anxious about the future of his son “for he knows that the batter fields of this generation are not in quite homes with leisure and reasonable content.” (336) The moral, which Gissing brings to surface, is the parental duty to children. The new middle class began to look to the older aristocratic standard of manners as its model. As a result, we see Gissing’s treatment of the bourgeoisie in *The Emancipated* and later novels somewhat more complicated than that of Dickens. This is because Gissing had to deal with gradual changes that were beginning to mask the rock-ribbed qualities of an older generation personified by such characters as Pecksniff and Dombey.

Like Dostoevsky’s hero Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) many characters in Gissing particularly Peak (*Born in Exile*), Amy Reardon (*The New Grub street*), Monica (*The Odd Women*) feels themselves free from the usual claims of morality, family affection, and friendship. They seem to have carved their own values to safeguard their interests. The shifting from conventional track of morality is conspicuous
by Peak’s defying of Christianity and conventional social norms. Gissing in a letter to his family member wrote that his most characteristic works are studies of ‘classless intellectuals’ helpless in the face of hostile social forces whose only chance of survival is: “to make a world within a world.”(ELT, 169)

Peak’s pretensions as Christian to win Sidwell and his exposure to her family as an atheist, his subsequent flight, moral conflicts and finally death suggest Peak’s weak moral conscience and sense of guilt. While he is ready to adopt wrong means to this end he lacks the strength of a wicked man to live up the consequences. He is unlike Jasper Milvain (The New Grub Street) who adopts cheap means to earn money in literary field, jilts her poor beloved Miriam because her father becomes insolvent and marries Reardon’s widow Amy his female counterpart without grudge or moral conflicts.

On the contrary Monica who seeks security in marriage with a man who is hostile to her as a husband finally dies with broken heart. Monica takes marriage as means to an end. The end is economic security and independence. Once her desires are thwarted by her husband’s domination, she discards it but could not come out of it. Gissing sees her natural opposite Amy Reardon a writer who obsessed with the modern changes puts emphasis on materialism. She compels her husband Mr. Reardon, a writer who won’t compromise with cheap commercialism in art to earn money by cheaper means- writing, whatever sells good. Amy represents the change in the values of the society where comforts of life, good ‘flats, sofa, and other luxurious things’ occupy supreme value. To this end any means is justified. This change in the value system has been bought by industrial and materialistic culture. John Sloan has rightly commented: “Yule, Reardon and Biffen are viewed as victims not simply
of a mechanical society, but of an inappropriate education that has ill-equipped them for altered conditions of the new age.” (Sloan, 93)

The New Grub Street tantalizingly lays bare the oppressive nature of literary production in the modern age. Gissing in his personal life i.e. thought fiction was critical of the commercialization of art. He ascribed it to a society which Cherishes it and encouraged trade in art as represented by Jasper Milvain ironically ‘Jasper of the facile pen’ (The New Grub Street, 1976, 292). As Jasper sums this trade in literature:

Literature nowadays is a trade. Putting aside men of genius, who may succeed by mere cosmic force, your successful men of letters, is your skilful tradesman. He thanks first and foremost to markets. When one kind of goods begins to go off slackly, he is ready with something new and appetizing. (38)

Gissing through a single factor, role of money and commercialization of art presents a series of impacts of science in The New Grub Street and The Unclassed: loss of social status, unhappy and hostile marriage, poverty and finally death. These upheavals seem as a series of social traps in the life of Edwin Reardon, Amy Reardon and Miriam (The New Grub Street) and Osmond Waymark, Julian Casti (The Unclassed).

To a man like Reardon who does not want to compromise with trade in art even married life is a curse. His wife Amy is opposed to his thought and Cherishes materialistic values. The result is Reardon’s alienation and death. Harold Biffen, another dedicated and infomercial writer, and realist is another failure. On the contrary Jasper Milvain makes a name for him in journalism and marries Amy Reardon, Reardon’s widow deceiving Miriam, a girl who works under his father is
a press owned by him. Jasper’s attraction to Miriam is purely commercial for he thinks he would inherit money if he marries her. But Miriam’s prospect is marred by her father’s blindness and financial collapse of the firm to which she hoped to get legacy. To Jasper Amy’s 110000 pounds is more attractive to marry a widow because to him Miriam with all her beauty and loveliness is no match without money. Jasper symbolizes the crude values of society caught into the ‘frenzy of commercialization’. It is this value of money around which all social relations, love, and morality hover.

Waymark, a struggling author is socially a failure (The Unclassed). His plight is perpetuated till the end of the novel because he delays his marriage for want of money. Ida Starr, a shop-girl degraded as a prostitute is another example of this commercialism. Gissing ascribes her degeneration to her own folly and stupidities but society stands accused for creating such circumstances. A typical Gissing protagonist is born class-conscious. The deep-rooted sense of class, which has so much influence on the speculative and practical life of his characters, is manifested in various forms. They broadly represent two classes viz working class and the middle or lower-middle class. Besides he has painted the lives of the people whom he euphemistically calls the ‘unclassed’. Gissing in preface to the second edition of The Unclassed (1884) says, “By unclassed. I meant not, of course, ‘declassé’.... male and female all the prominent persons of the story dwell in a limbo external to society”.

The term ‘class’, in Gissing’s novels is not to be confused with Marxist definition of class. According to Marx, society as a whole is more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. For Marx only two
classes existed that of ‘exploiters’ and the ‘exploited’, Moreover, he sees class in terms of economic ‘mode of production’ and ‘production relations’. To Gissing class is more a group or cluster of people sharing common social, economic and cultural attributes. John Halperin defines class in Gissing’s novels as “one’s financial and social position determines one’s class not essentially one’s natural class.”(Halperin, 189)

Gissing emphatically accepts the notion of class in the novel and quite clearly the notion of class antagonism. John Goode says in Gissing’s novels more “important are the implications in terms of the class struggle.”(Goode, 216)

The most striking fact about women in the nineteenth century novel is that they are overwhelmingly upper or middle class there are a few working class women. Merryn Williams notes, “They can be divided into a very few easily identifiable groups-on the one side heroines, on the other side fallen women, heartless fine ladies, shrews, and towards the end of the century, ‘new: strong-minded woman.”(Williams, 34) Gissing’s most of the women characters conform to these types.

Gissing’s gallery of women’s portraits consists of variety as well as qualitative richness. Women in Gissing’s novels may be seen to form several types. They may be identified as ideal woman, selfish and fallen women and women with revolutionary temperament. Most of them are socially conventional. Some of them are young and ambitious but without money. They are fighting against their destinies to attain social, material and spiritual emancipation. The working class women portrayed by Gissing are very different from his middle class women portraits. Most of the working class woman characters have not been cast in the working class setting and environment. P.J. Keating comments: “They are provided with qualities of beauty and character which make them
independent of, or indeed out of place in a working class setting.” (Keating, 35)

Gissing’s Alma Frothingham (The Whirlpool) demonstrates the disastrous consequences of submission to the stimulations of a meretricious society, while her burning desire for pre-eminence, lays bare the oppressions and stifling conventions of bourgeois domesticity. The image that emerges is of a type of masculine woman-purposeful, reckless, wanly, in ‘her ability to dream dreams.’ (Hemmings, 159) The effect of modernity on man’s inner feelings is significant in delineating Alma’s neurosis and frenzied pursuit of self-fulfillment. Alma is so much occupied by ‘public applause’ and her engagements outside the home that her family life is ruined. Rolf, Alma’s husband who allows her freedom to redeem her from the ‘vulgarism of the fashionable society’ discovers that the freedom has ended in ‘domestic explosions’. Rolf’s response to a society grown self indulgent on such liberties is critical of the fashionable women and society itself: “We are rotting at home”, announces the novel’s hero, “some of us sunk in barbarism, some coddling themselves in over refinement.” (316)

Rolf’s, condemnation of professional life for a married woman, is manifestation of male superiority over woman. Alma’s own painful resolve to “be a good woman, rule her little house, bring up her child, and have no will but her husband’s” (267) is pathetic and submissive nature of a woman in a male dominated world. Alma’s acceptance of ‘circumstance’ and ‘hereditary shame’ is represented not as an ascent to wisdom, but as a repressive purgatorial resolve, which is attended by a symptomatic recurrence of insomnia and drug dependence. In her final days of exile, nursing her ‘baffled ambition’ in a small house in Gunnersby’, Alma remain tragically divided between the desire for self-
validation in a world she knows to be merely ‘whirl and glare’, and a life of ‘house-ruling’ which submits to the intolerable conditions of feminine sacrifice and restraint. Alma dies due to overdose of sedatives. Alma embodies in herself the conflicts of female ambition and conjugal oppression, clash between the moral imperatives of traditional institutions and personal validation. It was with prophetic satisfaction as well as regret that Gissing wrote of the novel: “It is doubtful if I shall do anything better or anything again so good.”(Pateridge, 9)

Ryecroft, the lonely struggling hero of The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft (1903) sums up the value of money:

It is the fruitful soil wherein is nourished the root of the tree of life, it is vivifying principle of human activity, upon in luxuriate art, letters, science rob them of its sustenance, and they droop like withering trees. Money means virtue and lack of it is vice. ... Give me thousand pounds and tomorrow I become the most virtuous man in England. (53)

Through such characters Gissing shows that money compels an individual to resort to unhappy marriage, hostile family life, strained family relations and as Ryecroft puts it philosophically: “The greatest abyss in this world lack of money.”(139) In The Whirlpool and The Odd Women marriage seems to be an anathema for the women not because they reject it in the modern fashion but it has become so painful that they choose to remain spinsters. Harvey Rolfe (The Whirlpool) rightly comments or questions the happiness in marriage: “Happiness in marriage is a term of such vague application: Basil Mortan, one in ten thousand, might call himself happy.” (335)

The conventional role of women is no longer acceptable to Rhoda Nun and Miss Barfoot (The Odd Women) instead they stress on self-
independence and security. This change in the attitude of the women in the middle-class society was obvious in the nineties and Gissing has rendered it powerfully to focus on the failures of the society. Rhoda Nun and her group are not failures but they represent the failures of a social system, which forces them to spinsterhood. The malevolent dictatorship of the husband, the silent sufferings of women, and their self-sacrifices were landed as virtues. All these went with the Victorian values about the role of women and their status. Gissing while criticizing these things has also presented the crisis in the changing attitudes of woman. These attitudinal changes among women were due to the spread of education, growth of awareness and a sense of professionalism. One of the two feminist leaders in the novel, Mary Barfoot Clearly represents a more modest approach to social change. Her address on ‘Woman as an Invader’ may display a strenuous opposition to Ruskin’s idealised view of women. She addresses:

I want to do away with that common confusion of the words womanly and womanish, and I see very clearly that this can only be affected by an armed movement, an invasion by women of the spheres, which men have always forbidden us to enter. (135)

The promotion of educated woman, she argues, will prove beneficial to husband and useful to society. It will eradicate the evils perpetuated on women in the name of their angelic image. *In the Year of Jubilee* is the study of influence of mass education and mass production upon the society of the lower classes. This also explains the new power in the characters opposed to Gissing’s slum characters of earlier novels. This new social force is symbolized by the idle holidaying crowds that ‘pour through the streets’ during the celebration of Victoria’s jubilee. The
gross materialistic aspirations are symbolized by Luckworth Crewe; a suitor of Nancy’s who is in the process of raising himself by unscrupulous means from low social origins. Clever, greedy, and obsessed by the thoughts of fortune, he exploits the new force used to direct the power of mass-production and mass thought-advertising. Crewe represents a man who rising from a small position to places of authority becomes blind to morality. David Grylls has rightly commented: “he is blind to any but material values and unhampered by moral or spiritual convictions, a man capable of in Gissing’s views, of infinite destruction.” (Grylls, 31)

The most abject worshipper of the materialist superstition of progress is Samuel Barmby. His sisters maintain their old fashioned middle-class ways. They leave home rarely, read Evangelical periodicals, and lead a kind of life whose greatest events are ‘chaped functions and headaches’. Samuel, on the other hand leads, pointless social life. His membership in a debating society and an excursion club enable him to ‘feel glory in achievements of progress and industry’. He usually describes these in overwhelming statistics. The Barmby family is a microcosm of the change-taking place in middle-class customs. They were capable of amusement and even culture. But they believed like their father, that “Money was the only reality and that civilization was only a matter of production.” (186) the unscrupulousness that Gissing associated with commerce is found in the dress-shop scheme of Beatrice-French, an enterprise calculated to succeed by attracting ignorant women. With the aid of Luckworth Crewe, Beatrice plays upon the ‘parsimony and snobbery of bourgeois women.’ (187) Through it he achieves a dazzling financial success that Gissing felt to be perfectly typical of the ideals of a materialistic society indifferent to moral values.
In \textit{Marry Barfoot} we see a woman of tender heart, mercy given to her conviction of training women. She thinks women should carve their own place in the society. She is not materialistic in thought but she realizes that training for woman is necessary for their existence self-respect in the materialistic world. Miss Barfoot makes this clear to her trainees when she says to them, “I am not chiefly anxious that you should earn money, but that woman in general shall become rational and responsible human beings.” (46) She also feels that there should be diversification so that woman could work as a typist in the offices, steno and choose other careers.

She is more related to the problems and would not look into the intricacies of these. On the contrary Rhoda feels that woman can be saved only by a sweeping reorganization of the society. A feminist to the Core, she believes like Hermia Barton of Grant Allen’s \textit{The Women Who Did} (1895), that marriage custom itself is responsible for the subjection of women. Though it sounds like extreme view of a feminist it sprang from the body of the society, which had made marriage so horrorful. Miss Barfoot’s advocacy for training woman for choosing for themselves is noble advice. Mary Wollstonecraft recollects in a Vindication of the Rights of Woman many “Women who, not led by degrees to proper studies, and not permitted to choose for them, have indeed been overgrown children.” (185) We see Virginia and Alice and Monica as such overgrown children in the novel. Had Monica listened to Rhoda’s advice to get the training for office assistant she would have chosen a life of independence and security?

The feminist movement led by Barfoot is alive on the pages of this novel and Gissing discovers the smugness of this movement too. He imparts it dimensions and totality. Miss Barfoot’s movement is confined
to educated lower middle class. And the conversation between her and Mrs Small Brook is significant to the point that to what extent Gissing was bringing this movement. Moreover, he explores the ‘smugness’ of class prejudices. Mrs Small Brook cudgels:

“But surely you don’t limit your humanity, Miss Barfoot by the artificial divisions of the society”; “I think those divisions are anything but artificial” replied the hostess well humouredly: “In the uneducated classes has no intent whatever you have heard me say so”. She further expounds on her indifference to the poor, lower class “the lower classes (I must call them lower) for they are, in every sense”, to which small Brook responds: “But, surely... we work for the abolition of all unjust privilege? To us, is not a woman a woman? .... I aim at solidarity of women. You, at all events, agree with me Winifred?” “I really don’t think, aunt, that there can be any solidarity of ladies with servant girls”, responded Miss Haven. “Then I grieve that your charity falls so far below the Christian standard.” (105)

Mrs. Barfoot shows the shortcomings of her movement. Gissing through her brings home the message that how class obsessed the movement was. Secondly, it was more confined to the concept of class than concept of sex i.e. fair sex (gender). Barfoot’s statement: “I choose my sphere. . . I must keep to my own class” has pragmatic application too. How can one set other’s house by putting own’s in disorder? And the work of taking the lower class woman would have defeated her purpose of emancipation of her own class. Anyway, the logic of Mrs Small Brook seems to have influenced her like her own views on tenderness and maternal love for women to Rhoda at the end she says, “When I grow old
and melancholy, I think I shall devote myself to poor hopeless and
purposeless woman try to warm their hearts before they go hence.” (176)
“Admirable! Murmured Rhoda, smilingly.” “But in the meantime they
cumber us.” (176) Thus Gissing through his masterful ironic method
shows how inconsistent the feminist movement embodied in Barfoot is
between champion of female freedom and cool social awareness to the
lower-class people. Mary Barfoot subscribes to her conviction that the
women of lower class can’t be helped to independence. Gissing has
successfully revealed the dilemma of the women’s movement.

The Images of women and their changing value which culminated
In feminist movements of 1890’s and in Gissing’s case The Odd Women
has its embryonic forms in The Whirlpool (1897), In The Year of Jubilee
(1894) The Emancipated (1890) and The New Grub Street (1891). In all
these novels Gissing has depicted women who refuse conventional
Victorian morality for women. In the roles of Alma Rolf, Nancy, Amy
Reardon there is shift in the social roles and acceptance of conventional
values on marriage, home, and self - sacrifice. The shift is from self -
sacrifice to self - fulfillment (as in Monica’s case in The Odd Women).

The novelists in the last two decades of the Victorian age discussed
the role of changing woman widely and most of them saw the new
tendencies as neurotic. The expectations of changing women, their inner
conflicts and attitudes may be seen In the works of 1880s and in the last
decades of the century. Some ambiguous aspects of the feminist
movement appear in The Bostonians (1886) by Henry James. His
Washington Square (1880) and The Portrait of the Lady (1881) offer
darker pictures of disappointed expectations of romance. In Washington
Square, Catherine Sloper’s experience of her Suitor’s prudential
calculations persuades her to choose a single life.
The changes were on many fronts. The concept of marriage was to be substituted by free union. Merryn Williams writes: “Towards the end of the century the ‘new woman’ those became entangled with free unions, although it is worth nothing that most feminists strongly disapproved.”(Williams, 42) The Change in the concept of womanhood was due to many factors viz higher education, growth of female labor market, the campaign for vote, birth control (to a limited extent). All these produced feelings that world were fastly changing. “Ours is a time of transition, and all our ideas, political, social and even religious are tested a new with fire”, wrote one woman in 1894. She further adds, “Our sons are the pioneers of new life, how should our daughters escape the share of the burden.”(Hellenstein, 122)

The changes, which occurred during the period of transition in the Victorian age, have been portrayed through the lives of his female characters. Gissing tries to emphasize that in spite of all liberty, reason, and love for self-independence marked by these women the womanly virtues cannot be discarded. It is unethical, socially undesirable but also positive. We see the women committing breach of conduct sometimes survive but they are driven to either madness or death. In the cases’ of survival of Amy Reardon, selfish wife in The New Grub Street Gissing ironically shows that selfish woman are successful because the society itself has been trapped by the evils and corruption of morality. Obviously enough Gissing advocates for the preservation of unprejudiced values of womanly virtues rather than womanish.

Some of the basic ingredients of reform for the emancipation of women, which he holds necessary, are education, self-awareness and liberty as Mill propounded. To him the basic postulate of women’s emancipation lies on the pivot of education. Gissing’s women both
belonging to upper middle-classes, lower-middle-class (Sidwell, Emily Hood, Emmavine, Norman etc.) and working class women (Thyrza, Ida Starr, Clara Hewett) show their interest in books for self-enlightenment. The frequent references to classics, Ruskins Carlyle, and Jane Eyre show that they don’t only pursue reading as pastime but learning and imbibing lesson too. In *In the year of Jubilee*, Nancy’s getting hold of a book on advertisement makes her ambitious as a respectful glamorous career. This also speaks of their awareness to contemporary developments.

Gissing’s portrayal of woman places a lot of emphasis on their desire for greater liberty. Restlessness prevails over his women character in pursuit of freedom and more rights. There is strong desire for liberty: liberty from the burden of tradition, liberty from the bondage of slavery of marriage, liberty from the exploitation in the labour market and above all from the inhuman encroachments on spirit. Gissing as a moralist like Mill thought that reasonable exercise of freedom is necessary not only for preserving virtues but for the emancipation of women too.

The idea of human perfectibility, suggestive of Christian salvation in humanistic form, pervades the works of Jeremy Bentham and the early nineteenth-century British Utilitarians. Contrasted with the end of the century, the early years, paradoxically so conflicted at home and abroad by the Nepolonic wars and the consequent repression, reflect vitality in most areas of the humanities. While the Romantic poets cover a wide spectrum of opinion concerning human growth and reform, Bentham attempts to develop a social, moral and political philosophy that would lead to human advancement. Social organization, rather than any form of conversion theory and practice, underlines Bentham’s ideas. Yet, from early in the nineteenth century, Thomas Malthus raises questions about the efficacy of technological expansion and improvement to solve the
age-old problems of hunger and disease. By mid century, novelists, poets, essayists, and social reformers dramatize the negative effects of industrialization. Raymond Williams states that George Gissing’s *Demos* (1886) and *The Nether World* (1889) . . . stand in the direct line of succession from the ‘industrial novels’ of the 1840s” (Culture and Society, 174). Gissing’s 1880 novel *Workers in the Dawn*, noted by Robert L. Selig as a work “grounded in a harsh material existence” (George Gissing, 21), also continues this tradition, leavened with a dislike for the London masses amounting at times to a profound antipathy. In *The Nether World* and even as late as *In the Year of Jubilee*, group images of the people tend to be negative, their manners and behavior often little short of brutish. Jacob Korg describes the latter work as “sprawling story about marriage problems and the corruption of values in industrial society” (George Gissing, 195). Gissing’s urban portraits in his early novels makes it hard to believe that any positive social change occurred during the century, but statistically, living conditions, e.g., urban sanitation, medical health, and increased educational opportunities, were better. In Gissing’s fiction, the modern city represents a vast cacophony of people and technology that erodes the quality of life and threatens to overwhelm whatever peace and beauty of nature remain.

While it may seem logical to end rather than begin by examining Gissing’s dire views on modern society, knowing the reality and extent of his pessimism about change, progress, and the value of human hope short of death determines the boundaries within which analysis of his fiction is profitable. The important question is, does Gissing think the best thing for humans to do is give up and wait for the end, whatever that may be? Faced with this question about his fiction, one may say no. Regardless of his criticism of modern culture, Gissing is no bleak fatalist. However, his
fictive world produces serious, complex interruptions of any idea of a movement toward human happiness greater than transient relief. The paradoxical position implies a, recurring hope, however faint, that he continually challenges. If hope can survive, it will have to earn its place. In this way, Gissing does not have to believe that life can be improved for the lowest classes or those who cannot fit into their ‘rightful’ places in the middle class. He has only to accept the inevitable, the logic of circumstances that leaves some in possession of their lives. Will Warburton, in the novel of the same name (1905), finds himself defrauded and de-classed but nevertheless recovers his equanimity and a sense of balance toward the past and an acceptance of the present. Korg states, “At the end of the novel Warburton is moving away from his upper-class friends, and there is the clear suggestion (somewhat surprising Gissing) that he is well rid of them” (George Gissing, 225). The future lies unknown. One wishes to label this as un-Gissing-like, but it merely transcends or shifts aside ideology. Similarly, in The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft, Gissing gives Ryecroft a legacy and peace for several years and then lets him die. Ryecroft appears to find himself blessed in his escape from the drudgeries of the writing life for even that short time. Not only the content but also the title of Gissing’s essay “The Hope of Pessimism” begins to assume a sense of clarity. A real, if chastened, idea of hope results from an acknowledgement of Gissing’s bare vision of human life.

Although it may not be progress, Gissing does not portray any Luddite leftovers acting on the edges of labour unrest. This is a significant change from the early part of the nineteenth century when breaking the looms offered a possible surcease from an advancing industrialization. Accommodation and incorporation are surely the
watchwords in the 1880s and 1890s. In fact, Gissing dramatizes no serious threat to the industrial world. Its wealth permeates the society and preempts, if not silences, alternative discussions of social change. Tom Cobb in *The Paying Guest* moves into the realm of the needed expert who, if not the manager, is vital to his firm’s success. The lower class and the lower-middle class are not only the operators of the machinery, as happened during and after the Luddite outbreaks, but they also become its technicians and engineers. Gissing makes Cobb a generic electrical worker, though Mrs. Mumford thinks of him as “the electrical engineer, or whatever he was” (39) who functions more importantly as a symbol than a specific instance of expertise. Mr. Higgins, Louise Derrick’s lower middle-class stepfather, is “rich” (14), with a business address in Fenchurch St., the city, and thus connected with the growing wealth of the country. Although he pays for Louise’s sojourn with the Mumfords, the action centers on Louise Derrick’s fruitless attempts to flee her class and/or Tom Cobb’s ardor. Gissing matter-of-factly gives Cobb “the girl,” success for the modern man without surprise at the outcome.

A fundamental consideration on the subject of progress is whether it is inevitable. Is the nineteenth century shift or change under the pressure of scientific and technological innovation battering society? Ideas on free will and determinism come to mind, and if the latter rules, would man have any say in the event, whether the result is considered good or bad? Richard Mutimer’s inheritance in *Demos* transforms Wanley into New Wanley, and the discovery of an earlier will just as surely shifts it back. Is Hubert Eldon, the later beneficiary, any more in control of the destruction of the works at New Wanley than Mutimer is in their creation? Gissing’s use of the hackneyed device of a will to move the plot
may have more significance than is usually the case since its importance lies not so much in its effects on Eldon’s financial prospects but rather on the effects on technology’s inevitable march to social dominance. Gissing appears to reverse the century’s determining forces and suspend technology from its position of mastery. Dickens’ images of technological harm in *Hard Times* (1854) Coketown with its air and water pollution, and the general adaptation of that city, in its pervasive drabness, to the factory, train, and scientific educational methods lie upended in Wanley Valley’s newly recreated, pristine environment. Gissing makes Eldon most enthusiastic in his planned, complete eradication of the mines and the works. He tells Adela:

> I shall sweep away every trace of the mines and the works and the houses, and do my utmost to restore the valley to its former state . . . . For my own part, in this little corner, at all events, the ruin shall be delayed. In this matter I will give my instincts free play. Of New Wanley not one brick shall remain on another. I will close the mines, and grass shall again grow over them; I will replant the orchards and mark out the fields as they were before” (338)

John Halperin comments on this process: “At the end of *Demos*, when Mutimer is disinherited and Eldon comes back to power, New Wanley is joyously destroyed” (*Gissing*, 82). The narrator describes the aesthetic pleasure in the natural beauty as Eldon gazes at the prospect with the Rev. Wyvern. Society’s inevitable expansion on every scientific and technological front to the betterment of living standards, especially for the poor, is temporarily halted. The narrator observes:

> Hubert Eldon has been as good as his word. In all the valley no trace is left of what was called New Wanley. Once more
we can climb to the top of Stanbury Hill and enjoy the sense of remoteness and security when we see that dark patch on the horizon, the cloud that hangs over Belwick. (462)

This representative incident of the disruptive force of science and technology, its dramatic power lying in the paradoxical calm of the prospect, rises in its increasing suggestiveness.

To return to *Hard Times*, Sleary’s statement about the circus’s necessary role in society emphasizes another anti-progressive position that helps to illuminate the social alterations in *Demos*. First, the traditional, unchanging aspect of a circus is important to note. It is a world set apart that shows and reshow the same or similar acts and that one can see from childhood to adulthood and find in it little difference. Second, Sleary stresses the circus’s purpose when he says that people must be amused. In the Preface to *The Picture of Dorain Gray* (1891), Oscar Wilde later writes, “All art is quite useless.” (17) The shock of the unusual makes Wilde’s statement memorable, but the subtlety of Sleary’s words are more profound. William Wordsworth’s assertion in “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” that pleasure is the chief end of poetry (311) is a possible source for the statements by Dicken’s Sleary and Wilde. For them, art speaks to human feelings and emotions; it does not create social processes, technological or otherwise, though it does have the moral power to shape the society in which they operate. Wordsworth, Dickens’ Sleary, and Wilde present essentially static images. These images are repeatable and full of meaning but do not move from one state of affairs to the next in a sense that the word progress would suggest. And *Demos’s* Eldon functions in this tradition. To give pleasure in art, amusement at the circus, or the chance to appreciate an unchanged,
however ironically presented, natural beauty is not to deny the possibility of progress or even that science and technology could participate in it. However, by Gissing’s placing in *Demos* the static, recurrent experience on the site of the formerly dynamic, progressive one built by a working-class man become wealthy, and Eldon’s announced intention to keep it as it was, the author values the aesthetic over the socially progressive act. Sleary travels from one city to the other putting on the same show; Hugh and Adela will view the same prospect many times; pleasure, at the expense of Coketown and New Wanley, respectively, temporarily rules.

Gissing infuses his novels with objects, processes, and the products of modern science and technology. Unlike Upton Sinclair’s open investigation of the excesses of industrialization in *The Jungle* (1906) and *Oil* (1927), Theodore Dreiser’s picture of Chicago in *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Frank Norris’s novel about the expansion of the railroad in *Octopus* (1901), none of Gissing’s novels so openly engage the subject of industrilization but rather provide the physical results of science and technology as background and connection. In *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* (1971), Malcolm Bradbury provides a sense of this atmosphere:

> With the application of technology to communications, the nation as a whole was shrinking, while the individual environment was becoming wider: the railways, from 1860 the tramways, the postal and telegraphic services, the spread of gas and electric light, the wide-circulation and national newspaper broke into separated communities, enfranchising them but producing greater social and political complexity. The need for abstract, impersonal social arrangements increased, and local and national government alike had to
commit themselves to civic arrangements, services, sanitation, health matters. (45-46)

The emphasis in New Grub Street on the train that thunders under the bridge on which Jasper Milvain and Marian Yule stand is not so much as an industrial product with all the suggested effects of the factory system but rather as a contemporary symbol of force and energy.

The moon rising from the fog and mist in the last book of Wordsworth’s The Prelude and the frozen northern wastes that Dr. Frankenstein gazes on Mary Shelley’s work (1818) function similarly as symbols. To the young Jasper and Marian, looking to the future and interested in one another, the train symbolizes their different expectations from life. Wordsworth and Shelley, as seems appropriate for the Romantic period, incorporate natural images into their characters’ hopes and frustrations, images that provide them with understanding and from which they can obtain emotional and intellectual substance.

In New Grub Street and In the Year of Jubilee, Gissing also employs the London Underground, the telegraph, and electric lighting. In The Odd Women, the recently invented typewriter figures in the plot as a means to achieve female emancipation in a male-dominated world. Rhoda Nunn says:

My first engagement here was as shorthand writer to the secretary of a company. But he soon wanted some one who could use a typewriter. That was a suggestion. I went to learn typewriting, and the lady who taught me asked me in the end to stay with her as an assistant. This is her house, and here I live with her. (23-24)

Gissing uses some of these technological products in a positive way and some in a negative one but does not generally invest the product
with the negative or positive qualities. The smoke and dirt from the Underground, not electrified until the early 1900s (Saint and Darley, *The Chronicles of London*, 223), counterbalance the ease and speed with which one moves around the city. In a striking scene between Jessica Morgan and Samuel Bramby in *In the Year of Jubilee*, Gissing describes the Underground with ethos of Homer’s, Virgil’s and Dante’s images of the underworld (259). The news that Reardon receives in London of his son Willy’s illness in Brighton is not made worse by the telegraph’s quick transmission of it (*New Grab Street* 439) nor does the train that rushes him to Brighton, as sick as he is, convey negative overtones. Marian Yule, in the same novel, complains of the harsh effect on her eyes of the British Museum Library’s electric lighting, but the problem may lie as much in Marian’s physical and emotional condition as in this new means of illumination:

But then flashed forth the sputtering whiteness of the electric light, and its ceaseless hum was henceforth a new source of headache. It reminded her how little work she had done today: she must force herself to think of the task in hand. A machine has no business to refuse its duty. But the pages were blue and green and yellow before eyes; the uncertainty of the light was intolerable. Right or wrong she would go home, and hide herself, and let her heart unburden itself of tears. (108)

Other than Rhoda Nunn’s estimation that, “It takes a good six months’ work to learn for any profitable use” (*The Odd Women* 39), acquiring efficiency on the typewriter is an opportunity that women can take to achieve independence.

Shelley’s *Frankenstein* taps into the fear of disruption that science and technology create. It is not so much fear of any specific disruption but of the state or condition of disruption. True, Shelley explores the
application of electricity to the generation of life, a fundamental
displacement of the God-like role to the insistence by one human that he
must know if he can create life: Do his scientific ideas have merit?
However, any dramatic example would suffice since an underlying theme
of Shelley’s work is that a new world is coming, one that human beings
will fashion and in which they will turn intractable natural processes
advances of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries fall far short of this
goal, but they do produce inroads into nature’s ineluctable laws. A sense
of an oncoming force pervades Gissing’s fiction.The city of London
seeps into the suburbs; the masses of people swarm throughout the city;
the buildings stretch endlessly and dismally on some streets; the noise of
the city penetrates every recess. Earlier literature, to go no further back
than Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey”
(1798) and Books First and Seventh of the Prelude, has produced images
of a London that parallel these, but science and technology sustain the
greater momentum of later nineteenth-century occurrences. Processes and
products, ideas and things proliferate under a more dynamic system in the
last several decades. The word “dynamic” might have positive overtones,
but it could merely mean activity, kinetic energy. In fact, one could well
speak of an irreversible, dynamic decline that afflicts the lower classes in
all their swarming numbers. However, Gissing does not depict a
compression that is prelude to a revolutionary explosion. In In the Year of
Jubilee, Nancy Lord and Luckworth Crewe witness the police and the
masses “in brief conflict” (64) on Jubilee Day, but the people are more
stirred by drink than ideas. One might well ask what good is science and
technological change if not to improve humanity’s lot? Disruptive change
that narrows options is not sufficient.
Gissing’s emphasis on the social effects of science distances the reader from the factory and the laboratory. While he employs no affective images of machinery as Dickens does in *Hard Times* such as the machine as lumbering elephant or in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) as Little Nell and her grandfather escape from Quilp through an industrial landscape of glowing fires, the ominous spread of London portends a new world spawned by technology that increase wealth as it sometimes debass society. Admittedly nostalgic, Gissing’s fiction displays a desire for something more than the world not only fast approaching but already mutating under the new orders of hegemony.
Works Cited


